

Scaffolding Suggestions for Helping Students Read Short Stories

The scaffolding suggestions in the following chart focus on literary elements, some of which have not been addressed explicitly in the lessons in this chapter. However, you will no doubt teach these elements as students study short stories and other literature, so I've included scaffolding suggestions for them.

STUDENTS' NEEDS	POSSIBLE SCAFFOLDS
Identifying the protagonist: Needs support figuring out which is the main character; has trouble identifying the key problem the protagonist faces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the student which character plays the important role throughout the story. Or ask, "Who is the story about?" • Ask, "Which character has the big problem to solve?"
Pinpointing the problem the protagonist faces: Needs help separating the big problem from smaller ones or understanding what problems are	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the student understand that the protagonist in a short story has a key problem to solve and often smaller, related problems. • Make sure the student understands what a problem is. Start with problems students deal with in their own lives, such as not completing homework, falling and breaking an arm or leg, wanting to become part of the popular group at school. • Once the student understands what problems are and that we all have them, ask her or him to identify the big problem the protagonist must try to resolve.
Understanding antagonistic forces: Has difficulty showing how a force works against the protagonist; needs help to expand knowledge of what these forces can be: emotions, inner thoughts, nature, setting, and so on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the student understand that antagonistic forces can work against the protagonist and cause conflict or tension. Antagonistic forces can be inside a person—such as emotions or thoughts. Antagonistic forces can also be nature (storms), the setting of a story, other characters, or decisions. • Offer the student an example and discuss it. Try using Jerry in "Through the Tunnel" and explain that the desire to swim through the tunnel worked against Jerry until he figured out how to do it. • To guide the student, ask: "What people, situations, or settings worked against the protagonist? How did the protagonist deal with these?"
Inferring from the setting: Needs help understanding that an inference is unstated in the text; has difficulty pinpointing more than one setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First, make sure that the student understands the term <i>setting</i>—where and when the story takes place. Stories can have more than one setting. For an example point out that "Through the Tunnel" was set on the big beach, the bay, the tunnel, and inside the villa. • Have the student identify the settings in his or her short story. Then ask the student to think about how the setting affected the protagonist, how the setting brought about a specific decision, or how the setting changed the course of the plot of the story. • Think aloud and model, gradually turning over to the student the thinking about setting.

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STUDENTS' NEEDS	POSSIBLE SCAFFOLDS
<p>Using the plot to find the central idea:</p> <p>Has difficulty explaining the difference between central idea and theme; needs help figuring out the plot events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the meaning of central idea: explain that for the idea to be central, it has to relate to and grow out of most of the plot. • Show the student how you used the plot in "Through the Tunnel" to find a central idea. • Help the student find another central idea in "Through the Tunnel." Here are possibilities: The goal and achieving it are more important than the physical and mental strain experienced to reach the goal. Meeting a tough challenge takes grit and inner resolve and strength. • Review the short story's plot with the student. Help the student use the plot to determine one or more central ideas.
<p>Identifying the climax and figuring out the return to normalcy:</p> <p>Has trouble understanding why the climax comes close to the end of the story; needs help understanding what "return to normalcy" means</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the student understand that the climax is always near the end of the story. The climax is the highest point or moment of the plot. After the climax things settle down. The settling down is the denouement, or the return to normalcy for the story. • Have the student skim the last page or two of the completed short story and find the highest point of the plot. To support this, ask the student to show the return to normalcy. • Review the climax and denouement in "Through the Tunnel," if the student needs a concrete example. Then return to the student's completed story.
<p>Inferring a character's personality traits:</p> <p>Confuses physical and personality traits; needs support using story elements to infer personality: dialogue, inner thoughts, decisions, others, and so on</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help the student figure out a character's personality, look at one of these elements at a time: dialogue and inner thoughts, actions, decisions, interactions with the settings, and interactions with the plot. • Model in a think-aloud how you apply one of the elements, and then have the student try, using the same element but from a different part of the story. • When you see that the student can be more independent, pair him up with a peer expert for more practice.
<p>Figuring out how and why a character changes from the beginning to the end of the story:</p> <p>Needs support figuring out what the character was like at the beginning; has trouble understanding how the setting, plot events, interactions with other characters, decisions, coping with conflicts, and so on can change a character; needs help figuring out what a character is like at the end.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the student infer the protagonist's personality at the beginning of the story and at the end, using what he says, does, inner thoughts, decisions, actions, and so on. • Help the student infer the protagonist's personality at the end of the story and identify any changes. • Show the student how you look at plot events, decisions made, and interactions with others to figure out how the changes developed as the protagonist lived through these events. • Explain that as the protagonist lives through plot events, the events and how he dealt with each one have the potential for changing the protagonist and causing growth and maturity. • Show the student how you identify specific events, decisions, or interactions that changed the protagonist. Then give an event, decision, or interaction to the student and ask her to explain the change in the protagonist.