Character Perspective Charting: Helping children to develop a more complete ...
Timothy Shanahan; Sherrell Shanahan
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Timothy Shanahan
Sherrell Shanahan

Character Perspective Charting: Helping children to develop a more complete conception of story

Character Perspective Charting is an instructional technique that fosters story understanding.

The scene is a fourth-grade suburban U.S. classroom. Students have finished reading a short story, and now their desks are pushed together into five small groups. The students in each group are engaged in a sometimes spirited conversation about the story. One boy says, "No, no...I don't think those characters have the same intentions."

"Yes, they do. They both want the same thing," answers another group member.

"If we can't agree, how do I fill it in?" a third child, waving a Character Perspective Chart, appeals to the teacher. The students, as if one, open their books and begin to reexamine the story without any direction from the teacher. It is evident that these children are thinking deeply about the story and particularly about the relationships between characters' intentions and goals. As one youngster told us, "You never know the complete story without this activity."

We developed Character Perspective Charts (CPCs) to help children gain access to a more complete and appropriate understanding of stories. The purpose of this article is to describe the use of Character Perspective Charts in elementary reading classes.

Story mapping and what we used to believe about story comprehension

CPC is a technique that has its roots in the story summary charts or story maps that have been a popular activity in elementary classrooms for several years (McConaughy, 1980). Tim, one of the authors of this article, teaches undergraduate and graduate teacher education courses, and over the years he has often recommended the use of these story mapping techniques. Sherry, the other author, is a reading specialist in an elementary school district, and she has used mapping with students and has recommended it to the teachers in her school.

Most reading textbooks now recommend such charts or maps, and many articles for teachers have appeared showing how they can best be used (e.g., Beck & McKeown, 1981; Marshall, 1983; Reutzel, 1985; Sadow, 1982; Whaley, 1981). It has become commonplace to have elementary school children fill in charts with information about main characters, their problems, attempts to solve them, outcomes, and other plot elements.

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The source of such activities can be traced directly to the story grammar research conducted by cognitive psychologists during the 1970s (Mandler & Johnson, 1977; Stein & Glenn, 1979). Story grammar was an attempt to describe the rules that people use to create and remember stories. Like sentence grammars, a story grammar is a set of structural rules. For example, all well-formed sentences must have a subject and predicate, and the predicate describes the action of the subject. Similarly, according to story grammar rules, stories are expected to have a main character who is confronted with some type of problem.

Story grammars were remarkable in that they seemed to describe the powerful mental tools that people use for remembering stories, drawing inferences about them, and creating new stories. Stein's work (Stein & Glenn, 1979) was particularly persuasive, possibly because of the simple labels that she used for her categories and the elegance of her experiments (Shanahan & Neuman, in press). In one study, for instance, she told children stories that omitted some key structural information. Students tended to fill in the gap with structurally appropriate information when they remembered the story. Or if the structural information was told out of sequence, children would remember the story in story grammar order instead of as it was actually told. Thus, story grammars seemed to offer a sound description of the abstract categorical structures used to remember stories; as a result, teachers and curriculum designers developed a variety of instructional techniques based on them. That was why we, and others, thought story maps were such a good idea.

But what if story grammars—and the instructional story maps and charts based upon them—could not provide a full summary of most stories? What if these activities mislead teachers and students into thinking about stories in ways that are not especially accurate?

Quite by accident, we became aware of these troubling possibilities a few years ago. Since then we have been field testing a technique for helping children to develop fuller and more appropriate conceptualizations of stories. Given the dramatic increase in the availability of high-quality literature for teaching reading, this is a particularly opportune time for the development of instructional methods that reflect the actual complexity of stories. In the rest of this article we will describe CPC, a practical instructional alternative to story mapping, that appears to help children to better understand, interpret, and appreciate stories. We will describe how we developed CPC and some of the ways that we have used it with children in Grades 2–6 at Sherry's school.

