

When To Start a New Paragraph in a Story



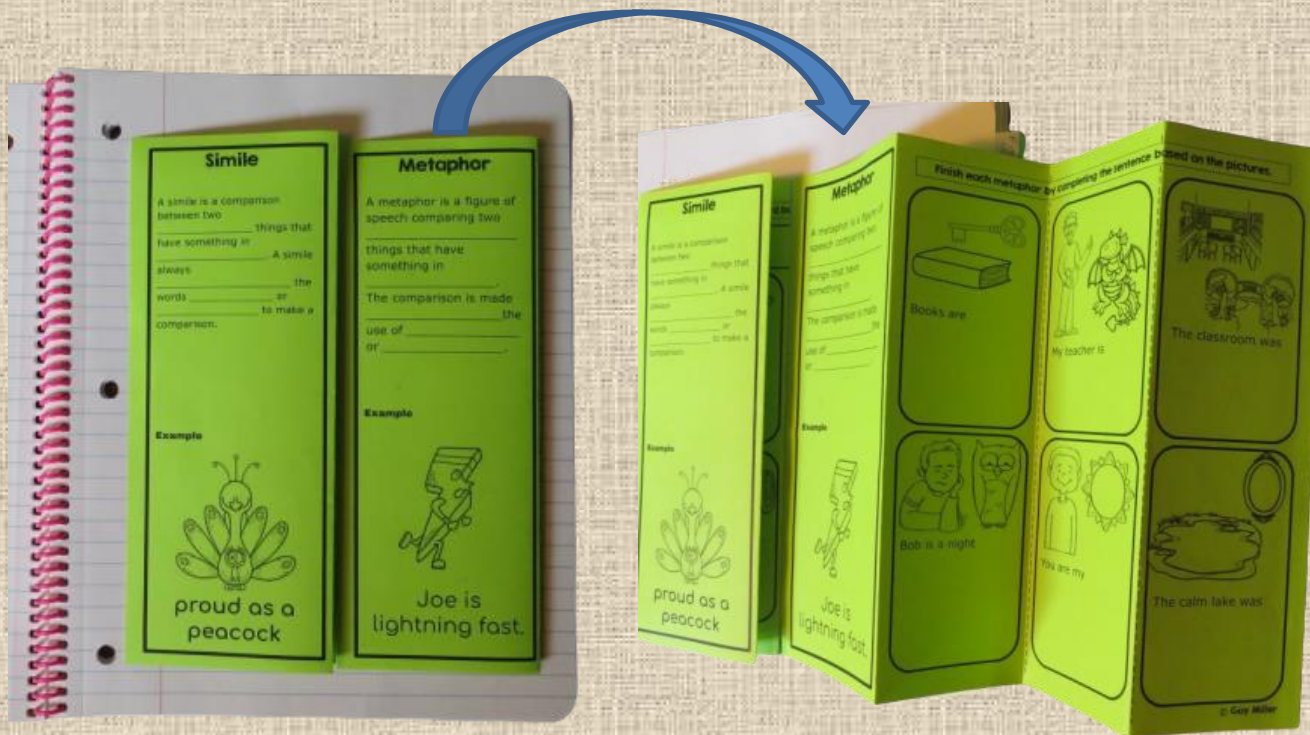
Fold the Organizer.

This organizer requires no cutting or coloring. I recommend telling students that they can color the blackline drawings at home if they wish to, but it is not necessary.

The organizer folds like a fan. Make sure the first fold is under, so the definitions are on top and will be visible when flipping through the interactive notebook.

Gluing the Organizer:

Flip the organizer over with the text box containing the definition face down. Have students place a single line of white school glue down the back right-hand side of the organizer. Glue the organizers two to a page (four to an open notebook).



[Get the digital version here.](#)

When To Start a New Paragraph in a Story

Rule 1
If the Topic Changes

Rule 2
When the Setting Changes

Rule 3
When a New Character Speaks

Rule 4
To Break up Long Narratives

Rule 5
For Effect



Rule 1 – TOPIC CHANGE – Just as in writing nonfiction, begin a new paragraph when a new _____ takes place. If the author describes the _____ and moves on to describing the _____ thoughts or _____ to the setting, create a _____ paragraph.

