

## Book Review

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Briseno, S., Briseno, K., & Bernabei, G., (2024). *Text structures from picture books: Lessons to ease students into text analysis, reading response and writing with craft*. Corwin Literacy.

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As a literacy methods Instructor at the college level, I am always on the lookout for new practitioner texts that will not only be helpful to the development of my preservice undergraduate students, but I am also searching for texts that will expand my knowledge and understanding as well. *Text Structures from Picture Books: Lessons to Ease Students into Text Analysis, Reading Response and Writing with Craft* (Briseno, Briseno and Bernabei, 2024) really was a mixed bag for me. Did I expand my understanding of text structures through reading this text, yes. Would I suggest this text to my undergraduate students? Of that I am not so sure. My detailed analysis and review of the text follows.

I have to be honest, when I first chose this text from an advertisement from the publisher Corwin Literacy, I failed to closely read the subtitle. This error on my part caused me to think that this text was going to include lessons on how to teach the five standard text structures found in informational text: description, cause-effect, problem-solution, compare-contrast and sequence. However, much to my surprise and initial dismay, that is not what these authors mean by text structures. Instead, Briseno, Briseno, and Bernabei (2024) refer to the myriad of sentence frames provided for student written response use, as text structures, which in a way they are, just not the typical text structures that you think of. Each of these text structures have been given a

unique name such as “The Story of My Thinking” (pp 136-139), “Learning to be Me” (pp. 233-238), and “Yearning for a Friend” (pp. 40-45) to name a few and are connected to specific picture book lessons. Once I got past my dismay at this use of the term text structures by these authors, I decided that it was time to dig in and learn what Briseno, Briseno and Bernabei (2024), had to offer in this newly published text. What follows will be an analysis of the contents and set-up of the text, as well as a detailed analysis of one of the lessons designed and provided. The *Lessons* portion of the text provides fifty picture books text structure lessons designed by the authors.

### **Layout of the Text**

The text in total is 318 pages long, broken up into three main sections, each of which will be discussed in the subsections below. These subsections include an *Introduction*, *Lessons*, and an *Appendix*.

#### **Introduction:**

Overall, this section is well-intentioned, but could have been organized differently to make for easier navigation. Visually, it is full of colorful textboxes of information, illustrations, diagrams and the like to aid in location of important information. The *Introduction* includes a short section explaining how to utilize the text and provides the reader with some options and choices in implementing the included text structure lessons. Additionally, an important component of the *Introduction* includes a subsection describing how to navigate the layout of the text structure picture book lessons located in the *Lessons* section of the text. This is done through the use of colorful diagrams and labels which explain each of the six major components of each text structure basic lesson, as well as the three additional components that are included in

the *Want to Go Deeper?* part of the lesson. One component of the *Introduction* section, which I feel comes a little late to the game, is the explanation of what the authors refer to as Text Structures. Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei (2024) provide a general definition/explanation of how they conceive text structures. In the words of the authors, “A text structure is the plan, or path, that a writer uses in order to ‘track movement of the mind.’ In other words, the structure will allow a reader to glimpse what you, the writer, know and how you know it (p. 12).” Since this understanding of text structures is so very different from the traditional understanding of text structure, it would be helpful to the reader for this explanation to be provided earlier in the text. It still will take a close read of the text and subsequent components of the *Introduction* to really come to understand the authors’ perspective on text structures. Once you realize that the text structure lessons are designed to first illustrate the overall structure, or path, that the story is taking, as well as writing response lessons, it begins to make sense that text structures in this text are very similar to sentence and paragraph frames traditionally used to help lay a foundation and model how to develop certain types of writing.

The *Introduction* section is 38 pages long. This might seem long for an introduction, however, this introduction is jammed packed full of important information that makes it almost impossible to utilize the *Lessons* section within this text without thoroughly reading and implementing the subsection components of the *Introduction* section. In particular, there are three subsections which provide mini-lessons on how to implement key components of all the lessons that will be provided in section two, *Lessons*, of the text. These three subsections: *Introducing Your Students to Kernel Essays*, *Introducing Your Students to Truisms*, and *Introducing Your Students to Reading Response*, are integral to implementing any of the 50 picture-book related text structure lessons provided.

In a short subsection in the *Introduction*, prior to the mini-lessons, the authors describe what they mean by a kernel essay. The authors use the analogy of a kernel of corn, a small piece of writing which can be “popped” into a fuller more complete writing piece. As defined in the glossary, a kernel essay is “The writing that comes as a result of following a text structure. The kernel essay is a highly organized set of sentences that a writer produces following the prompts of a text structure. It can be expanded into a longer paragraph, essay, or even something bigger like a book!” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024, p. 291). The basic kernel essay is based upon the prompts in a text structure paragraph frame. The example that the authors provide is for the text structure the authors have named “The Story of My Thinking” and contains three sentence frames: “I used to think...”; “But this happened...”; “So now I know...”. To write the kernel essay, you need to complete each sentence frame in one sentence, thereby producing a three-sentence paragraph which students then read aloud to three peers to ensure and promote social engagement and interaction.