A different way of looking at stories

A few years ago, Tim was preparing a presentation on story mapping for an undergraduate reading course that he was teaching. He used *The Big Orange Splot* by Daniel Pinkwater (1977) as his example and filled in each of the categories in the chart with information about that story. (See left side of the Figure.) It worked beautifully. All essential information from the story was used, all of the blanks in the chart were filled, and a somewhat conventional theme emerged. But, what if...? Tim began to anticipate questions that students might ask.

But what if...story maps and charts... mislead teachers and students into thinking about stories in ways that are not especially accurate?

"What if a child erred? What if a child charted it incorrectly?" If a child made a mistake, the chart wouldn't come out right, he assumed. Surprisingly, given the popularity of these techniques, there are no examples in the literature of their diagnostic use. He proceeded to develop an example with a mistake in it so that these beginning teachers would recognize the implications of errors that might occur.

To fill in the chart Tim had to think about who the main character was. It is a simple story, and the only choices for main character are Mr. Plumbean or the neighbors. We usually tell children to choose the main character based upon who has the important problem, and in this case he thought it was Plumbean; after all, it was his house that was messed up. So, to get it wrong, he

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chose the neighbors as the main character for this second chart. (See right side of the Figure.) Despite this fundamental error in choice, he found that he could, again, summarize all important information from the story. He was able to fill in all of the spaces on the chart and, surprisingly, could still arrive at a reasonable theme. Even more surprising was the fact that the themes for the two charts were in conflict.

As he examined the charts, he began to appreciate the depth of *The Big Orange Splot* in new ways. This simple children's story emerged as a cleverly designed tale that captured the fundamental tensions between two very different world views. Any summary of the story without a description of its conflict of perspectives would miss the point. Clearly the story mapping chart alone was insufficient. It allowed a reasonable summary of the story, but it also focused the reader's attention on only a single perspective. By charting the story from both characters' points of view, however, he arrived at a greater

Character Perspective Chart

Main character: Who is the main character? MR. PLUMBEAN	Main character: Who is the main character? MR. PLUMBEAN'S NEIGHBORS.
Setting: Where and when does the story take place? PLUMBEAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD	Setting: Where and when does the story take place? PLUMBEAN'S NEIGHBORHOOD
Problem: What is the main character's problem? PLUMBEAN'S NEIGHBORS PESTER HIM.	Problem: What is the main character's problem? BIRD DROPS PAINT ON PLUMBEAN'S HOUSE.
Goal: What is the main character's goal? What does the character want? TO DECORATE HIS HOUSE AND GET NEIGHBORS TO LEAVE HIM ALONE	Goal: What is the main character's goal? What does the character want? TO MAKE NEIGHBORHOOD ALL THE SAME AGAIN.
Attempt: What does the main character do to solve the problem or get the goal? DECORATES HOUSE AND TALKS TO EACH NEIGHBOR	Attempt: What does the main character do to solve the problem or get the goal? TRY TO CONVINCE HIM TO CHANGE THEN EACH CHANGES TO BE LIKE HIM
Outcome: What happened as a result of the attempt? PLUMBEAN'S HOUSE LOOKS LIKE HIS DREAMS AND NEIGHBORS ACCEPT IT.	Outcome: What happened as a result of the attempt? ALL HOUSES IN NEIGHBORHOOD ARE DECORATED IN SAME WAY.
Reaction: How does the main character feel about the outcome? HAPPY.	Reaction: How does the main character feel about the outcome? HAPPY.
Theme: What point did the author want to make? FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS.	Theme: What point did the author want to make? IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE THE SAME.

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understanding and appreciation. Instead of structural elements being a kind of static property of story—a stable set of building blocks that, when properly assembled, add up to a story—this procedure encouraged an awareness of the dynamic interconnections between theme and structure. The original story grammar research never considered multiple character perspectives, conflict, or even the dynamic relationship of theme and structure. (Theme in most maps is just one more structural property of story, one more box to fill in.) By thinking about the story from a second perspective, Tim had deepened his understanding and appreciation of this story and of stories in general.

