

Deanne Camp

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## It takes two:

*Pairing fiction and nonfiction books on the same topic, along with interactive class strategies, can boost students' understanding and enjoyment.*

# Teaching with Twin Texts of fact and fiction

Using fiction and nonfiction trade books as Twin Texts in an elementary classroom is an authentic way of introducing content material into the curriculum. Twin Texts are two books, one fiction and one nonfiction (informational), on the same (or related) topic (see sample Twin Texts list). While the nonfiction book answers questions in a more straightforward manner, the story structure of a fiction book may be less difficult for children to comprehend. Teachers can integrate language arts, science, social studies, and other content areas by using children's literature as a bridge.

Teachers who use fiction and nonfiction trade books together may be rewarded with students who are excited about learning. Twin Texts help teachers encourage the enjoyment of reading while capitalizing on students' fascination with facts. "A nonfiction or fiction trade book has the potential to be a magnifying glass that enlarges and enhances the reader's personal interaction with a subject" (Vacca & Vacca, 1999, p. 88-89). As Aaron (1987) pointed out, "The major aim of reading instruction programs is to develop readers who not only *can* read but who *do* read and who will continue to read throughout life" (p. 126). Trade books, when used with textbooks, can "help learners think critically about content" material (Vacca & Vacca, 1999, p. 89). Most students are familiar with the format of fiction trade books and with the way a story "sounds." It is often less difficult for teachers to teach content material using those familiar story structures. The many outstanding

informational books now available for children can make content area material come alive. Many of them use the conversational tone similar to that of fiction books. The use of Twin Texts is a viable method for both teaching and learning critical reading and thinking skills.

### Twin Texts working together

Within the past few years, there has been a virtual explosion of books published for children—both fiction and nonfiction. Deciding which books to use may be difficult and time consuming for teachers. Therefore, putting books of the same topic or theme together makes sense. The term *text sets* has been used by several authors (Hamman, 1995; Opitz, 1998; Short, 1991). Opitz (1998) described text sets as "collections of books related to a common element or topic" (p. 622). For the most part, these collections consist of fiction trade books. Given children's natural tendencies to ask questions about the world around them, why not focus on both fact and fiction to help answer those questions? Because of the varied genres of fiction books, readers can explore many ways of looking at a given topic. Some of these ways include fantasy, folk tales, and myths. Consequently, the Twin Text fiction book provides contextual settings for a topic that might not be found in the more sterile factual text. A different mindset or topical overview can easily result. While Short (1991) did not specifically use Twin Texts, she did use "one book to facilitate understandings of other books and issues" (p. 2).

## Sample twin texts

### Fiction

#### For younger readers

*Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon  
*Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs* by Judi Barrett  
*Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf* by Lois Ehlert  
*The Tree That Would Not Die* by Ellen Levine  
*The Apple Pie Tree* by Zoe Hall  
*Old Bear* by Jane Hissey  
*Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman  
*Aunt Harriet's Underground Railroad in the Sky* by Faith Ringgold  
*The Maestro Plays* by Bill Martin Jr  
*Listen Buddy* by Helen Lester  
*Postcards From Pluto: A Tour of the Solar System* by Loreen Leedy  
*Flatfoot Fox* by Eth Clifford  
*I'm Going to Be a Firefighter* by Edith Kunhardt  
*The Whales* by Cynthia Rylant  
*The Foot Book* by Dr. Seuss  
*The Butter Battle Book* by Dr. Seuss  
  
*A Happy Tale* by Dorothy Butler

#### For older readers

*Thunder on the Tennessee* by G. Clifton Wisler  
*Hiroshima* by Laurence Yep  
  
*A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, a Slave Girl* by Patricia McKissack  
*West to Opportunity: The Diary of Teresa Angelino Viscardi* by Jim Murphy  
*Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady* by Ellen E. White  
*The Egypt Game* by Zilpha K. Snyder