In the mini-lesson *Introducing Your Students to Kernel Essays*, Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei (2024) lay out a six-step process for teaching students how to construct kernel essays, using the before mentioned process. What makes the mini-lesson section different from the explanation section on kernel essays is that the mini-lesson section is laid out as a think-aloud modeling lesson, providing think-aloud teacher language for each step of the process. The process is modeled for the students and then for each step, time is provided for students to create/write their own sentences before the teacher moves onto modeling the next step of the process. Steps 4, 5 & 6 are really extensions of the kernel writing process, and are important components of the overall process. In step 4, the authors once again reiterate their stance on the importance of sharing the kernel essays. The authors emphasize this step, by making it clear that

this step should not be skipped “Don’t skip this step!” (Briseno, Briseno, & Bernabei, 2024, p. 16). In the words of the authors “Writing should be social, and sharing is the main course, not the dessert, in the process, *don’t skip the sharing*” (p. 16). Step 5 of the process reminds the reader to repeat the process with the same text structure several times so that it becomes a more natural written response pattern on the part of the students. Lastly, Step 6 gives directions for how to “pop” the kernel essay into a full-fledged essay. The authors provided several helpful hints and tips for how to do this.

The second mini-lesson provided in the *Introduction* section is *Introducing Students to Truisms*. As found in the *Glossary* section of the *Appendix*, a truism is defined as “...a message or truth about life that applies to nearly everyone. Truisms do not describe and they do not command. Other words for truisms are *theme, thematic statement, message, main point, life lesson, and thesis statement*” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024, p. 293). This mini-lesson is broken down into a four-step process. To teach students about truisms, the authors suggest using an attention-grabbing photograph to display on the document camera. Briseno, Briseno and Bernabei (2024) provide a sample photo in the text for teachers to utilize. As was the case with the prior mini-lesson, this mini-lesson is also written in a think-aloud modeling lesson format. The purpose of the photo is to get students to analyze the photo and list observations (and not inferences) and then using this data move into step 3 – noticing the big ideas. The Big Ideas must be backed up with the evidence provided in what was observed in the photo. A three-column chart is then created to record thinking: *What I See, Big Ideas, and Truisms*. From the Big Ideas column, students each choose one and write a truism. The authors highly suggest that you do not model this part of the lesson, but rather allow students to come up with their own truisms; the authors suggest students share in small groups before sharing with the whole class. Although I

respect the authors' position on modeling in this section, I suspect that students will have greater success if the teacher models how to come up with a truism connected to the photograph. I would suggest modeling the whole process once with a photograph and then repeating the process using another photograph, this time utilizing the gradual release of responsibility model.

The last mini-lesson that the authors share is entitled *Introducing your Students to Reading Response*. A major component of the individual text-structure lessons is the incorporation of written reading responses after the text has been read and discussed. In this mini-lesson, which in reality is a series of mini-lessons, Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei (2024), walk the reader through how to use each of the four Reading Response Text Structures templates that are included within this section of the text. The first template discussed is the *Basic Reading Response Text Structures* template which has five different sentence/paragraph frames to assist students in writing the written response kernel essays. The authors have named these text structures "The Story of My Thinking," "Character Feelings," "Making a Connection," "Summary," and "The Effect of an Author's Choice." The authors suggest that after each of these basic reading response text structures have been modeled for and used by students, then teachers should allow students choice in which of the five text structures they want to respond to while writing their kernel essay response to a reading.

The next two text structure reading response templates provided are slightly more complicated, but once modeled by the teacher and practiced by the students, they will offer a myriad of choices to the students for their responses. What makes these two templates different from the basic text structure reading response template is that both template #2: *Questions and Text Structures for Reading Responses: Questions and Answers about Understanding the Reading*, and template #3: *Questions and Text Structures for Reading Responses: Questions*