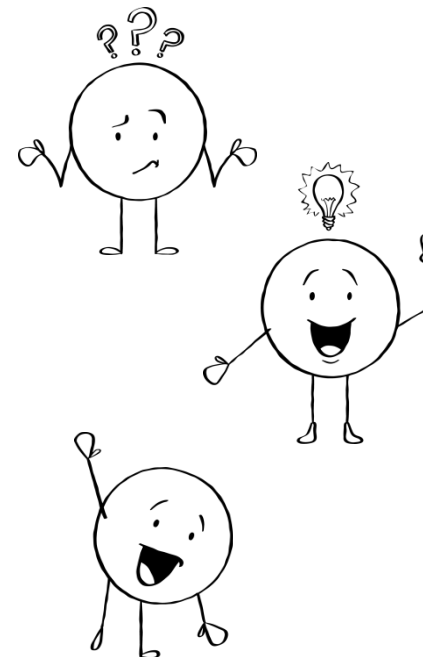
Rule 2 – SETTING CHANGE-SKIPPING TO A NEW TIME OR A NEW PLACE – Remember that setting includes both _____ and _____. If the story shifts from one place to _____ or one time to _____, begin a _____ paragraph. Scenes generally take place in one location. When the location changes, this means a new _____ is about to take place.

Rule 3 – IN DIALOGUE WHEN A NEW CHARACTER SPEAKS – Each time a _____ character speaks, create a new _____. Note that this is also true with thoughts. If the narrator is describing the _____ of one character and a different character speaks, start a _____ paragraph.

Rule 4 – TO BREAK UP LONG NARRATIVES – If a character gives a long speech, it is easier for the reader if the dialogue is _____ up.

Break up long bits of narration _____ with _____. For example, if a flashback is taking place, have the character come back to the _____, describe what is taking place, and then go back to the _____.

Rule 5 – FOR EFFECT – Use a paragraph break to _____ an important point, for a laugh, to drive a message, or gain some advantage.



Practice

Write the rule number at the beginning of each paragraph change.

Excerpt from The Tale of Despereaux

And then, listener, as he stood before the king, a wonderful, amazing thought occurred to the mouse. What if the suit of armor had been empty for a reason? What if it had been empty because it was waiting?

____ For him.

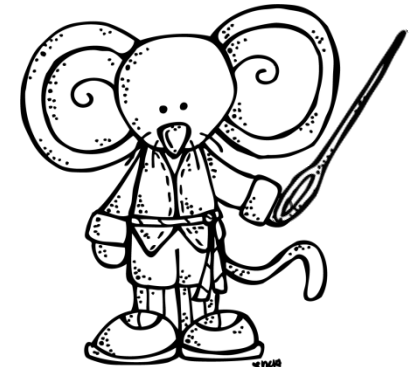
____ “You know me,” that was what the knight in his dream had said.

____ “Yes,” said Despereaux out loud in wonder. “I do know you.”

____ “I can’t hear you,” sang the king.

____ “I’ll have to do it myself,” said the mouse. “I will be the knight in shining armor. There is no other way. It has to be me.”

____ Despereaux turned. He left the weeping king. He went to find the threadmaster.



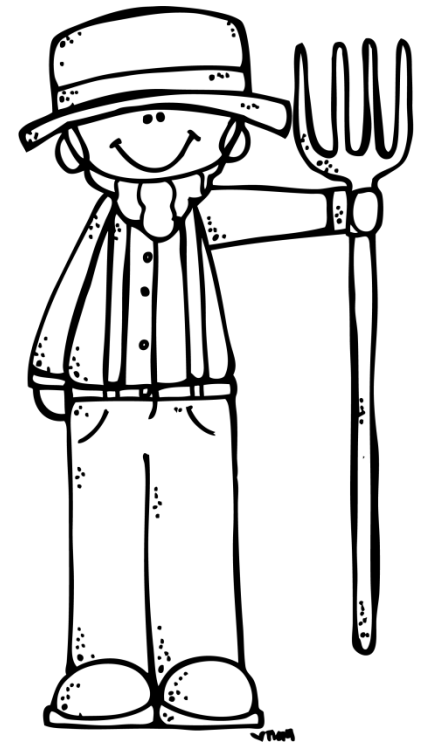
Stone Fox

Like the time Grandfather dressed up as the scarecrow out in the garden. It took little Willy an hour to catch on. Boy, did they laugh. Grandfather laughed so hard he cried. And when he cried his beard filled up with tears.