### Nonfiction

*Bats* by Celia Bland  
*Comets, Meteors, and Asteroids* by Seymour Simon  
*Why Do Leaves Change Color?* by Betsy Maestro  
*A Tree Is Growing* by Arthur Dorros  
*Apples of Your Eye* by Allan Fowler  
*How Teddy Bears Are Made* by Ann Morris  
*The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles  
*"Wanted Dead or Alive:" The True Story of Harriet Tubman* by Ann McGovern  
*What Instrument Is This?* by Rosmarie Hausherr  
*Communication* by Alike  
*Do Stars Have Points?* by Melvin & Gilda Berger  
  
*Foxes* by Emilie U. Lepthien  
*Fire!* by Joy Masoff  
*Whales* by John Bonnett Wexo  
*What Neat Feet* by Hana Machotka  
*Always to Remember: The Story of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* by Brent & Jennifer Ashabranner  
*Sky Pioneer: A Photobiography of Amelia Earhart* by Corinne Szabo

*A Nation Torn Apart* by Delia Ray  
*Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr  
*Rosa Parks: My Story* by Rosa Parks with Jim Haskins  
  
*Children of the Wild West* by Russell Freedman  
  
*Ghost Liners* by Robert D. Ballard  
  
*Pyramids* by Anne Millard

After introduction of a topic by use of a fiction book, the Twin Text nonfiction book can offer a more in-depth look at the subject. Fortunately, for both children and teachers, the abundance of recently published works also includes quality nonfiction books written for children. Just as fiction books follow a typical story structure, nonfiction trade books also follow teachable text structures. However, Moss, Leone, and Dipillo (1997) indicated that nonfiction books "need not be exclusively expository in nature; more and more titles combine narra-

tive and exposition in unique and creative ways" (p. 420). *Postcards From Pluto: A Tour of the Solar System* by Loreen Leedy, *The Popcorn Book* by Tomie de Paola, and *The Magic School Bus* series by Joanna Cole are examples of such creativity in combining narrative and expository text. Students often struggle with content text material because of the density of facts and several vocabulary terms presented in a short amount of text. Therefore, having background information about a topic allows learners to focus on the content they need to learn, rather than

## Venn diagram

### Definition

The Venn diagram is a graphic organizer constructed by “overlapping circles to indicate features common or unique to two or more concepts” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 271). For this activity, two or more concentric circles may be used. The nonintersecting parts of the circles are used to record information unique to each concept.

### General procedures for implementation

This graphic organizer is effective for comparing and contrasting characters within a story such as Charlotte and Wilbur from *Charlotte's Web*, two or more versions of a fairy tale such as *The Egyptian Cinderella* and *The Korean Cinderella*, or two or more versions of the same story such as the video and book of *Sarah, Plain and Tall*.

### Additional comments

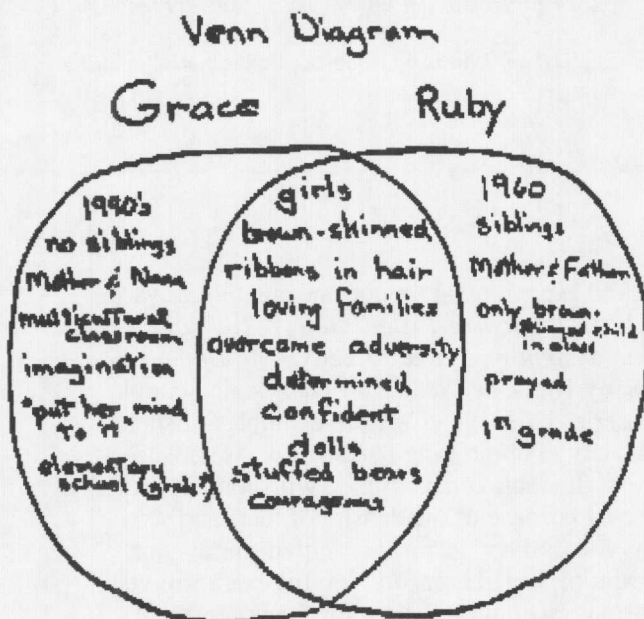
For young children, pictures may be used in each of the circles instead of words. The activity can be completed by individuals, groups, or whole classes. The Venn diagram is effective for Kindergarten through high school.

struggling with both the content and format of textbooks.