*about Author's Choices* come with an assortment of question stems, which can be modified to connect with a specific text. Template #2 has 23 question stems and template #3 has 19 question stems. The question stems to respond to are initially chosen by the teacher, but with practice and modeling can be left up to the students to choose. The use of these templates is slightly different from using the basic reading response text structure template. When using these more advanced templates the teacher models how to first answer the question stem and then chooses one of the text structures provided to write a kernel essay. The text structure sentence and paragraph frames are different from those available on the basic response form. Reading Response template #2, *Questions and Text Structures for Reading Responses: Questions and Answers about Understanding the Reading* includes the following Reader Response Text Structure frames. Each text structure reader response frame has a unique name and will require a quick read of the glossary to understand each of these text structure reader responses. For example, two of the more interestingly named text structures that are utilized on template #2 are: RACE (Restate, Answer, Cite, Respond) and Ba-Da-Bing the Evidence (“Ba-Da-Bing- A sentence that traditionally tells you where your feet were (ba) what you saw (da) and what you thought (bing)” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024 p. 289). On template #3: *Questions and Text Structures for Reading Responses: Questions about Author's Choices*, there are four reader response text structure frames: RACE (Restate, Answer, Cite, Respond); Noticing the Author's Moves; The Effect on a Reader; and The Effect of an Author's Choice. Space does not allow me to explain how each of these text structure functions, and what sentence frames compose each reader response text structure. Each follows the same format of those found on the Basic Reader Response template. Each component of the sentence frame is responded to in a complete sentence. When completed, these then become the reading response kernel essays.



The fourth and final reading response template provided is entitled “*Common Extended Constructed Response Prompts*.” This template provides five prompts, each with a specific sentence frame text structure associated with it. These are provided for additional writing experiences with a text after one of the other templates has been utilized. These prompts and sentence frames are more advanced and will require considerable teacher modeling and student practice. The text structures provided on this template are entitled “Two Voices, One Message;” “Something Changed;” “Ways We Are Alike;” “A Symbiotic Relationship;” and “This Is Better Than That.” I was hopeful that the companion website <https://resources.corwin.com/textstructurespicturebooks> would have links to examples of these templates to share in this review. However, as of this writing, January 2024, the website is not yet functional. I am hopeful that once the website is up and functional it will contain links to these Reader Response Template forms.

A component of the Introduction section that I have not yet mentioned is the inclusion of eleven QR codes which link to video clips provided by the authors which include clips of the authors engaged in providing lessons, videos of the authors providing background knowledge, link to the website, and also links to Prezi presentations used in instruction. The topics covered in these links include text structures, kernel essays, truisms and how to use text structures as written reading responses. The QR codes bring you to the specific video on YouTube. Once there, you can easily find other video clips that accompany the text. I watched the video clips on how to use text structures, I found them informative on how to use the text structures but not so helpful on explaining what they are and how they are different from what is commonly thought of as text structures. Overall, I feel they would be helpful to teachers new to this concept of text structure use in writing.

## *Lessons*

The *Lessons* section is really the crux of the text. Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei (2024), have provided 50 text structure lessons using 50 different picture books. The picture books include classics, as well as relatively recent publications. The authors have included a good mix of multicultural literature. Although the text provides a link to a list of the picture books used in creating these lessons in the text, when I tried the link I found it to be nonfunctional—a disappointment for a newly published text. Additionally, and surprisingly, there is no reference section listing the APA citations for each of the picture books used in the lessons. I find this disappointing as well.

The goal of each Text Structure lesson plan is to utilize specific picture books as a means of introducing a specific type of text structure, but additionally the lessons are designed to help build student understanding and comfort in writing using each of the text structures provided. Early in the text, the authors provide a reference chart (pp. ix-xiv) listing in chart format the lesson number, the name of the picture book, name of text structure, big ideas explored and writer's craft challenges. I feel that the chart comes too early in the text to be of much use to the reader who does not understand the authors' concept of text structures. A better placement for this chart would be after the *Introduction* and at the beginning of the *Lessons* section. At this point in the text, the reader has a much firmer understanding of the authors' concepts and the reference chart would really be more of a support than something glossed over because it is not understood in its current placement.

Each of the 50 lessons follows the same format which I will explain in some detail in the text that follows. Each lesson occupies four to five colorful and easy to navigate pages.

Prior to the step-by-step lesson being laid out, the authors provide the full title of the text

and author information. No publication information is provided, however. The authors summarize the picture book, provide an explanation as to why they like the book, and also provide a list of big ideas that the text addresses. These three types of information about each picture book indicates the depth of close reading done on the part of the authors as they were preparing this manuscript.

