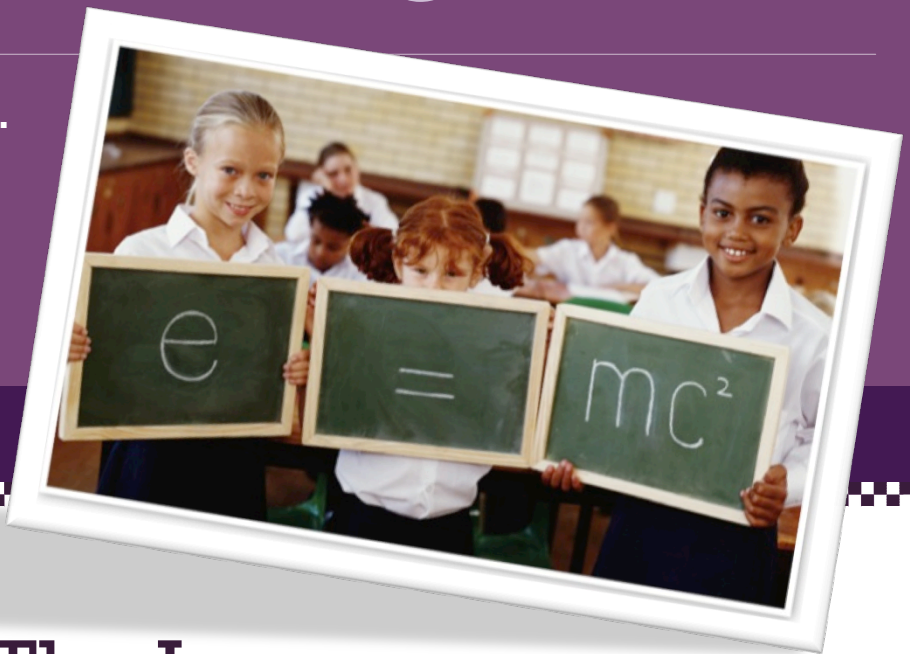


Building Background

Building Background ...
jump start students'
schemata and past
learning to find out
what they know.

Final Questions: 7-9



Building Background Feature Components

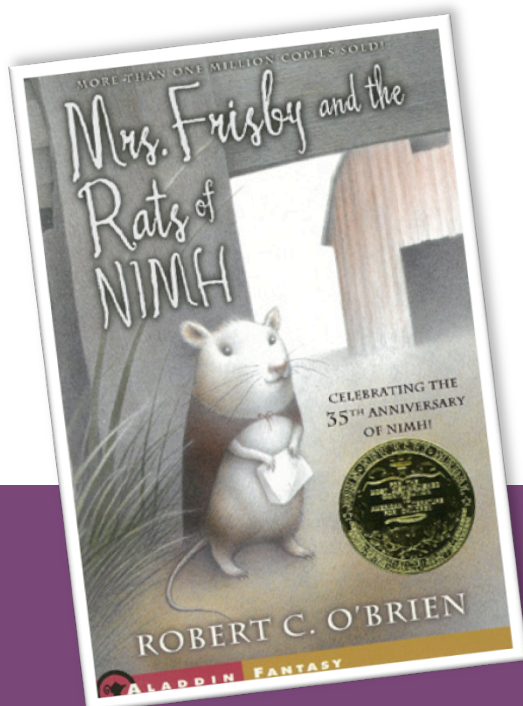
- 7. Concepts Explicitly Linked
- 8. Links Explicitly Made
- 9. Key Vocabulary

The Lesson

UNIT: Mrs. Frisby & the Rats of NIMH (6th Grade)

As part of a literature course, Miss Paige is required to teach a variety of American literature. The first book in the series is *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, spending one week to ten days on the unit.

The story is about Mrs. Frisby, a field mouse, who is worried about her younger son, Timothy. He has had pneumonia and is too weak and frail to be moved. But if the Frisbys don't move immediately, they'll all be killed. Mrs. Frisby hears about the wonderful Rats of NIMH who are strong, smart, and able to do almost anything. The story chronicles the adventures of the family and the Rats of NIMH.



The goals of this lesson include:

- (1) students will read an extended text, and
- (2) students will use their prior knowledge as a tool for understanding the text.

Teaching Scenario

Miss Paige began the first lesson of the unit by asking, “Have you ever seen a rat?” and showing the class a picture of one. The students were quite interested in this topic and readily shared their experiences. She then talked with the students about how in some stories and novels, animals take on human characteristics, such as in *Charlotte’s Web* (E. B. White, 1974), a book many students had read or listened to in grade 4. She asked students for other examples of stories or books that had animals who behaved like humans. Two students, both English learners, mentioned books they had read in their native languages before moving to the United States. Miss Paige then introduced a semantic map that had the word *survival* written in the center. She asked, “What are some words and ideas you can think of that have to do with survival?” As students orally provided their ideas, she clustered them on the chart: *Survivor TV Show, escaping a tsunami, September 11, earthquakes, animals’ need for food and water*, and so forth. She then asked students to discuss with a partner the following question: “What would you do if a member of your family was very ill, but you had to move in order to survive?” The students and Miss Paige had a brief and lively discussion about what students thought they would do. Miss Paige then introduced *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, written by R. C. O’Brien & Z. Bernstein (1986). She told her students that in this book a family of rats who behaved like humans would face the problem of survival. She then began showing the video of *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. After watching the video, Miss Paige showed a transparency listing ten key

terms from the story that she was certain some students would not know. As she pointed to each word, she asked the class if they knew what the word meant. At least one student knew the meaning of two of the ten vocabulary terms, indicating that Miss Paige had done an adequate job of selecting key vocabulary words for which the students needed direct instruction. She discussed each term and wrote a brief definition next to the word on the transparency. Next, Miss Paige began reading the first chapter of the book with her students. While reading chapters in the book throughout the course of the unit, she made it a practice to pause every few paragraphs to check for understanding, elaborate, define words, and paraphrase parts of the story. Occasionally she reminded students of something they had discussed in another lesson. For example, when Mrs. Frisby is described as a widow, Miss Paige said, “Who remembers what a widow is? We talked about that word when we read *The Witches* by Roald Dahl. Remember the grandma who was a widow? What does that mean?” Then Miss Paige wrote the word on a piece of chart paper that she continued to use as a word wall throughout the unit, adding words the students identified as unfamiliar throughout the course of the unit.



Although these may seem somewhat vague, the teacher felt strongly that these students need to have the experience of reading an extended text, even a challenging one, because materials written at their literacy levels tend to be short, simple stories. She believes that with appropriate instruction, the ELLs will be able to participate in reading the novel. She is planning to introduce the novel by showing the video version of the story. **Seeing the video prior** to reading the text provides students with an overall understanding of the story and will provide exposure to new vocabulary associated with the text. Following the viewing of the video, she will introduce the text, which the class will read together. Miss Paige may provide activities of her choosing to reinforce the concepts and vocabulary covered in the story.