Because most information students are expected to learn comes from textbooks, using expository text structures correctly becomes increasingly important. Hiebert (1990) emphasized that “The challenge for whole language advocates is to progressively increase students’ use of expository material as they acquire fluency in reading, thereby providing more diverse contexts for problem solving and critical thinking” (p. 63). Teachers should not forget that “For many students, narrative is a kind of haven which they are reluctant to leave because chains of events have a ready-made organization, whereas exposition requires that the student create and assert a new order that is not a given of the material” (Moffett, 1981, p. 122).

Both the Twin Text fiction and nonfiction books may convey facts. After acquiring this base of information from the Twin Texts, the reader has better understanding of textbook material. Using nonfiction books can serve other purposes, such as helping students develop reference skills, presenting summaries, introducing new topics, offering instructions to construct hands-on activities, or following recipes (Cullinan, 1993).

Figure 1  
Venn diagram comparing two characters



## Classroom applications of Twin Texts

Interactive strategies, such as the Venn diagram, K-W-L, DR-TA, activating prior knowledge, webbing activities, and other forms of graphic organizers can be used successfully with Twin Texts. These activities provide experiences that are meaningful and challenging to students. Here are classroom examples using Twin Texts.

### Venn diagram

Fourth-grade teacher Mrs. Holt (all names are pseudonyms) knew most of her students learned more efficiently if information was presented graphically. She chose to use an interactive Venn diagram to visually organize material she wanted students to learn. (See Venn diagram sidebar.) After reading *Amazing Grace* by Mary Hoffman to her fourth graders, Mrs. Holt drew a Venn diagram on the chalkboard. Then she reviewed the process of completing the diagram with information. But what information could they use? A list of physical and social character-

istics describing Grace was created during a brief brainstorming activity.

Over the next several days, Mrs. Holt read *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles to her students. During the reading of this biography, the fourth graders created a second list of physical and social characteristics they discovered about Ruby Bridges. Now they were ready to complete the Venn diagram from information learned about both Grace and Ruby Bridges. It helped the students focus on the real-life personal bravery and challenges faced by Ruby Bridges. (See Figure 1.) Mrs. Holt used the themes of personal bravery and believing in oneself from the Twin Text fiction book and added information from the Twin Text nonfiction text. These then became stepping stones to these same themes in the social studies book.

## K-W-L

As part of a thematic unit on nocturnal animals, Mr. Murphy chose Twin Texts consisting of *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon and *Bats* by Celia Bland to help his second graders discover characteristics of night creatures. He decided to use Ogle's (1986) K-W-L activity to meet this challenge. (See K-W-L sidebar.) During the first reading of *Stellaluna*, Mr. Murphy asked the students to listen carefully to the story and observe the illustrations without much discussion. However, for the second reading, he encouraged comments and discussion about the character of *Stellaluna*; the details of the illustrations, including *Stellaluna*'s facial expressions and body language; and the overall theme of the picture book.

Because the students had created a K-W-L twice before (once in a whole-class activity and once in small groups), Mr. Murphy needed only to review what the letters meant and the purpose of using the chart. Each student had a literacy partner and was asked to work with that partner on a K-W-L chart. By using the information in *Stellaluna*, their own prior knowledge about bats, and what they thought they knew about the animals, the students were able to put some information in the Know column. Next, the information was shared in a whole-class discussion. As a result, the students were able to form questions about what they Wanted to know about nocturnal animals and bats in particular. Questions included the following: How do nocturnal animals see at night? Why don't they fly

## K-W-L

### Definition

K-W-L is a method of graphically organizing information based on what readers *Know* about a topic, what they *Want* to know, and what was *Learned* after reading. "This simple procedure helps teachers become more responsive to students' knowledge and interests when reading expository material, and it models for students the active thinking involved in reading for information" (Ogle, 1986, p. 564).

### General procedures for implementation

Ogle's procedure is graphically portrayed in a three-column chart. In the first part, a brainstorming session is conducted where the teacher records all ideas students can generate about a specific topic—what they Know. The general term *extinct animals* may be too broad to focus on what the reading selection is about. However, using *dinosaurs* as a more specific term will turn the focus of the discussion to the desired topic of the reading material. Ideas are recorded on chart paper, the chalkboard, or student copies of the procedure. The second part of the prereading activity is to develop purposes for reading the selection—what students Want to know. While this part of the procedure is usually done individually, more effective teachers lead the discussion toward asking questions based on the level of knowledge generated in the first step. These questions are added to the students' copies of the K-W-L chart. The third step of the procedure occurs after reading the selected material. Students are asked to write down what they Learned from the selection, keeping in mind those questions generated in the second step.