As a result of this peculiar discovery, we began to wonder about the prevalence of social conflict within stories and to investigate how useful this kind of dual charting might be for helping children to think more effectively about what they read. In this process, we went back to read the original research on story grammars again and found that as persuasive as the story grammar work had been, there were other conflicting theories and studies that challenged the story grammar findings. Unfortunately, these theories had not been translated into instructional activities or procedures, so they exerted little or no influence on comprehension instruction. These alternative views were more in accord with the kind of dual charting that Tim had used with *The Big Orange Splot.*

For example, Bertram Bruce and his colleagues described stories on the basis of character plans and goals. They illustrated how stories gained depth when characters' plans interacted and claimed that "much of the complexity of stories in which characters interact arises because the story is about a *conflict* between the goals of two characters" (Bruce & Newman, 1978, p. 196). Elsewhere (Steinberg & Bruce, 1980), they quoted the novelist John Le Carré as pithily saying, "The cat sat on the mat is not a story. The cat sat on the dog's mat is a story" (p. 1). Unfortunately, this economy of description was not preserved in their analysis, and these ideas did not find their way into the instructional literature. Bruce and his colleagues found that character conflicts of this type were common in children's books. They examined a sample of 32 stories (half primary, half intermediate) and found that 29 of them contained such conflicts, and all but one of these was an example of interpersonal conflict.

More recently, Trabasso (1989) pointed out that "when we understand a series of events in a text, we do not experience them as isolated, individual occurrences," but as "a *coherent* sequence of happenings" (p. 68). He concluded that to achieve this coherence, a reader must draw inferences about the protagonist's plan or goal-directed sequences. Trabasso criticized the static quality of story grammar categories but, like us, did not simply reject them. Instead, he provided a reconceptualization of the categories. These categories, in Trabasso's view, "activate information we have stored about intentional action and use to infer relations from this knowledge about plans" (p. 75). His work demonstrated that children, ages 3–9, recognize the need for a goal plan for their main characters (Trabasso, Stein, Rodkin, Munger, & Baughn, 1992). This study found that story memory can be described better when we consider causal connections based upon readers' theories of characters' intentions.

Even more relevant to our concerns is the work of Golden and Guthrie (1986). They examined student responses to a story and wondered about the sources of the interpretive differences that occurred. After careful analysis, they concluded that both text and reader factors were implicated. Interpretations depended on whether readers felt empathy for particular characters, and empathy depended both on readers' personal experiences and on how "the text presents the points of view of two characters...and thus evokes different kinds of emotional involvement" (p. 417). They noted that "A favorable disposition toward one character may lead the reader to construct meaning in which that character is central" (p. 419). Thus, readers who focus on the perspective of a single character, something that they may be predisposed to do by their own experiences or the art of the author, can end up with an incomplete understanding of a story. Golden and Guthrie found that readers often disagreed about who was actually in conflict within a story, and, therefore, multiple plausible plot summaries were possible. They argued that conflict, because of its close connection to theme and character intentions, transcends plot details. Traditional story mapping or summarizing procedures could mask this

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inherent complexity, as they focus attention only on the main character's point of view. Emery and Mihalevich (1992) have demonstrated that children can have trouble understanding a literary work when they focus too narrowly on the main character's perspective.

Given these findings, it is surprising that story mapping has been so widely recommended. Story mapping focuses attention so heavily on the problems of a single character that it can only reinforce the notion of a single correct interpretation. Authors and children's book publishers have recognized the importance of character perspective or goal conflict; witness *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* (Scieszka, 1989) in which the author tells the story and explains the conflict from the wolf's point of view. But as enjoyable and useful as a book like this can be, it should be remembered that it is the author and not the children who is doing the hard interpretive work.

Literary interpretation and, indeed, reading are constructive acts. To be good at them, the reader must learn to do this interpretive work on his or her own.

Literary interpretation and, indeed, reading are constructive acts. To be good at them, the reader must learn to do this interpretive work on his or her own. Story maps emphasize static structural properties of text over these more dynamic and interactive qualities. The dual CPC charting that Tim happened upon seemed promising as an instructional technique because of the possibility that it would provoke children to interpret character perspective in ways more in accord with these richer views.