The lesson plan is divided into six step-by-step components each identified with a number for ease in navigating the page. I will describe each section using Lesson #1 based upon *The Adventures of Beekle: The Imaginary Friend* (Santat, 2014). The lesson begins at **Step 1 – Quick Write**- with the students doing a quick write of a provided prompt. For this lesson, the prompt is “*Think about a time you felt really alone and wished for a friend*” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024, p. 40). **Step 2 - Read** involves doing an interactive read aloud of the picture book. Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei (2024) provide helpful hints to utilize during the read aloud: discuss important points, what writer’s craft points did you notice, what are the parts of the story. These hints are consistent across the 50 picture book lessons thereby establishing a good teacher routine to follow during a read-aloud. **Step 3 –Craft Moves to Notice**. This section is specific to each of the 50 picture book lessons and provides two to three craft moves that can be found in the text. Since many of these craft moves have unique names, it is useful to refer to the glossary for definitions and descriptions of the craft moves listed. For this lesson using *The Adventures of Beekle: The Imaginary Friend* (Santat, 2014), the authors point out the craft moves of an echo ending defined in the glossary as “when an author starts and ends a story with the same wording, phrasing or ideas – like an echo!” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024, p. 290). The second craft move listed is pitchforked

description; the authors provide an example of from the text: “The real world was a strange place. **No kids were** eating cake. **No one stopped** to hear the music. And **everyone needed** naptime” (Santat, 2014, np). To understand pitchforked descriptions, one needs to understand what the authors refer to as pitchforks, “A sentence (or series of sentences) that takes one thing and branches it off into three or more. Similar to the rule of three, this pattern is usually in sentence form. It takes something from being vague to being crystal clear” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024, p. 292). The inclusion of this component to the picture book lesson really extends the lesson into text analysis, a useful skill as students continue through the educational system. **Step 4 – Share The Structure**, for each picture book lesson there is a specially designed text structure format. In this case, the text structure is entitled, “Yearning for a Friend” and contains five sentence frames: “Why I felt alone”; What I decided to do about it; How that didn’t help; How I finally found a friend; and What we did together” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024, p. 41). The authors suggest that the picture book be read a second time, this time looking out for the parts of the text that respond to each sentence frame of the text structure. **Step 5- Invitation to Write:** This section is consistent in each of the 50 lessons provided. In general, the authors provide the same suggestions across the whole text: have students use the text structure to write a kernel essay based on the picture book, have the students use the text structure to write their own kernel essay, or have students choose between the following: a page of thoughts connected to the quick write, examples of author craft moves, responding to a text structure of their choice. **Step 6 – Share-** have students read aloud their writing to at least three peers. The authors state “the sharing is just as important as the writing” (Briseno, Briseno & Bernabei, 2024, p. 41).

For those teachers who want to go deeper with their lessons, the authors have provided three options for extensions to the lessons. This section is aptly named **“Want to Go Deeper? Try These Options.”** *Option #1 – Craft Challenge* connects to the craft move that is introduced in the main lesson and asks the students to try to incorporate the craft move into their writing. *Option #2 – Analyze*, this section is consistent across the 50 lessons and deals with students determining big ideas from the picture book and then writing truisms. This is an important component for students in the upper grades. *Option #3 – Reading Response*, this section is unique for each text selection. In this section the authors have provided question prompts for the students to respond to after the initial text structure kernel essay has been written by students. Options 1, 2 & 3 are an excellent resource for lessons with older students and with those who have mastered many of the text structures provided in the text. For those teachers just beginning this process, sticking with the basic six step lesson is probably the best bet for effective instruction.

The remaining one to two pages of each lesson plan includes student examples of the major components of the lesson and its extensions. Included in these pages are samples of quick writes, kernel essays, truisms, big ideas and craft challenges. This is an important component of the lesson because it gives the teacher, new to this type of lesson, an idea of what responses should look like.

### ***Appendix***

The Appendix is composed of several resources that might benefit the teacher who wants additional information and resources. The resources provided include: a glossary, a year-at-a-glance lesson plans, five weeks at a glance for standardized prep, copies of each of the four Reading Response Text Structure templates, and a list of all of the text structures featured in the

book. Of the resources provided, probably the most important to the reader of the text is the glossary. This is because many of the terms used in the running text of the manuscript will be unfamiliar to the reader unacquainted with the work of Gretchen Bernabei. The glossary is a must-read resource to understand the concepts introduced not only in the introduction, but also addressed in the individual 50 lesson plans provided.

In conclusion, this text, *Text Structures from Picture Books: Lessons to Ease Students into Text Analysis, Reading Response and Writing with Craft* (Briseno, Briseno and Bernabei, 2024) would be a useful text for new teachers and seasoned teachers as well to assist their students in writing a variety of structured reading responses. The lessons are well-designed and do more than teach writing with text structure; they also get students to think more deeply about the text, analyzing it for big ideas and truisms. Additionally, the students, through being exposed to these lessons, will increase their understanding and personal use of writing craft ideas. My initial misreading of the title of the text was a win for me as it exposed me to a text that had much more to offer than I initially thought. Once the reader gets past the meaning of text structure utilized in this text, as well as some of the shortcomings of the text such as its layout and lack of availability of online resources, there is much to recommend here, even to my undergraduate preservice elementary school teacher candidates.

#### References

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