### Additional comments

There are several variations of Ogle's original technique, such as adding a step where students could find answers to their questions, or what students still want to know (questions unanswered from the reading) after reading the selection. The three-column chart can be completed by individuals, groups, or whole classes, and is most usually used with expository material. This model is effective for Kindergarten through high school.

into things? What do real bats eat? What kind of bat was *Stellaluna*? What colors are bats? Why are bats so ugly? What sounds do bats make? How big are most bats? Where do bats live?

The Twin Text nonfiction book *Bats* was read to the class. During the reading, much discussion was generated. The second graders enjoyed seeing pictures of real bats and comparing the facial expressions with those of *Stellaluna*. The students were asked to reread their questions and determine if the answers were included in the nonfiction book. The pages had to be visited again and again in order for specific questions

## DR-TA

### Definition

The Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA) is an activity where readers are encouraged to think and predict about the reading selection. Burns, Roe, & Ross (1996) defined the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity as "a general plan for directing the reading of content area reading selections or basal reader stories and for encouraging children to think as they read, to predict, and to check their predictions" (p. 701).

### General procedures for implementation

Leading questions are asked to help focus readers' attention on selection titles or illustrations. Several researchers (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1996; Vacca & Vacca, 1999) have the same general steps for implementing the DR-TA. Step 1: Begin with a discussion of the book or story title, or a preview of chapter headings and illustrations within the expository selection. Ask questions such as "What do you think the story/chapter will be about?" Follow up with "Why do you think so?" These predictions can be recorded on chart paper or on the chalkboard. The teacher should be accepting of all predictions. Step 2: After some initial discussion, students read silently to a predetermined point within the story/chapter to find out if their predictions are correct. Step 3: At this point, more discussion occurs with other predictions suggested by students based on their reading to that point. Step 4: These steps are repeated until the story or chapter is completed.

### Additional comments

Teachers should be aware that too many stopping points might interrupt comprehension. This instructional procedure is effective for both fiction and nonfiction/expository reading selections. After reading, those initial predictions not yet discussed are checked for accuracy within the text material. This procedure is effective for Kindergarten through high school. However, for young children (or nonreaders) the Directed Listening-Thinking Activity (DL-TA) may be used. The steps are the same except the story/chapter is read aloud by the teacher.

to be answered. Those unanswered questions from the K-W-L were written on chart paper and kept in front of the students to be answered at another time.

Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham, & Moore (1995) stated that "The greatest contribution of response activities is that they enable students to determine for themselves how thoroughly and imaginatively they comprehended a piece of literature" (p. 136). Therefore, a follow-up for the bats discussion was a literature response activity. Students clarified and incorporated their new knowledge of nocturnal animals through both

writing and an art project. After discussion both as a whole class and in small groups, students were asked to write and illustrate a story incorporating the information from the K-W-L chart. This story could be fictional, factual, or a combination of both. Focusing on several days' study of bats helped Mr. Murphy's second graders generalize for the larger picture of understanding habitats, life cycles, habits, and other characteristics of nocturnal animals. This interactive strategy became a bridge to the science textbook.

## DR-TA/DL-TA

Many teachers continually find creative ways to connect children's literature to their grade-level content area textbooks. In order to develop the ability to think critically about a subject, Mrs. Steinert used a version of the directed reading-thinking activity (DR-TA) with her first graders. (See DR-TA sidebar.) Because there were several struggling readers in her class, she decided to use the directed listening-thinking activity (DL-TA). That way, all of the students could concentrate on the same text material. She knew most of her students had a favorite stuffed animal, many of which had been brought for sharing time along with stories about the animal.

Mrs. Steinert chose the *Twin Texts of Old Bear* by Jane Hissey and *How Teddy Bears Are Made* by Ann Morris. In preparation for the DL-TA, she encouraged the students to bring their favorite stuffed animal, and many stories were shared both in small groups and with the whole class. The animals were categorized in several ways: by color, size, moveable parts, and animal type.

