

# The Unit Organizer Routine

## Teaching More By Teaching Through the Big Ideas

Keith Lenz  
KU - CRL

**"In particular, the Lesson Organizer Routine focuses on how to plan for, introduce, and teach a lesson to a diverse group of students".**

The Unit Organizer Routine is one of the newest routines in the Content Enhancement Series. Like the Lesson Organizer Routine, which was featured in Strategram Vol. 6 Nos. 3&4. The Unit Organizer Routine was developed to help teachers respond to the needs of diverse groups of learners in mainstream classes. The Unit Organizer Routine focuses on how teachers can "frame" a unit for students using a particular set of instructional methods. A unit is any "chunk" of content that a teacher selects to organize information into lessons and that ends in some type of test or closure activity. Typically, a subject-area course (e.g., science, health, social studies, math, English) is divided into several such units. By framing a unit, the teacher helps students see and understand the "big picture" of the unit. Specifically, the Unit Organizer Routine is used to help teachers introduce and build a unit so that everyone can: (a) understand how the unit can be part of bigger ideas or a sequence of units; (b) see a method for organizing knowledge; (c) define the relationships associated with knowledge; (d) recognize what has been learned through self-questioning; (e) clarify what has been done in relation to what must be done; and (f) monitor progress and accomplishments in learning. In general, the Unit Organizer can be used to help students become oriented to where they *have been* in the learning sequence, where they *are*, and where they *are going* in learning.

### Research Supporting the Unit Organizer Routine

The Unit Organizer Routine was developed in collaboration with secondary-level teachers. Teachers reported that prior to using the

routine, they often lost sight of the "big picture" of a unit and frequently became bogged down in trying to cover masses of information. As a result, their students had difficulty understanding the relationships among clusters of information being presented. Using the routine, however, helped teachers focus their instruction and assessment activities and helped students understand important relationships. They also noted that having the freedom to modify the routine to suit their own needs helped them use the routine successfully. Results showed that the way the teachers presented information changed after they learned to use the Unit Organizer Routine. Specifically, they began to explicitly explain to students what was to be learned, the relationships among chunks of information, and the activities that would be completed to promote learning.

### Components

Most courses of study are comprised of several units, which typically last at least five days and as long as several weeks. To introduce each unit, a visual device, called the **Unit Organizer**, is presented to students. During the interactive presentation of the Unit Organizer, teachers follow a set of **Linking Steps** that are imbedded within an instructional sequence called the **Cue-Do-Review Sequence**. The purpose of the Cue-Do-Review Sequence is threefold: (1) to prompt students to attend to and participate in the routine, (2) to present the Unit Organizer to students, and (3) to check students' understanding of the Unit Organizer. Thus, successful use of the Unit Organizer Routine is

*(continued on page 2)*

*(continued from page 1)*  
based on three critical components: the Unit Organizer, the Linking Steps, and the Cue-Do-Review Sequence.

### THE UNIT ORGANIZER

To help teachers present their "vision" of a unit, a visual device, called the **Unit Organizer**, is used. Serving as the "centerpiece" of the Unit Organizer Routine, the Unit Organizer is used to graphically organize and depict the content of the unit and related information. The Unit Organizer typically is co-constructed by the teacher and students at the beginning of a unit, when the teacher and students simultaneously fill in information on blank Unit Organizer forms. An example of a completed Unit Organizer is presented in **Figure 1** on page 3.

This Unit Organizer was created for a unit on the causes of the Civil War in a high school U.S. history class. The unit aims at helping students understand "sectionalism" in the United States as a cause of the Civil War. The idea of "sectionalism" is explained by helping students see the differences among three sections of the nation: the North, the South, and the West. During the unit, the teacher planned to present information about the geographic sections of the United States, the political, social, and economic differences among these sections, the events that pulled these sections apart, and the leaders that influenced the events in each of the sections.

### THE LINKING STEPS

The Linking Steps, which have been designed with students' learning needs in mind, refer to the procedures a teacher uses to present the content of a unit in an interactive way to students. Thus, the Linking Steps guide the way the Unit Organizer is used during three phases of unit instruction: (a) launching the Unit (i.e., introducing the unit), (b) floating Unit Ideas (i.e., maintaining unit ideas

and themes as unit content is taught), and (c) tying up the Unit (i.e., gaining closure on unit content by helping students see how unit ideas hold all the information together. The Linking Steps are as follows.