Grandfather always got up real early in the morning. So early that it was still dark outside. He would make a fire. Then he would make breakfast and call little Willy. "Hurry up or you'll be eating with the chickens," he would say. Then he would throw his head back and laugh.

Once little Willy went back to sleep. When he woke up, he found his plate out in the chicken coop. It was picked clean. He never slept late again after that.

Explain why the paragraphs change.

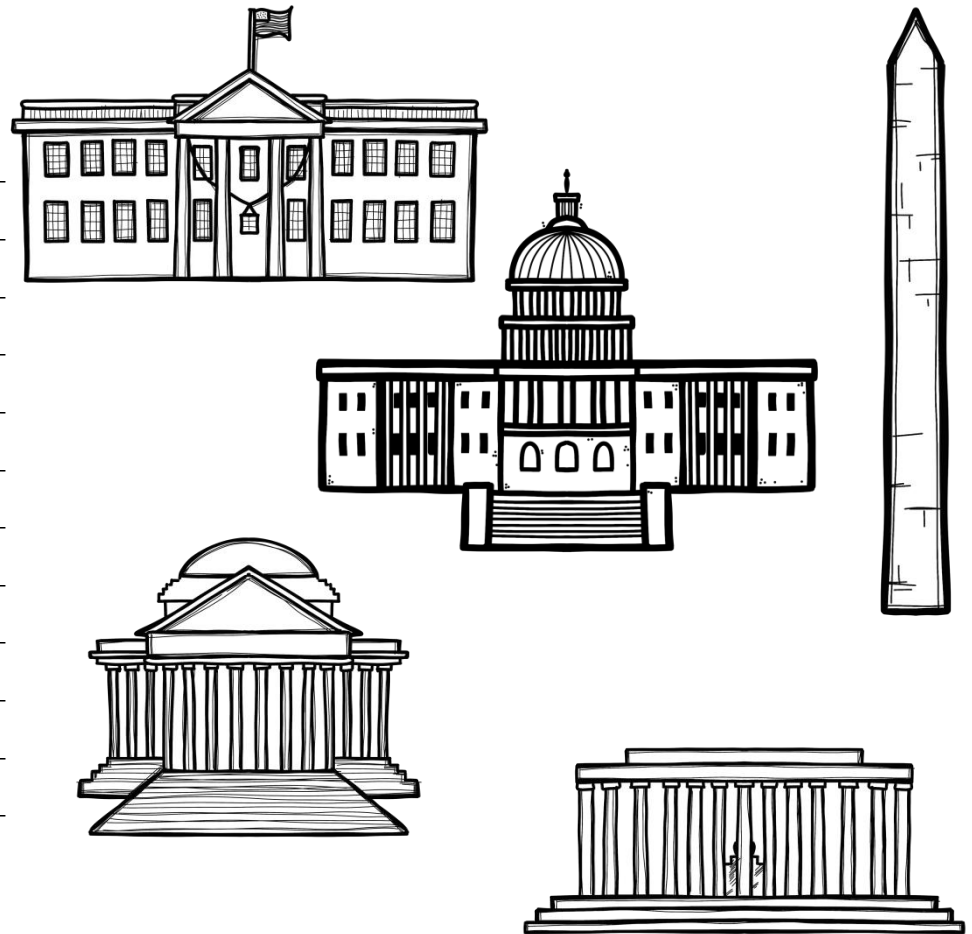


Bridge to Terabithia

Even in the rain he could make out the landmarks, looking surprisingly the way the books had pictured them—the Lee Mansion high on the hill, the bridge, and twice around the circle, so he could get a good look at Abraham Lincoln looking out across the city, the White House and the Monument and at the other end the Capitol. Leslie had seen all these places a million times. She had even gone to school with a girl whose father was a congressman. He thought he might tell Miss Edmunds later that Leslie was a personal friend of a real congressman. Miss Edmunds had always liked Leslie.

Entering the gallery was like stepping inside the pine grove—the huge vaulted marble, the cool splash of the fountain, and the green growing all around. Two little children had pulled away from their mothers and were running about, screaming to each other. It was all Jess could do-not to grab them and tell them how to behave in so obviously a sacred place.

Explain why the paragraphs change.