Character Perspective Charts and how we use them

This is where Sherry got involved. She was looking for some new techniques for teaching comprehension and thought Tim's CPC idea might be just the thing. This led her—and some of the teachers at her school—to try it out with children in Grades 2–6, with very promising results.

Stories or novels used with CPC should have two or more characters with separate goals. The technique can be applied to any story with more than one character, but it is most revealing when the characters' goals are in conflict. Fairy tales often have this structure. Think of the conflicting goals of Cinderella and her grasping stepsisters, Rumplestiltskin and the clever peasant's daughter, or the three bears and Goldilocks.

Sherry's school has both a K–8 basal anthology and the early levels of a 6–12 litera-

Table 1
Some recent Caldecott winners for Character Perspective Charting

Caldecott winners	Characters in conflict
Rathman, Peggy. (1995). *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. New York: Putnam.	Buckle/Gloria
Say, Allen. (1993). *Grandfather's journey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.	Grandfather/Grandchild
McCully, Emily Arnold. (1992). *Mirette on the high wire*. New York: Putnam.	Mirette/Bellini
Wiesner, David. (1991). *Tuesday*. New York: Trumpet Club.	Frog/Policeman
Macaulay, David. (1990). *Black and white*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.	Boy at home/Parents
Young, Ed. (1990). *Lon Po Po: A red-riding hood story from China*. New York: Scholastic.	Children/Wolf
Ackerman, Karen. (1988). *Song and dance man*. New York: Knopf.	Grandpa/Children
Yolen, Jane. (1987) *Owl moon*. New York: Philomel.	Father/Daughter
Yorinks, Arthur. (1986). *Hey, Al*. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux	Al/Bird
Van Allsburg, Chris. (1985). *The Polar Express*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.	Boy/Santa

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ture series. She examined the stories in these and found that such conflict was evident in more than 60% of the selections; this is attenuated a bit because of the existence of nonstory materials from science and social studies and stories with only single characters. In other words, it is very easy to find appropriate selections. (See Tables 1 and 2 for lists of some popular books and stories that can be used with CPC.) Although the technique was developed for use with short stories, such as those in a typical picture book format, Sherry found that it worked even better with longer and more complex novels such as *The Black Cauldron* by Lloyd Alexander (1990) or *Ramona Forever* by Beverly Cleary (1979). The idea of CPC is to help children to think about stories at a deeper level, and most novels recommended for classroom use have the kind of depth that makes such an analysis worthwhile. In these stories each chapter poses new problems and character actions. Each chapter can be charted separately for a detailed understanding of the whole novel.

CPC works well with historical fiction, also. When fifth graders charted *The Fighting Ground* by Avi (1987), a story about 24 hours during the American Revolution, they developed a fuller understanding of how perspectives of war differed between common soldiers and officers. The many events, problems, and conflicts support two opposing themes, which made for a lively class discussion about the glory and realities of war. We have a hunch

Table 2
Other popular stories for Character Perspective Charting

Stories for various grade levels	Characters in conflict
Grade 2	
Henry and Mudge by Cynthia Rylant	Henry/Mudge
The Wednesday Surprise by Eve Bunting	Grandma/Anna
The Mysterious Tadpole by Steven Kellogg	Louis/Miss Seevers/Alphonse
The Best Friends' Club by Elizabeth Winthrop	Lizzie/Harold
Grade 3	
Dr. DeSoto by William Steig	Dr. DeSoto/Fox
Grandfather Tang's Story by Ann Tampert	Chou/Wu Ling
The Patchwork Quilt by Valerie Flournoy	Grandma/Tanya/Mama
Ramona Forever by Beverly Cleary	Ramona/Mr. Quimby
Dream Wolf by Paul Goble	Tiblo/Wolf
Grade 4	
The Lost Lake by Allen Say	Dad/Luke
Sarah, Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachlan	Sarah/Anna
Yeh-Shen by Ai-Ling Louie	Yeh-Shen/Stepmother
The Three Little Pigs and the Fox by William Hooks	Hamlet/Fox
Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters by John Steptoe	Nyasha/Manyara
Grade 5	
The Talking Eggs by Robert San Souçi	Rose/Blanche/Old Woman
The Voyage of the Dawn Trader by C.S. Lewis	Eustace/Lucy
Willie Bea and the Time Martians Landed by Virginia Hamilton	Willie Bea/Toughy Clay
The Best Bad Thing by Yoshiko Uchida	Rinko/Aunt Hattie
The Shimmershine Queens by Camille Yarbrough	Angie/Ms. Collier
Grade 6	
Zlateh the Goat by Isaac Bashevis Singer	Aaron/Reuven
Dragon, Dragon by John Gardner	Dragon/Youngest Son
Greyling by Jane Yolen	Fisherman/Wife
The American Slurp by Lensey Namioka	Maibon/Dwarf
The Wise Old Woman by Yoshiko Uchida	Emperor/Old Woman/Farmer

