

Mila University Center

2024/2025

Department of Letters and Foreign Languages

Module: Reading (L 1/S2)

Dr. Rania Khelifa Chelihi

Strategies for Reading Comprehension: Narrative Text

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill for becoming an active reader who engages with various types of text. Understanding a text allows readers to gain information, engage in discussions, and, ultimately, experience the joy of reading for pleasure. In general, texts can be categorized into two broad groups, each presenting unique comprehension challenges. The following sections explore these challenges and the strategies that can help overcome them.

1. What is a Narrative Text?

Broadly defined, narrative text **tells a story**. It is found in the form of *short stories, folktales, fairy tales, fantasy, fiction, myths, fables, legends, fantasies, adventures, science fiction, plays and poems ... etc.* The narrative structure most often features a beginning, middle, and an ending. It most often also features clear story elements, or *story grammar*.

- The most basic *story grammar* includes:
 - **Setting:** When and where the story takes place (which can change over the course of the story).
 - **Characters:** The people or animals in the story, including the protagonist (main character), whose motivations and actions drive the story.
 - **Plot:** The story line, which typically includes one or more problems or conflicts that the protagonist must address and ultimately resolve.
 - **Theme:** The overriding lesson or main idea that the author wants readers to glean from the story.
- A story grammar may also include a **central problem, or conflict**, and a **resolution to the conflict**

Reading narrative texts involves following characters through a story, tracking dialogue, visualizing people and places, imagining emotions and reactions, and reading between the lines, or using inference, to go beyond what is written on the page. This is cognitively demanding and can be made more challenging by the following elements.

Different storytelling techniques: Narratives can include a range of different storytelling techniques, combining dialogue, diary entries, emails, letters and text messages that challenge learners to integrate different contexts within the mental model constructed for the story.

Made-up vocabulary: Narratives set in imaginary worlds may well include made-up vocabulary, such as places or creatures that don't exist, or verbs that are specific to a book or an author. **Road Dahl** is an example of an author who created many new words, such as the verb '**argy**' (to argue) or the noun '**snozzberry**' (an edible berry). While these add excitement and interest, they may also throw readers off course by slowing the decoding process.

Multiple narrators: A single narrative text may use multiple narrators and combine **first person, second person and third person**, with each having specific perspectives and views on the story being told. This adds complexity to comprehension and may slow down some readers as they try to compare and contrast viewpoints.

Unusual narrative structures: The most common narrative structure is to have an opening that establishes the setting and characters, a middle where events happen, and an end that sees a resolution. However, many books deviate from this and may use an **unpredictable narrative structure** that doesn't tell the story in chronological order, using techniques such as **flashbacks** and **backtracking**. This can prove challenging and require extra cognitive processing for learners to understand the order of events and make connections across them.

2. Reading comprehension strategies for narrative texts

It's prudent to prepare for these challenges: there are many strategies educators can use to help a learner tackle challenging narrative texts and come out the other side a more skilled and satisfied reader.

➤ Preview the text

This is about pre-empting any difficulties that you may anticipate before reading. Identify the main characters, create a plot outline, and look at the main themes and storytelling techniques.

For each element you preview, activate prior knowledge by linking to previous similar texts, experiences and existing knowledge. This will ease the cognitive load of processing a complex storyline, unusual vocabulary, or a meandering structure.

➤ Illustrate and organise

Graphic organisers are visual representations of information and are a great organisation tool to aid reading comprehension. They can be used **before reading** or **during reading** to organise new information as it comes in, and **after reading** to link with existing information.