#### Step 1: Create a Context

In the first step, the Unit Organizer is used to help students see how information in the current unit is connected to previous and future learning. At this point, therefore, Sections 1-4 of the Unit Organizer are filled in or mentioned to create a context for learning or for review. Section 1 contains the title of the new unit. This may be the

### **"... the Unit Organizer is used to graphically organize and depict the content of the unit and related information"**

name of the section of a textbook on which a unit is based or the name given to the unit by the teacher. In Figure 1, the name of the current unit is "Causes of the Civil War." The information in Section 2 includes the name of the LAST UNIT that was covered or the last experience the students had related to the current unit. In Figure 1, the name of the LAST UNIT was "Growth of the Nation." The information in Section 3 includes the name of the unit or experience that will follow the CURRENT UNIT. In Figure 1, the name of the Next Unit is "The Civil War." Section 4 contains the name of the idea or theme that holds several related units together. The vertical dotted lines can be made solid to indicate that "THE BIGGER PICTURE" may not include the previous or upcoming unit. In general, the name, "THE BIGGER PICTURE," helps students understand what multiple units have in common. In Figure 1, the theme that holds the three depicted units together is "The roots and

consequences of civil unrest."

#### Step 2 : Recognize Content Structures

In this step, information is presented to help students see how the information in the unit can be structured or restructured in order to aid comprehension and recall. Here, the Unit Map is either drawn in Section 5 as the unit is launched, expanded in Section 9 (see figure 2) as each section of the unit of the unit is taught, or is reviewed as part of tying up the unit and preparing for a test or unit closure.

The Unit Map includes two types of information. The first, the Unit Paraphrase, is written in the oval at the top of the section. It is a translation of the main idea of the Current Unit into words the students can easily understand or into a word or words that reveal the central meaning of the unit title. In Figure 1, the Unit Paraphrase translates the central idea behind the words "Causes of the Civil War" into "Sectionalism."

The second type of information in the Unit Map is a graphic depiction of how the unit content is organized. To create the map, key words are written within geometric shapes to indicate the parts of the unit to be taught and the page numbers of the text related to each part. A horizontal dotted line can be used in each geometric shape to separate the name of the section from the page numbers in the text where relevant information can be found. As a general rule, the Unit Map should include no more than seven parts. In Figure 1, the parts of the Unit Map that correspond to the four parts of the unit to be covered include: "Areas of the U.S.," "Differences between the Areas," "Events in the U.S.," and "Leaders Across the U.S."

Within the Unit Map, lines are drawn between the geometric shapes, and word labels are provided for each line to indicate the relationships between the sections and the main idea of the unit. The word labels are written such that students can read the words in one

*(continued on page 4)*

# The Unit Organizer

Figure 1  
④ BIGGER PICTURE

NAME Elida Cordora  
DATE 1/22

*The roots and consequences of civil unrest*

|  |  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
|--|--|--|------|------|------|-------------------------------------|--|---|------|------|-----|-------------------------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|-----------------|-----|------|----------------|---|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| ② LAST UNIT/Experience<br><i>Growth of the Nation</i>  | ① CURRENT UNIT<br><i>The Causes of the Civil War</i> | ③ NEXT UNIT/Experience<br><i>The Civil War</i> |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| ⑧ UNIT SCHEDULE<br><table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>1/22</td><td>Cooperative Groups over pp. 201-210</td></tr> <tr><td>1/28</td><td>Quiz</td></tr> <tr><td>1/29</td><td>Cooperative groups over pp. 210-225</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>"Influential Personalities" Project Due</td></tr> <tr><td>1/30</td><td>Quiz</td></tr> <tr><td>2/2</td><td>Cooperative groups over pp. 228-234</td></tr> <tr><td>2/6</td><td>Review for test</td></tr> <tr><td>2/7</td><td>Review for test</td></tr> <tr><td>2/8</td><td>Test</td></tr> </table> | 1/22   | Cooperative Groups over pp. 201-210            | 1/28 | Quiz | 1/29 | Cooperative groups over pp. 210-225 |  | "Influential Personalities" Project Due | 1/30 | Quiz | 2/2 | Cooperative groups over pp. 228-234 | 2/6 | Review for test | 2/7 | Review for test | 2/8 | Test | ⑤ UNIT MAP<br> | ⑥ UNIT RELATIONSHIPS<br><table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>descriptive</td></tr> <tr><td>compare/contrast</td></tr> <tr><td>cause/effect</td></tr> </table> | descriptive | compare/contrast | cause/effect |
| 1/22   | Cooperative Groups over pp. 201-210                  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| 1/28   | Quiz   |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| 1/29   | Cooperative groups over pp. 210-225                  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
|  | "Influential Personalities" Project Due              |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| 1/30   | Quiz   |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| 2/2  | Cooperative groups over pp. 228-234                  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| 2/6  | Review for test                                      |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| 2/7  | Review for test                                      |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| 2/8  | Test   |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| descriptive  |  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| compare/contrast   |  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| cause/effect   |  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |
| ⑦ UNIT SELF-TEST QUESTIONS<br>What was sectionalism as it existed in the U.S. of 1860?<br><br>How did the differences in the sections of the U.S. in 1860 contribute to the start of the Civil War?<br><br>What examples of sectionalism exist in the world today?   |  |  |      |      |      |                                     |  |   |      |      |     |                                     |     |                 |     |                 |     |      |                |   |             |                  |              |