There were 14 stuffed bears. The first graders carefully examined them. Did any of the bears look alike? Were the feet, ears, eyes, or noses the same? Finally, the stage was set for using the text material. Time was spent observing the cover of the fictional *Old Bear* and asking students what they thought the animals were doing on the cover. During one of several readings, students were asked to observe the stuffed animals, identify the animal, and note if all the bears in the story looked the same. Did all the students' bears look the same? Did any students' bears look like bears in the story?

*How Teddy Bears Are Made* is about a visit to the Vermont Teddy Bear Factory. The cover of this book was compared to the cover of the fic-

tional book, and predictions were made about the contents of this book. Mrs. Steinert stopped several times during the reading of the book to ask questions and seek predictions. Then she continued reading to verify the predictions. Many students had predictions about how teddy bears are made, why they look different, how the stuffing gets inside, and how the bears get to department stores. Terms such as *factory*, *pattern*, *metal die*, *fabric*, *sewing machine*, and *trimming* were defined and discussed.

A literature response activity was a natural extension from using the Twin Texts. Students were asked to write a story about their own bear or about one from either book. Information about the construction of the bear and an adventure encountered by the bear were to be included in the story.

## Webbing

Always looking for resources to help her third graders meet district goals, Miss Tanner found the use of Twin Texts helpful. The class was studying a thematic unit on oceans, and she wanted to focus on mammals' characteristics, communication systems, and interactions with their environment. By sharing *The Whales* by Cynthia Rylant and *Whales* by John Bonnett Wexo she was able to combine several science and communication arts goals. Miss Tanner decided doing a webbing activity would be a good strategy. The students had constructed webs previously and understood how to do the strategy. (See Webbing sidebar.)

Miss Tanner shared the text of *The Whales* with her third graders, and they discussed the colorful illustrations. After the first reading, she asked the students to think of all the words from the text they could remember. These were listed on the chalkboard. During a second reading, they added to the list other important words about whales. (See Figure 2.) With *whales* as the central word in the web, the students decided to use names of whales as spokes extending out from the center word. But then they were stuck. What other information could be derived from those individual names of whales? And how could the information be organized?

Miss Tanner then shared *Whales* with the class. Because this is a book that may not need to be read front to back, she pointed out that there are two rather different groups of whales:

## Webbing

### Definition

Webbing is an activity that connects a central topic to related areas. This comprehension technique may be used before, during, or after reading and writing with both fiction and nonfiction/expository material.

### General procedures for implementation

As a prereading or prewriting activity, students offer ideas about a central topic, such as spiders. Students are guided to think about main headings, such as types, habitat, food, physical description, and poisonous and nonpoisonous species. These are recorded on spokes from the central topic. As a during-reading activity, students can add to their individual webs or to the class-constructed web (on chart paper or chalkboard). During reading students can also make a list of those ideas or terms they think should fit into the web somewhere, but are not quite sure which category. After reading, students may add to the original web or construct a new one to use as a comparison about what was learned from reading the story or chapter.

### Additional comments

A webbing activity is also effective as a guided writing lesson. The central topic may be used as an opening sentence or paragraph. The information from the spokes may be used as individual paragraphs with specific information attached to the spokes as detail sentences. Then, in summary of the students' writing activity, the central topic may be repeated. A webbing activity may be completed by individuals, groups, or whole classes. This is an effective technique for Kindergarten through high school.

