

Example Lesson Plan: Activating Background Knowledge

For Elementary School Students

Background knowledge describes the information that students know about a topic prior to reading a related text. Background knowledge is a vital part of reading comprehension, as it allows students to understand texts more deeply and to make connections between a text and the real world. As different students enter the classroom with a varying range of background knowledge on different subjects, it is often up to educators to provide just enough background information that readers are equipped to successfully comprehend and engage with a new text. For more information on building background knowledge, see our blog post [“The Journey Is the Treasure: Providing Just the Right Amount of Background Knowledge to Support Reading Comprehension”](#) by Deborah K. Reed, Ph.D., and Jennifer Knight, Ph.D.

This example lesson plan models teaching students strategies for using graphic organizers to activate background knowledge and make connections while reading.

The text of this lesson plan is intended to serve as an example of what a lesson on this topic might look like. It is not intended to be read to students verbatim. Rather, teachers should feel empowered to use the example plan as an outline for building their own unique lesson. That said, scripted explanations of terms, concepts, and activities can be used as desired.

Activating Background Knowledge Elementary School Example Lesson

Materials: lesson plan, teacher copy of [Frogs by Gail Gibbons \(1993\)](#), [semantic map graphic organizer](#) for teacher and students, paper and pencils, projector

Optional materials: whiteboard, markers, and extra pictures of frogs

Additional Resource: For more on activating background knowledge, read the Iowa Reading Research Center blog post "[The Journey Is the Treasure: Providing Just the Right Amount of Background Knowledge to Support Reading Comprehension](#)" by Jen Knight, Ph.D., and Deborah K. Reed, Ph.D.

Set Goal and Purpose

We are going to learn a strategy that will help us understand what we read. Good readers use what they already know about a topic to help them make sense of new information. Today we are going to practice doing that before we read and while we are reading a book. We are going to activate our background knowledge or think about what we already know about a topic. This will help us make connections and understand what we are reading.

Review

First, let's review what we learned about making connections.

My turn: *A connection is a link between the text you are reading and something you already know or have experienced. It could be from your personal life, another text, or something else you learned.*

Say it with me: *A connection is a link between the text you are reading and something you already know or have experienced.*

Now it's your turn: *[Child's name], what is a connection?*

If correct: *Excellent, you know what a connection is.*

If incorrect: *Stop. My turn. A connection is a link between the text you are reading and something you already know or have experienced. It could be personal, another text, or something else. Say it with me. What is a connection?*

New Instruction

Great, we know what connections are. Today we are going to use connections to help us activate our background knowledge. This is something good readers do before they start reading and while they read.

My turn: Activating your background knowledge means you think about what you already know about the topic that will be in the book you are going to read.

Say it with me: Activating your background knowledge means you think about what you already know about the topic that will be in the book you are going to read.

Now it's your turn: What does it mean to activate your background knowledge?

If we can activate our background knowledge and make connections with what we already know about a topic in the book, we will have an idea what to expect and a way to help ourselves understand the passage better. Why is it helpful to activate our background knowledge before and while we read?

If correct: Excellent! You know what it means to activate your background knowledge.

If incorrect: Stop. My turn. Activating your background knowledge means you think about what you already know about the topic that will be in the book you are going to read. Say it with me. What does it mean to activate your background knowledge?

General response: It helps us know what to expect in the book so we can understand it better.

Demonstrate Using Strategy

Great! Now that we know what it means to activate our background knowledge, we are ready to try it out during reading time. Today we are going to read about frogs. Before we start reading, we need to activate our background knowledge. Take a minute and think about a time you saw a frog. Don't say anything yet; just make a picture in your head. Where did you see the frog? What did it look like?

My turn: I've made a picture in my mind of a frog I've seen before. I know what color it was. I know how many legs it had and what its body looked like. I remember the eyes and tongue. I remember the way it moved around. I can see where it lives.

[There is no specific error correction here because students are picturing a frog in their minds. If they have difficulty or have no prior knowledge of frogs, show the picture of the frog on the cover of the book and ask students to think about how they would describe the frog to someone who has never seen a frog before.]