The Paragraph Hall of Shame

“Hey,” Jake said “I found a weird thing in the backyard,” he shouted. His sister didn’t look up from her phone. “What kind of thing?” she mumbled. Jake waved his arms. “Like...glowing green slime in a jar with tentacles!” “That sounds fake.” “It’s not fake!” “Prove it.” “I already touched it.” “You WHAT?” Mom walked in. “What’s all the yelling about?” she asked while stirring a bowl of mac and cheese. “Jake touched alien goo,” said his sister. “Ugh,” said Mom.

What’s wrong?

#1

I woke up and I was late and then I ran to the bus stop but I had no shoes and then I tripped over my neighbor’s garden gnome and my backpack flew into the road and a squirrel tried to eat my granola bar and I screamed and the bus driver saw the whole thing and laughed and now I think I’m never going back to school again.

What’s wrong?

#2

I was standing on the stage ready to do my solo then suddenly it was last Tuesday and I was in music class then I was in kindergarten remembering the first time I held a recorder then I blinked and I was back on stage but I forgot the lyrics.

What’s wrong?

#3

Max didn’t want to tell his mom he broke the window because she’d be mad and then he’d get grounded and miss the soccer game but also maybe she’d be impressed that he kicked the ball that hard but then again she probably wouldn’t think it was cool especially since it hit her tulips but maybe she wouldn’t notice but he also kind of wanted to confess and be honest because honesty is good unless it gets you grounded.

What’s wrong?

#4

The Paragraph Hall of Shame

"I just think it's weird," Zoe said. "I mean, who puts ketchup on spaghetti? It's unnatural. Like, there's tomato sauce right there, just use it. And it's not just the spaghetti, either. Remember when Kyle put mustard on pancakes? That guy needs help. I swear, if he shows up with ranch on his cereal, I'm calling the food police."

What's wrong?

#5

First I was in the school cafeteria, and everyone was yelling about the pizza being square. Then I blinked, and suddenly I was in gym class running laps. After that, I was at home eating cereal and wondering if maybe I had dreamed the whole day. Then I was back in the cafeteria, and the square pizza was still there, staring into my soul.

What's wrong?

#6

I couldn't believe it. My science project exploded. I was proud. I was horrified. I was thrilled. I was covered in glitter. Everyone clapped. Then they screamed. Then the fire alarm went off. And then Principal Gomez said I might win a ribbon. I think I'm traumatized. But also famous?

What's wrong?

#7

"It's haunted," Mia whispered. "No it's not," said Eli. "I saw it," whispered Jake. "A floating lunch tray!" "That was me," said Olivia. "I was hungry." "You hovered?" "No, I used the drone from robotics class." "Wait, the ghost is a drone?" "Sort of."

What's wrong?

#8

Answer Key

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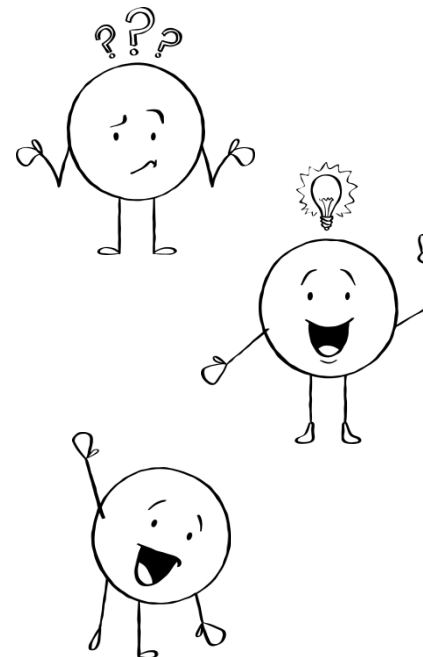
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Rule 4 – TO BREAK UP LONG NARRATIVES – If a character gives a long speech, it is easier for the reader if the dialogue is broken up.

Break up long bits of narration with action. For example, if a flashback is taking place, have the character come back to the present, describe what is taking place, and then go back to the flashback.

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Practice

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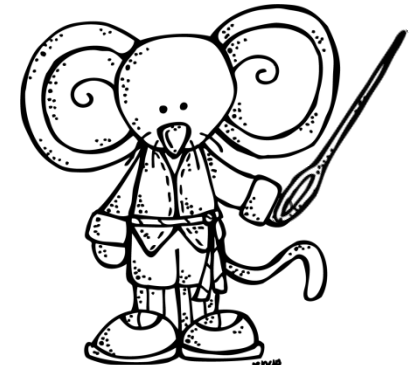
3 "You know me," that was what the knight in his dream had said.