Figure 2  
Important words about whales

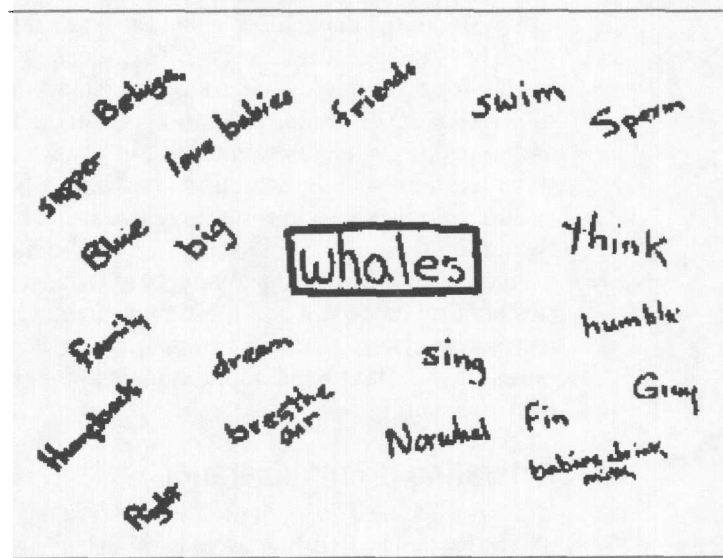
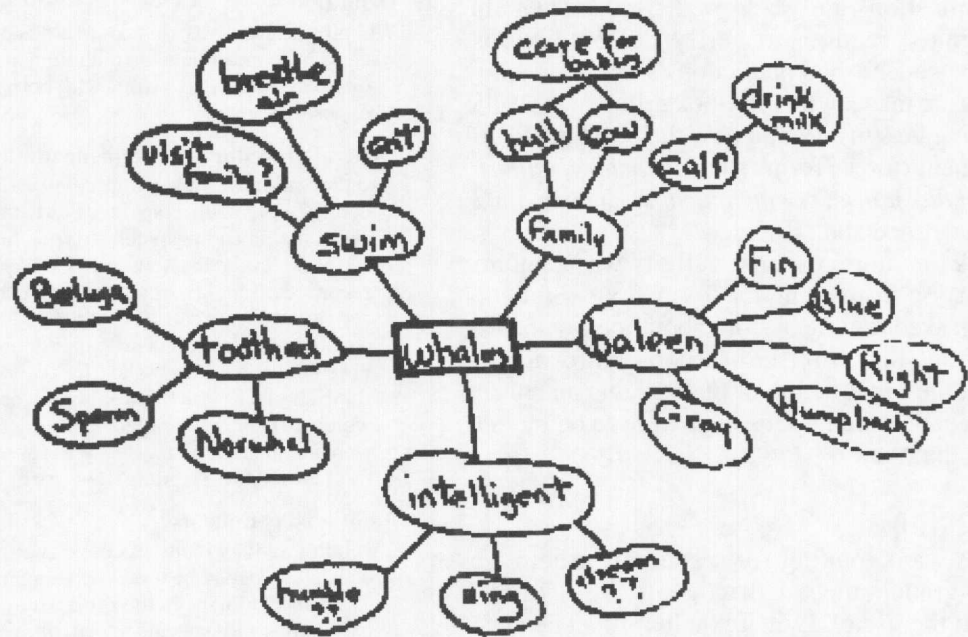


Figure 3  
Detailed web about whales



toothed whales and baleen whales. Students worked in groups to create a more detailed web, using information from the original list but adding specific terms and phrases from the factual book. Miss Tanner served as facilitator. (See Figure 3.)

Using whale Twin Texts of fact and fiction allowed Miss Tanner to arouse the students' curiosity about the curriculum goals she wanted to teach her third graders. The Twin Texts became a bridge for the students to better understand the material in the content area textbooks. Realizing and expecting students to interpret information based on their own background knowledge, literature response activities were created using information from the webs. Most of her students used the web information creatively to write stories about whales and add their own distinct illustrations. These stories and illustrations were bound into a class book about whales to add to the oceans unit.

### Activating prior knowledge

After seeing *Titanic* at movie theaters, many of Mr. Roseman's fifth graders were discussing

what might have actually happened during the sinking of the ship. He discovered there was a great amount of interest and a great amount of misinformation about the disaster. Mr. Roseman decided to channel this enthusiasm to focus on some of the district social studies goals for fifth grade. In geography he could teach map skills and spatial relationships. For history goals, he could teach knowledge of how significant historical events and developments affect today's events, how lifestyles of different groups of people in various cultures have changed, and how innovations in transportation and communication affect the lives of people today. He chose Twin Texts to help meet those goals. Multiple copies of the fictional *Voyage on the Great Titanic: The Diary of Margaret Ann Brady* by Ellen E. White and the factual book *Ghost Liners* by Robert D. Ballard were the two instructional literature books used.