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that CPC would also work with factual historical narratives in a similar fashion, although we have not yet had the opportunity to try it out with them.

CPC is likely to be especially helpful with those stories and novels that reveal variations in life experiences that we hope children will learn to bridge. For example, using CPC with a story such as *Princess Poo* by Kathleen Muldoon (1989) helped a classroom of second graders become more aware of and sensitive to physical handicaps by charting the story from the points of view of two sisters, one confined to a wheelchair and the other jealous of the attention that her sister received.

Moreover, CPC is likely to become more useful as teachers increasingly try to use literature that reflects the experiences of various racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Books such as *Baseball in April and Other Stories* by Gary Soto (1990), Virginia Hamilton's (1993) *Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave*, or Lois Lowry's (1989) *Number the Stars* do more than just describe characters of particular cultural heritages; they illuminate the difficulty of maintaining positive relationships among those from different backgrounds. CPC, because of its emphasis on the conflicting intentions and goals of various characters, seems like a natural companion to explorations of this type of literature.

When Sherry first introduces CPC to children, she provides a demonstration of how it works. This usually takes 30–40 minutes depending on the length and complexity of the story used. All the children read the same story, and the teacher does the initial charting—with assistance from the children. It is easier, of course, if the children have already had experience charting stories, but in any event, it is a good idea to review the story elements included in the form. This is especially true of characters' goals/decisions/plans, characters' reactions, and themes. Research shows that children become aware of more subtle aspects of stories, such as characters' goals and reactions, relatively late (Stein & Glenn, 1979); moreover, such items are often omitted from the maps or charts used in schools. For the initial discussion, it is enough to define each and give an example from a story that the children already know.

Next, Sherry presents two blank charts and tells students that they are going to fill them in together. Each chart is labeled with a main character, whom the children thoroughly describe and discuss. Sherry explains that, "Each of these characters has his or her own point of view. Each character has different goals. If we want to fully understand the story, we need to know how these goals differ and see what problems arise because of them." She then asks questions that will help the children fill in the charts.

Setting is usually a shared element, that is, it is the same for the two characters, so that is an easy place to start. Problems, on the other hand, are inextricably bound up in the characters' plans, goals, or intentions, and these reflect the conflicting perspectives of the characters. Initially, we didn't have a separate box in the chart for characters' goals or intentions; we had assumed that stating the problem was sufficient. However, without a careful consideration of intentions, it is easy to misunderstand the entire sequence of events that follows. Some stories pose more than a single problem for the character, and it is essential that we recognize how he, she, or they interpret the situation.

It is worth discussing these intentions thoroughly, and the problems need to be stated in terms consistent with the characters' actions and feelings. In *The Big Orange Splot*, for instance, when a bird drops a can of orange paint on Mr. Plumbean's house, this apparently is not a problem for him (although without a separate consideration of intentions, both children and adults see this initiating event as his problem). He neither does anything about it nor seems particularly concerned. In fact, his later actions suggest that he kind of likes the splot and wishes that he could decorate his house even more. Mr. Plumbean's real problem, the one that moves him to action, is that his neighbors are upset about how his house looks and are pestering him. For the neighbors, the orange paint—and the later decorations—are the problem; Mr. Plumbean fails to conform to community tastes. These differences are then summarized in the two charts.