3 "Yes," said Despereaux out loud in wonder. "I do know you."

3 "I can't hear you," sang the king.

3 "I'll have to do it myself," said the mouse. "I will be the knight in shining armor. There is no other way. It has to be me."

2 Despereaux turned. He left the weeping king. He went to find the threadmaster.



Answer Key

The City of Ember

Paragraph 1 - Paragraph 1 describes Lina, one of the main characters.

Paragraph 2 - Rule #1 - Paragraph 2 describes Doon, another main character.

Paragraph 3 - Rule #1 - Paragraph 3 compares the wishes of Lina and Doon.

The Giver

Paragraph 1 - This paragraph begins the story. It describes an event that frightened Jonas

Paragraph 2 - Rule #2 - A new paragraph is made to explain what is normal. A shift takes place from the past to present

Paragraph 3 - Rule #2 - A new paragraph is created to go back to describing the event. Another time shift takes place going back to the past.

Hatchet

Paragraph 1 - The narrator tells what Brian is thinking about. This leads to a single word paragraph. Divorce.

Paragraph 2 - Rules #2- This paragraph explains the divorce. Note: Paragraph 2 is a flashback to events that took place in the past.

Paragraph 3 - Rule #2 - The story goes back to the present.

Paragraph 4 - Rule #2 - This paragraph introduces the story is going to shift back to events that took place sooner.

Paragraph 5 - Rule #5 - This one word paragraph was created for effect.

Stone Fox

Paragraph 1 - Paragraph 1 tells about a time when Willy and Grandfather had fun.

Paragraph 2 - Rule #1 - This new paragraph clearly changes to another example.

Paragraph 3 - Rule #5 - The punch line of the joke is in a paragraph by itself for emphasis.

Wonder

Rule #3 - This is a conversation. Paragraphs change between speakers.

Bridge to Terabithia

Paragraph 1 - Jessie rides around D.C. with Miss Edmunds.

Paragraph 2 - Rules #2 - Jessie gets out of the car and goes into the museum.

Holes

This short chapter from *Holes* is an example of Rule #4. The longer narrative is broken down into short paragraphs.

Paragraph 4 - Rule #5 - Making this sentence fragment a paragraph is used for emphasis

Paragraph 5 - Rule #1 - A shift in topic from Camp Green Lake in general to why Stanley is going to Camp Green Lake.

Paragraph 6 - Rule #1 - The topic shifts again to explain why Stanley selected Camp Green Lake.

The Paragraph Hall of Shame Answer Key

Instructions for Students:

These paragraphs are a hot mess! Fix them by adding proper paragraph breaks, correcting dialogue formatting, and making the narration easier to follow. Use the 5 paragraphing rules as your guide.

🗨️ Hall of Shame #1: Dialogue Disaster

“Hey,” Jake said “I found a weird thing in the backyard,” he shouted. His sister didn’t look up from her phone. “What kind of thing?” she mumbled. Jake waved his arms. “Like...glowing green slime in a jar with tentacles!” “That sounds fake.” “It’s not fake!” “Prove it.” “I already touched it.” “You WHAT?” Mom walked in. “What’s all the yelling about?” she asked while stirring a bowl of mac and cheese. “Jake touched alien goo,” said his sister. “Ugh,” said Mom.

What’s wrong?

- every character is speaking in the same paragraph
- no paragraph breaks for speaker changes
- hard to follow who’s talking

🏃 Hall of Shame #2: Run-On Rampage

I woke up and I was late and then I ran to the bus stop but I had no shoes and then I tripped over my neighbor’s garden gnome and my backpack flew into the road and a squirrel tried to eat my granola bar and I screamed and the bus driver saw the whole thing and laughed and now I think I’m never going back to school again.

What’s wrong?

- one gigantic sentence = one gigantic paragraph
- needs breaks for pacing, clarity, and dramatic effect
- could be hilarious with the right structure!

🕒 Hall of Shame #3: Time Travel Trouble

I was standing on the stage ready to do my solo then suddenly it was last Tuesday and I was in music class then I was in kindergarten remembering the first time I held a recorder then I blinked and I was back on stage but I forgot the lyrics.

What’s wrong?