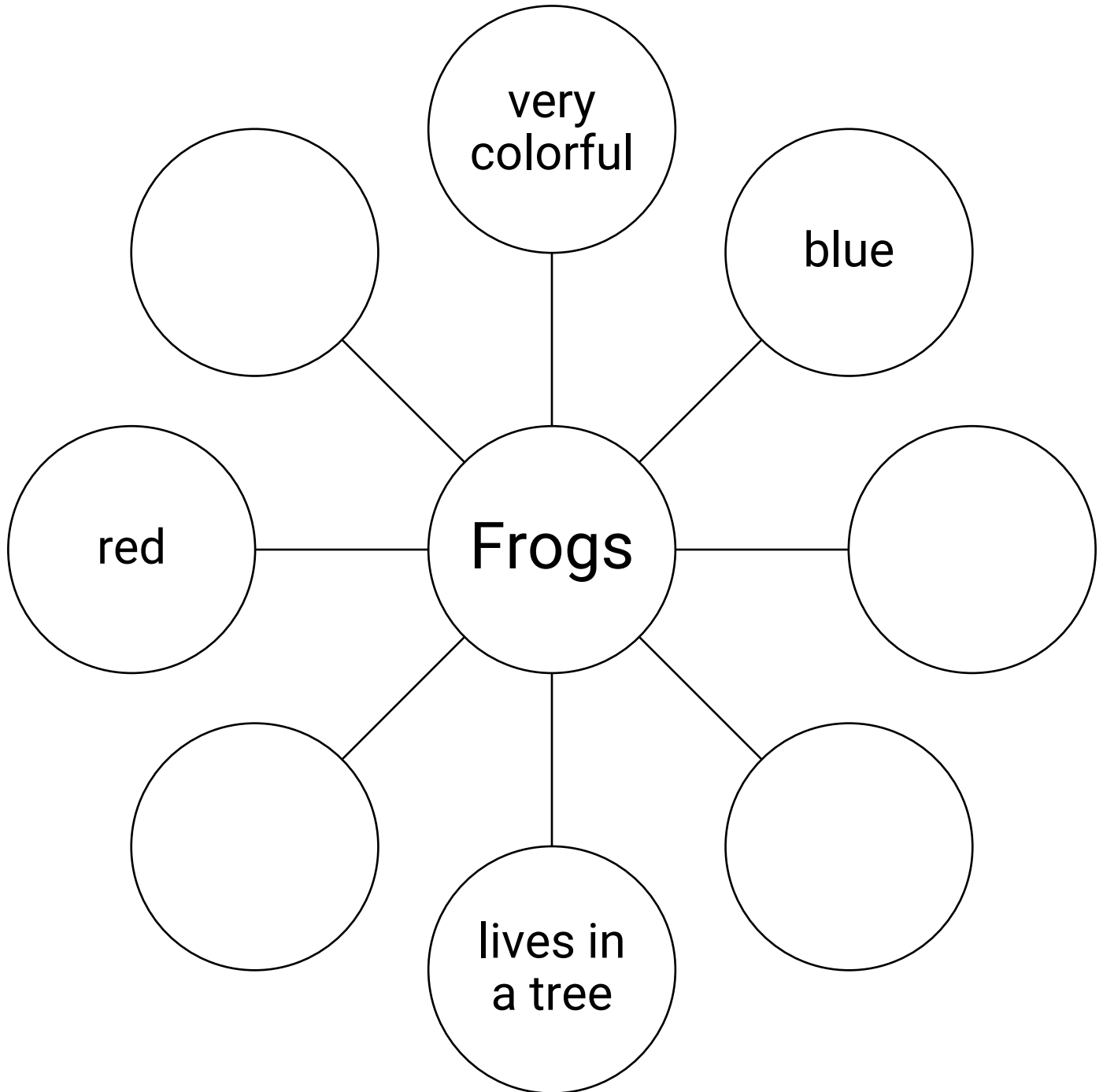
<p>Your turn: Without saying anything, make a picture in your head about your frog. What does it look like? What color is it? Where does it live? How does it move around?</p>	
<p>We are ready for the next step: writing down our ideas about frogs on our graphic organizer. Remember, your ideas about frogs may be different from mine. We may be thinking of different kinds of frogs. You may know a little bit about frogs or a lot. It is okay. Right now, we want to activate our background knowledge about frogs so we can be ready to read and learn more. This will help us as we read today because we can check what we have written to make sure it is correct. If we learn any new things about frogs, we can change or add to our graphic organizer.</p> <p>[Use a projector to share your graphic organizer and hand out student copies]</p> <p>My turn: I'm going to put frogs in the middle of my web so I can remember the topic in the book I will be reading. Now, I'm going to add a few of the things I pictured. I know my frog was very colorful, red and blue. The frog lived in a tree with lots of leaves.</p> <p>Let's try this together: On your graphic organizer, write frogs in the middle. Now, tell me what color was the frog you pictured?</p> <p>Your turn: Keep adding all of the ideas you pictured in your mind. What did your frog's skin look like? Where did it live? How did it move around? How and what did it eat?</p>	<p>[There is no specific error correction here because students are sharing their ideas about frogs. Monitor students as they complete their graphic organizers. If they make incorrect suggestions, such as saying a frog has a tail, ask clarifying questions. For example, maybe a student is thinking of a tadpole or a lizard. It will be important to help the student distinguish this.]</p>
<p>Practice</p>	
<p>Now that we have some ideas down about frogs on our graphic organizers, we are ready to start reading our book called <i>Frogs</i>. Let's start reading. [As you read, stop periodically and ask students if what they knew about frogs would be changed by the information in the book. Fill in new information about frogs from the text on the graphic organizer. Continue to monitor students' graphic organizers to make sure they have accurate information written down.]</p>	

References

Gibbons, G. (1993). *Frogs*. Holiday House.