Mr. Roseman knew the importance of activating prior knowledge. (See Activating Prior Knowledge sidebar.) Cunningham et al. (1995) stated that "Students who activate prior knowledge in preparation for literacy tasks have ad-

vantages over those who do not” (p. 92). Therefore, a brainstorming session was initiated to find out what students already knew or at least thought they knew. Then Mr. Roseman was better able to help his students bridge the gap from the known to the unknown.

Because he knew the information at the beginning of the book would be difficult for the fifth graders to grasp, Mr. Roseman began the literature set by reading aloud to students while they followed along or just listened. It was important for students to appreciate the atmosphere of an orphanage in England in 1912, where Margaret Ann Brady lived. Students’ prior knowledge about this time period was almost nonexistent. “Like all readers and writers, elementary school students require appropriate prior knowledge and meaning vocabulary to make sense during their reading and writing” (Cunningham et al., p. 92). There was much discussion about how the living conditions in 1912 of Margaret Ann Brady were like and unlike those of the students in the class. The fifth graders were able to use the photographs from *Ghost Liners* to see the clothing styles of children in the early 1900s.

As April 15, 1912, approached in the diary of Margaret Ann Brady, the students became more and more interested in discussing what they knew about the sinking of the ship. Mr. Roseman encouraged them to find out what the explorers of the sunken ship discovered from the recovery of the *Titanic*. Maps and globes were diligently searched for exact locations of the ship as described in *Ghost Liners*.

Differences in communication advances were discussed. Could such a disaster occur today? What breakdown in communication happened on the *Titanic*? Or was there a breakdown? What forms of communication were used to discover the wreckage? How were *Alvin* (the submarine used to discover the *Titanic*) and Jason Junior (the underwater robot) used? Are wireless communications still used today? These were some of the questions discussed after reading *Voyage on the Great Titanic*. The Twin Text of *Ghost Liners* helped answer some of these questions.

## Helping students and teachers meet challenges

Most children are excited by the world around them. They enjoy knowing specific facts

about their favorite topics. Yet the challenge of learning from content area textbooks is sometimes overwhelming. Some of those challenges are writing style, text structure, unfamiliar topics, or even illustrations not placed near the descriptive text material. Pairing books of fact and fiction allows students to become familiar with selected topics and vocabulary. These selected topics and vocabulary can often be taken from fiction books and eased into factual trade books, and then into the content area textbook (if more in-depth knowledge is needed). As a result, students may be better able to meet the demands of learning content material. Using Twin Texts will support readers’ development of strategic knowledge while reading. The use of Twin Texts will also help teachers meet the challenge of teaching curriculum content, while encouraging students to read for both comprehension and enjoyment.

### Activating prior knowledge

#### Definition

Prior knowledge may be defined as “knowing that stems from previous experience” (Harris & Hodges, 1995, p. 194). Cunningham, Moore, Cunningham, & Moore (1995) expanded that by stating “prior knowledge is the intellectual substance someone has when beginning to explore unfamiliar topics” (p. 93).

#### General procedures for implementation

Most teachers realize that students learn better and retain new information longer when it is connected to previously learned material. Teachers who activate prior knowledge realize students have some prior knowledge about most topics—some knowledge is correct, other knowledge is incorrect—and know the importance prior knowledge plays in learning new information. Teachers may be more effective if they realize prior knowledge comes in many forms, such as attitudes, morals, cultural differences, experiences, values, or skills (Vacca & Vacca, 1999). Educators use numerous techniques and activities to tap into readers’ prior knowledge in order to confirm correct knowledge or make positive readers’ misconceptions about the topic. Some ways of activating prior knowledge are brainstorming, graphic organizers, questioning, predicting, writing, and discussing (Cunningham et al., 1995).

#### Additional comments

Prior knowledge activation should be part of all literacy activities, including reading, writing, and thinking. This teaching strategy is productive and valid for use with learners of all levels and ages.




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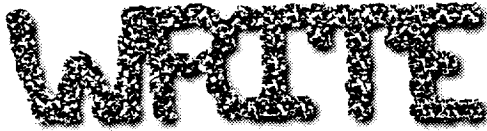
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