- wild time shifts with no paragraph cues
- needs breaks for clarity
- students can separate each time change into a paragraph

The Paragraph Hall of Shame Answer Key

□ Hall of Shame #4: Thought Soup

Max didn't want to tell his mom he broke the window because she'd be mad and then he'd get grounded and miss the soccer game but also maybe she'd be impressed that he kicked the ball that hard but then again she probably wouldn't think it was cool especially since it hit her tulips but maybe she wouldn't notice but he also kind of wanted to confess and be honest because honesty is good unless it gets you grounded.

What's wrong?

- endless inner monologue in one paragraph
- no shift back to action or narration
- Students can add breaks for each thought twist.

☹ Hall of Shame #5: Monologue Mayhem

"I just think it's weird," Zoe said. "I mean, who puts ketchup on spaghetti? It's unnatural. Like, there's tomato sauce right there, just use it. And it's not just the spaghetti, either. Remember when Kyle put mustard on pancakes? That guy needs help. I swear, if he shows up with ranch on his cereal, I'm calling the food police."

What's wrong?

- one long speech, no break or pacing
- needs paragraph breaks to emphasize key moments or insert action/reaction
- could add humor or character reactions to enhance readability

▣ Hall of Shame #6: Setting Slip-Up

First I was in the school cafeteria, and everyone was yelling about the pizza being square. Then I blinked, and suddenly I was in gym class running laps. After that, I was at home eating cereal and wondering if maybe I had dreamed the whole day. Then I was back in the cafeteria, and the square pizza was still there, staring into my soul.

What's wrong?

- setting shifts multiple times with no paragraph cues
- hard to follow transitions
- each location shift deserves its own paragraph

The Paragraph Hall of Shame Answer Key

🤖 Hall of Shame #7: Emotion Explosion

I couldn't believe it. My science project exploded. I was proud. I was horrified. I was thrilled. I was covered in glitter. Everyone clapped. Then they screamed. Then the fire alarm went off. And then Principal Gomez said I might win a ribbon. I think I'm traumatized. But also famous?

What's wrong?

- too many emotions in one chunk
- Paragraph breaks could show shifts in feeling and events.
- could be funnier and more dramatic with pacing and breaks

🤖 Hall of Shame #8: Who Said That?

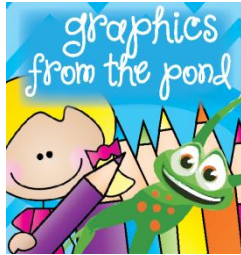
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What's wrong?

- multiple characters speaking in one paragraph
- no breaks for speaker changes
- Readers can't keep track of who's saying what.

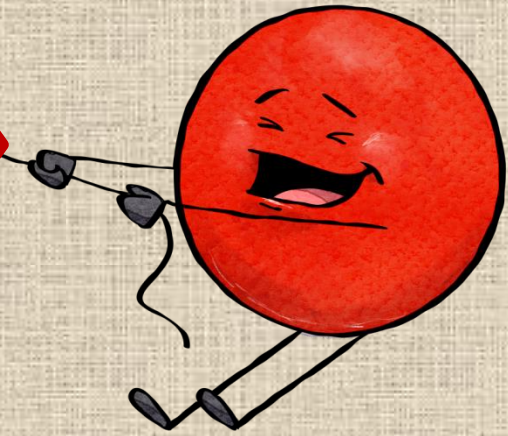


Credits



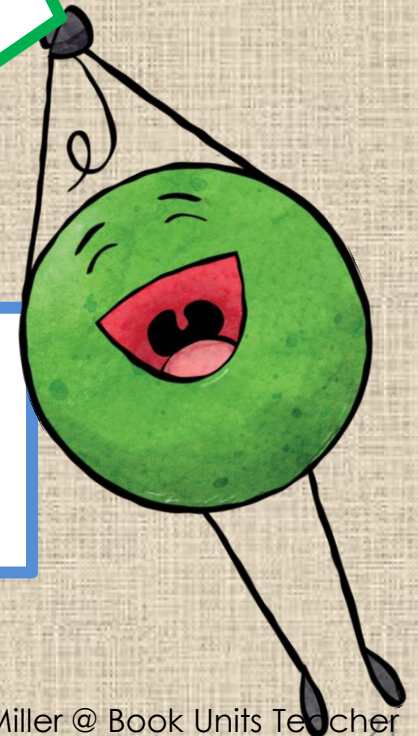
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