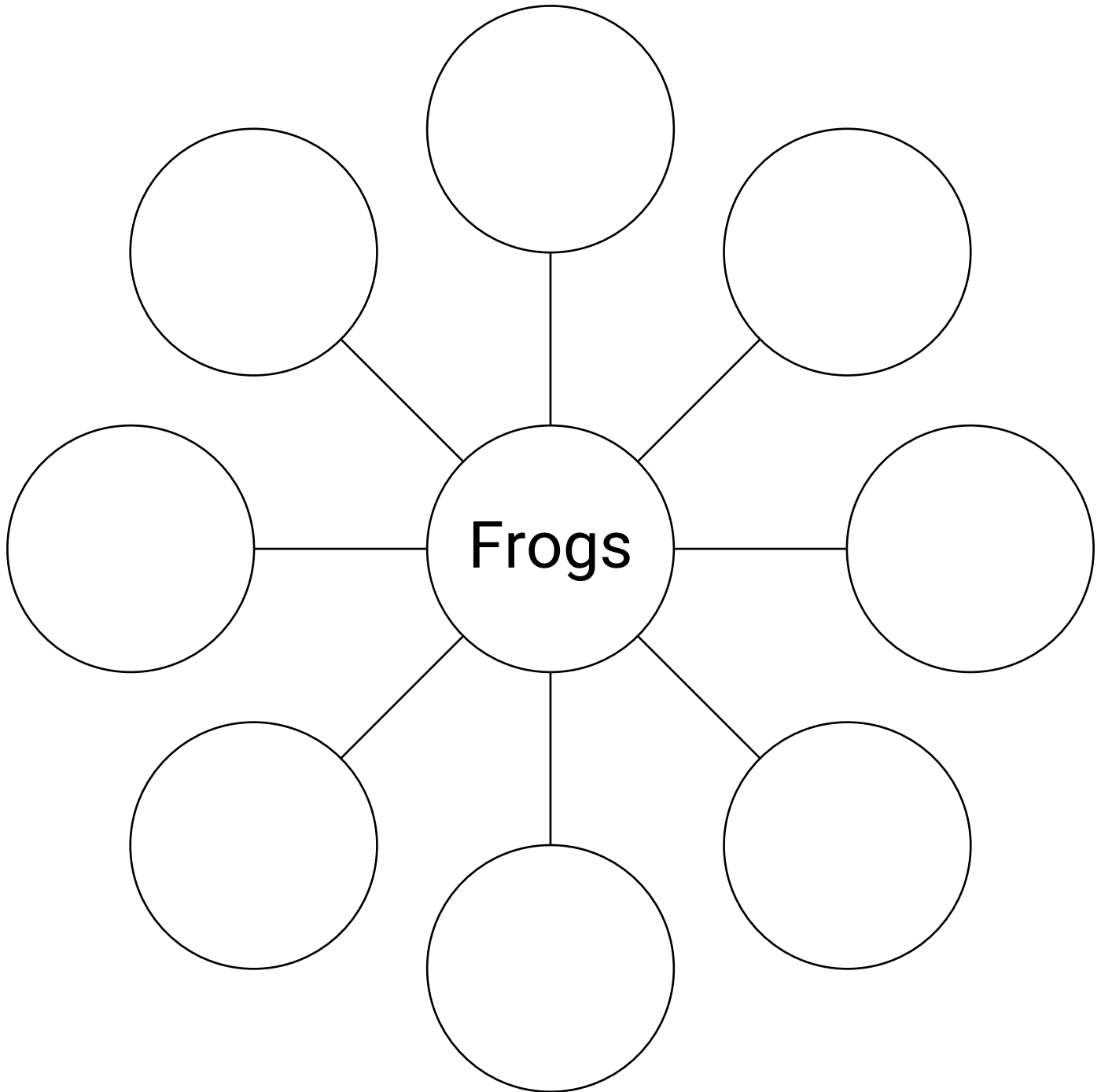
Frogs by Gail Gibbons

Background Knowledge Semantic Web



Frogs by Gail Gibbons

Background Knowledge Semantic Web



Semantic Web Graphic Organizer