With different problems and goals, not surprisingly, the two characters take different actions. Mr. Plumbean decides that if the neighbors are going to bug him anyway, he might as well decorate his house as he chooses. When the pestering neighbors try to get

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him to make his house like theirs, he convinces them, instead, to go on their own decorating binges. The neighbors want conformity and try to induce Plumbean to change his style. When they fail to persuade him to live as they do, they decide to make their homes more like his. Again, this information is filled into the two charts.

In the end, the charts reflect that both characters had positive reactions to the events; they have accomplished their goals. Plumbean wanted to follow his individual vision without interference, and, in fact, his house "reflects his dreams" and has support of his community. The neighbors wanted conformity, and when they couldn't get Plumbean to be like them, they conformed to his standards. Given the striking differences in the two points of view for this story, we arrive at two different themes. For one the idea is that we should follow our dreams, and the other is more of a "if you can't beat them, join them" kind of tale. One story champions personal freedom of expression and individuality and the other the importance of group cohesion and social agreement. The striking differences between these two themes are unusual. In our experience, themes differ depending on which character is the focus of study, but they tend to be either variations on the same theme—such as good is rewarded, evil is punished—or very separate issues altogether. In a case such as this one, part of the richness of the story comes from the tension between the opposing themes.

After a demonstration, and the spirited conversation that it entails, it is worthwhile to encourage students to reflect on the types of thinking strategies that they used, including remembering details, developing vocabulary, drawing inferences or conclusions, and comparing the goals and actions of characters. It can be a good time to raise issues of critical reading or author's craft, as well. How did the author advantage one point of view over another? Or what did the author include to build sympathy for either of the perspectives?

Most students have been able to use CPC independently or in small groups after only a single demonstration, although second graders may need some additional assistance with the ideas of point of view and theme. With these younger children, it might be wise to do several CPCs together over time; some of the teachers that Tim works with even prefer to use it as a type of guided reading lesson for a class or group under teacher direction. We have tried many variations on the technique, and all seem to work pretty well. It would be wise to experiment to see what works best with your students.

Some other ways to use CPC

In the demonstration described above, both charts were completed simultaneously. With this simultaneous charting, students do not seem to get as locked into the idea of a single point of view, whichever one they started with, as being correct. However, it can be easier with relatively difficult material, or for younger or disabled readers, to chart a story one way and then to chart it again from a second perspective afterwards. The size of the boxes in the chart are an important issue with younger children, too. The boxes need to be reasonably large to accommodate their larger printing and script styles, but multiple-paged charts have proven cumbersome.

Another variation that we have tried has been to divide a class into two groups, with each group assigned responsibility for developing one of the charts. This is an excellent cooperative learning activity that engenders a lot of productive discussion. In this case, it is probably best for students to know which character they are to focus on before reading, or the activity may require additional time for rereading. Once the two charts are developed, the groups come together to compare and discuss their separate findings.

Although most of our experiences with CPC have been in small-group or whole-class situations, it has worked well with individuals also. One third grader went so far as to use the charts independently to help write a book report. Nevertheless, most students tell us that they prefer to work with CPCs in cooperative pairs or groups; they value the discussion and support that their classmates provide.

CPC can also be used in combination with other popular instructional techniques. Many teachers, for instance, have used Venn diagram charts to compare story characters (Routman, 1996). This can still be done. We think that children might be better able to delve into character similarities and differences, however, once they have explored their contrasting points of

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view using CPC. Children who have difficulty getting beyond the superficial in book club discussion groups (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995) might use CPC as a kind of warm-up activity that could better prepare them for productive book conversation. Also, Emery (1996) has suggested that teacher-led discussions can encourage children to think about character perspectives more thoroughly, and we think combining such discussion procedures with CPC might be helpful to some children.