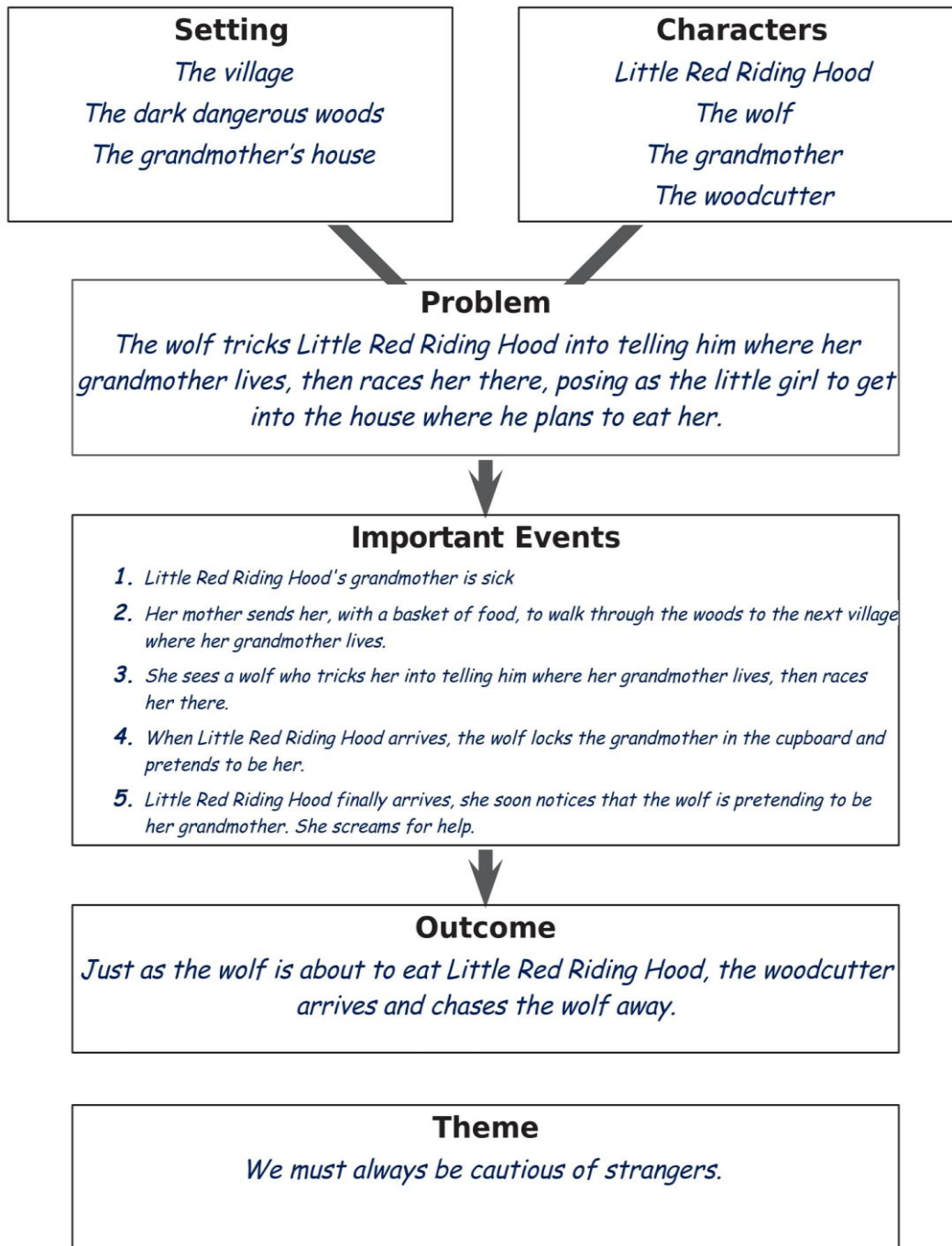
Many types of **graphic organisers can be used to tackle different challenging elements of a narrative text**. For example, a story map helps create a **visual overview** of the different elements of a narrative and can include **segments** for **setting, characters, problem, solution** and so on.

An example of **graphic organizers**: **Story Maps**

- A story map is a graphic organizer that helps students learn the elements of a narrative. Learning to identify a story's characters, plot, setting, problem, and solution.
- There are many different types of story maps. The most **basic ones** focus on the **beginning, middle, and end** of the story while **more sophisticated organizers** focus more on story elements like **plot, character development, or theme**.

- Story maps provide students and learners with a framework for identifying the elements of a story, and organize information and ideas efficiently.
- They help learners to develop a deeper understanding of how stories work that can be applied to other texts and content areas.

Story Map Title: *Little Red Riding Hood*



➤ Answer questions

The question-answer relationship (QAR) strategy aims to boost comprehension by learning how to **locate information**, how to **understand text structures** and how **information is organised**, as well as to identify when they must read between the lines to understand something (inference).

QAR involves the teacher creating questions for small sections of text at a time, with the questions falling within four categories:

- **Right There** – The answer is in the text and learners reread, scan and look for keywords to find it. For example, "**What has just happened to the main character?**"
- **Think and Search** – The answer is across different sections of the text and the learner has to recall previously read information through rereading and accessing working memory. For example, "**Has this happened to them before?**"
- **The Author and You** – The answer comes from a combination of what is in the text and the learner's prior knowledge. The learner rereads, thinks about what they've read, and applies their own experience to that information. For example, "**How do you think the character felt when that happened?**"
- **On Your Own** – The answer is based on the learner's own experience and knowledge. The learner thinks about what they've read and makes connections with their own experiences. For example, "**How would you feel if that happened to you?**"

➤ **Monitoring understanding**

Learners should get into the habit of reading and pausing, using monitoring techniques during the pause to test their understanding of the narrative. This could incorporate **the graphic organisers** or **visual tools** discussed above; it may also include **summarising activities** to see if they've understood what they've just read; or **self-questioning**, where learners create a list of questions to answer after reading each section. For example, after each section they could ask themselves: **Who, what, when, where and why?**