

Case Study: Using the PLANS Strategy with Mateo

Classroom Example: Ms. Taylor's 6th Grade Nonfiction Writing Unit

Classroom Context

Ms. Taylor teaches a 7th grade class with varying writing abilities. During a nonfiction writing unit on *animal adaptations*, she introduces the PLANS strategy to help all students improve their planning and organization skills.

One student, Mateo, is a bright and curious learner who often struggles to translate his verbal ideas into written form. He frequently produces incomplete drafts and becomes frustrated during writing tasks. Ms. Taylor sees the PLANS strategy as a way to provide Mateo with the structure he needs to build confidence and fluency.

Step-by-Step Implementation with Mateo

P – Preview the Topic, Audience, and Goals

Ms. Taylor begins by leading the class in a discussion about the purpose of the assignment: to write an cross-curricular/interdisciplinary, informational essay about an animal adaptation from a recent unit the students completed in their Science class. She models how to think about the *audience* (classmates and teacher) and *goal* (to teach others about an interesting adaptation). She sits with Mateo during independent work time and says,

"Let's think together about what you already know about animal adaptations. Have you read anything or seen a video recently that stood out?"

Mateo excitedly recalls a documentary they recently watched in Science class about how camels survive in the desert. Ms. Taylor encourages him to jot down keywords like "camel," "desert," "humps," and "temperature." They talk about what he wants readers to understand after reading his piece. He says he wants his classmates to know that camels are amazing survivors. She praises his clarity and writes his audience and purpose at the top of his PLANS Frame Graphic Organizer (G.O.).

L – List Main Ideas and Details

Next, Ms. Taylor shows students how to list their main ideas and details using the PLANS Frame G.O.

She projects a sample PLANS Frame G.O. and begins filling it in with the camel adaptations as a model.

She then helps Mateo brainstorm his own PLANS Frame G.O..

- Main Idea 1: Camels store fat in their humps.
- Detail 1: The fat provides energy when food is scarce.
- Detail 2: It helps regulate body temperature.
- Main Idea 2: Camels have thick eyelashes and closeable nostrils.
- Detail 1: Protects from sand during storms.
- Detail 2: Keeps out dust and wind.

- Main Idea 3: Camels can drink a lot of water quickly.
- Detail 1: They can drink up to 40 gallons at once.
- Detail 2: This helps them survive in dry areas.

A – Assign Numbers to Indicate Best Order

Once his ideas are listed, Ms. Taylor guides Mateo in sequencing them in a way that makes sense to a reader.

They read through his graphic organizer and she asks,

“If I were learning about camels for the first time, what would I need to understand first?”

Mateo decides to start with the humps, then move to protection from the sand, and finish with the camel's drinking ability. They assign numbers next to each bubble on the graphic organizer. Ms. Taylor praises his reasoning, reinforcing the importance of logical flow for the reader's understanding.

N – Note Ideas in Complete Sentences

Using his ordered PLANS Frame G.O., Mateo begins drafting his essay on the second page. Ms. Taylor provides him with sentence starters and modeling for paragraph structure.

“Let's start with a sentence that hooks your reader and connects to what they already know. How about something like: ‘Deserts are hot and dry, but some animals have amazing ways to survive.’”

Mateo writes a strong opening sentence. He then follows the numbered main ideas and details from the first page of his graphic organizer to expand each main idea into a paragraph. Ms. Taylor reminds him to include at least two sentences per detail.

When he slows down or gets stuck, she encourages him to talk it out:

“Say what you want to write out loud first.”

This verbal rehearsal helps Mateo generate full, clear sentences.

S – Search for Errors and Correct

With a full draft complete, Ms. Taylor introduces the “Search” step as a detective game. She encourages Mateo to both read the paper silently to look for grammar and spelling errors, as well as out loud to look for sentences that do not make sense or run-on sentences. She encourages Mateo to partner with a peer editor.

He reads his work aloud to find awkward phrasing and incomplete sentences. Ms. Taylor then meets with him in a conference and they look for any additional spelling and punctuation errors together. She uses guiding questions:

“Does this sentence sound right when you say it aloud?”

“Can you find a sentence that might be too long or has more than one idea?”

Mateo corrects several run-on sentences and adjusts a few verb tense mismatches. He reflects that reading aloud helped him “catch things I didn’t notice before.”

Outcome:

By the end of the unit, Mateo has produced a clearly organized, informative, and engaging essay about camel adaptations. When he shares his writing, he beams with pride and tells the class,

“The PLANS steps helped me know what to say next and made it easier to finish.”

Ms. Taylor notes a significant improvement in Mateo’s ability to structure and elaborate his writing. She plans to continue using PLANS throughout the year, especially for students who benefit from structured scaffolds during the writing process.