

A Paragraph Model

by Shelly Lyon

Building a model always seems to make learning a new and complicated lesson less difficult. This is even true for the nebulous idea of the paragraph. I discovered this with my class of fourth grader this month while I was having them write a paragraph on Peace. They were getting all muddled up with the topic sentence, the details and the conclusion. So I came up with this model.

First I used a paragraph outline as a worksheet for ideas. It looks like this:

Paragraph Outline

Specific Topic _____

Topic Sentence _____

Details (key word) (Description)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Conclusion (a rewrite of the topic sentence) _____

Once the children filled this outline out with ideas and had a plan for their paragraph, then we made our 3D model. Here's how we did it. The Specific topic, Peace was represented by a white dove. The children traced Leslie's dove onto file folders and cut them out. Glue the wings at the top of the back to simulate flight. Using heavy material here is important so the doves are stiff enough to hold the rest of the mobile. We wrote "Peace" on one side, and "Specific Topic" on the other side of the dove below the wings.

Second we made a two sided paper branch to represent an olive branch. The branch had to have three twigs branching off of it. On this olive branch we wrote the topic sentence on one side, and the words "Topic Sentence" on the back. We glued the two sides of the branch together so that it would be stiff enough to hang as a middle part of the mobile.

Third we made three green olive leaves. These hang from the three twigs branching from the olive branch. On one side of each is written "Detail", while on the other sides the specific details are written from the outline form. I asked my class to just write the Key Words, not the descriptive words.

Finally the conclusion is written on a banner that is hanging beneath the leaves of the olive branch. The actual concluding sentence is written on one side, and the word "Conclusion" is written on the back.

When all pieces are finished, it is time to hang them in mobile form. I found that if we started from the bottom, it was easier to get the pieces to balance straight. Each child needs a hole punch and 9 paper clips. Punch three holes in the top of the banner. Punch one hole in the top and bottom of each leaf. Punch one hole in each of the three twigs at the bottom of the branch and two close together on the top of the branch. Then you'll need two holes on the belly of the dove and one above the wings.

To hang a mobile we used paper clips. Slip the outside end of the tip of the clip through the hole and turn it twice into the hole of the first object to hang. Then connect that same clip to the hole of the object that is to hang from it. Slip the same tip into the hole, but turn it only once. That leaves the clip connecting the two objects together.

Now that the mobiles are done, they hang proudly over the children's desks. I notice them referring to them often as they are assigned paragraphs to write for assignments. Making models really helps make learning real!