In some cases, such as with *The Big Orange Splot*, children may have difficulty, even with CPC, sorting out subtle themes or those that do not match well with their life's experiences. With this story, younger children sometimes have trouble seeing that a new kind of conformity descends on the neighborhood, because each house is wildly decorated in its own way. In such cases, it can help to introduce another story with a related issue or theme. With *Splot*, we have found *The Araboolies of Liberty Street* (Swope, 1989) to be a useful companion book. In this story, again, all the houses are the same initially, until the arrival of a new family. A general who lives on the street is so concerned that he calls in the army to destroy the house "that's different." To save the newcomers, the other neighbors quickly make their houses different, too, so that only the general's stands out when the tanks arrive.

Finally, we have tried out CPC as a postreading assessment tool. Teachers have seen it as a way of appraising students' understanding of a story. As one explained, "If a student is able to think about a story from two characters' perspectives, then that student probably has a pretty complete understanding of the story."

What children learn from CPC

Sherry has field tested CPC with several classes of students and observed its use by other teachers; she has interviewed children about their experiences with it; and we have examined hundreds of charts that they have developed. Some children, mainly younger ones, such as second and third graders, have indicated that they liked the activity because it helped them to think more about the different characters' actions and personalities. Not surprisingly, children at this stage focus heavily on the separate elements of the story. Their responses seemed to show deep understanding of particular characters or events, but this information does not appear to be any better coordinated as a result of CPC.

However, for children a bit older, we saw many examples of better understanding of the relationships between characters and their actions. A fourth-grade student, for instance, remarked that now he could understand "two sides of the same story," as in the story of the Three Little Pigs. He could make sense of "how both the pigs and the wolf felt" in their dealings with each other. Fifth graders said that they could better appreciate "what a character was going through and why they made the decisions that they did." They often related the characters' decisions to their own lives, too. Most fifth graders realized, for instance, that they have conformed to peer pressure just like the neighbors in *The Big Orange Splot*.

Often students indicated that they appreciated the story more as a result of the insights developed from CPC, and some showed how they had used this new awareness. A fourth grader volunteered that he had used this activity when watching the movie *Grumpy Old Men* and that he liked the story only if he thought about it from one of the character's points of view, but not from the other's. Similarly, several sixth graders noted that they found that they liked or disliked characters depending on how their own points of view matched with those of the characters. These comments reflect appropriate literary understandings and the availability of useful cognitive tools for critical reading and interpretation.

Most students, no matter what the grade level, claimed that the technique led them to think about a story more thoroughly. According to these students, before the use of CPC they usually considered only a single interpretation of a story. They like CPC in part because it encourages them to read the story more completely.

In conclusion

We were not attempting to conduct a formal research study here, nor should readers think of our descriptions as being based on statistically significant evidence proving CPC to be better than anything else at improving reading comprehension. Nevertheless, CPC is a practice that is more consistent with the basic research findings from cognitive psychology and theories of literary interpretation than is

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the popular story mapping technique. Our investigations show that it is a practical technique that can be used in a variety of ways with children as early as second grade, and that they generally seem to enjoy its use and appreciate the insights they gain. Finally, the technique encourages the development of multiple perspectives on a story, something that is not usually evident in other instructional techniques. We can only speculate on the implications of this for reading achievement or even for student use of these insights in other reading situations. With regard to the latter, the various student attempts to use this on their own that we have described make it seem rather promising.

Although simple story structure charts support children's comprehension by helping them to recognize and remember structural elements of stories, they can mislead as well. Approaching stories from only a single perspective can foster the misconception that there is only a single meaning. Thus, such charts emphasize comprehension (understanding what is there), rather than interpretation (wondering about meaning). Character Perspective Charting is valuable because it encourages children to use structural information as a base for interpretation. By requiring the reader to enter the minds of the various characters and to consider events from their alternative perspectives, children come to a fuller understanding of story and theme. Character conflict is a central property of a large proportion of stories, novels, and factual narratives, and Character Perspective Charting can help children as early as second grade to develop more mature and complete conceptions of such texts.

Timothy Shanahan teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he also directs the Center for Literacy. He may be contacted at the Center for Literacy (M/C 147), 1040 W. Harrison, Chicago, IL 60607, USA. Sherrell Shanahan is an elementary reading specialist at El Sierra School in Downers Grove, Illinois, USA.

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