# The Unit Organizer

Figure 2

NAME Elida Cordora  
DATE 1/22

**The Causes of the Civil War**

⑨ Expanded Unit Map

⑩ The Unit Self-Test Questions

*How did national events and leaders pull the different sections of the U.S. apart?*

(continued from page 2)

geometric shape, the line label, and the words in the connected geometric shape to create a complete sentence. The lines and line labels are critical elements that help students understand how the parts of the unit are connected. Research has shown that students who are given Unit Maps that include lines and line labels remember substantially more about a unit than students who are given Unit Maps without them.

After the unit is launched or introduced, the second page (or back side) of the Unit Organizer is used throughout the unit and at the end to expand the Unit Map by adding critical subtopics and key vocabulary, which are identified as lessons or parts of the unit are completed. The Expanded Unit Map for the unit on the Causes of the Civil War is depicted in Figure 2 bottom of page 3.

### Step 3 : Acknowledge Unit Relationships

After students see how unit information can be structured, they are asked in this step to look for and identify possible relationships that might be important in understanding the information. The relationships are written in Section 6 of the Unit Organizer. In Figure 1, for example, the various sections of the nation must be described and then compared and contrasted in order to understand how their differences led to the Civil War within a cause-and-effect relationship.

### Step 4: Frame Unit Questions

In this step, the teacher leads students to generate and discuss the types of questions that might be posed about important relationships within the unit and the types of information that might be used to answer these questions. The teacher also elicits questions that the students would like to be able to answer at the end of the unit. Students are asked to generate questions based on examining the parts of the Unit Map and the Unit

Relationships that have already been identified. Generated questions are written in Section 7 of the Unit Organizer on the day the Unit is launched. Questions are written that students should be able to answer when the unit is complete. Students can ask themselves these questions to review the content of the unit. One of the questions that students should be able to answer at the end of the unit depicted in Figure 1 is, "What was sectionalism as it existed in the U.S. of 1860?"

After the unit has been launched, new questions may emerge that become important to understanding the big ideas in the unit. The space labeled "Section 10" below the Expanded Unit Map (shown in Figure 2) is used to write questions that the teacher and students identify as they explore the unit. For example, in the Expanded Unit Map in Figure 2, the question that has been added is, "How did national events and leaders pull the different sections of the U.S. apart?"

---

**"The Unit Organizer Routine can be used as a powerful teaching tool when used by itself, but it can be especially powerful when used systematically and in combination with other routines."**

---

### Step 5: Tie Content to Tasks

In the final step, the Unit Schedule is created or mentioned to assist students in seeing how tasks are related to help them answer Unit Self-Test Questions and understand relationships depicted in the Unit Map. The Unit Schedule is reviewed regularly to help students become aware of work completed, upcoming work, and their progress in learning the content of the unit. Section 8 is used to summarize the schedule of

required tasks, activities, or assignments associated with learning the information in the unit. As shown in Figure 1, dates are written in the square boxes, and associated tasks, activities, and assignments are written in the rectangular boxes.

### CUE-DO-REVIEW

The Cue-Do-Review Sequence is the instructional sequence that is used to introduce the Unit Organizer Routine, implement the Linking Steps, and check students' understanding of the information presented. It is used regardless of whether the unit is being launched, maintained, or closed. In other words, this sequence is used to (a) draw students' attention to the use of a certain instructional process, (b) involve them in that process, and (c) check the effectiveness of the process.

### Keys to Success with the Unit Organizer Routine

Experience with the Unit Organizer Routine has indicated that the following factors are important for improving the performance of students in academically diverse classes:

- The routine is explicitly introduced to the whole class, so students can understand how the teacher's use of the routine and their own participation in the routine can markedly improve their academic performance.
- The routine is used *regularly*, so both teacher and students have ample opportunity to become comfortable with it as a learning tool.
- The routine is adapted to meet the unique needs of the students, the personality and teaching style of the teacher, and the content of the course.
- Use of the routine is varied occasionally to enhance student motivation.
- The routine is integrated over time with the other routines in the

(continued on page 8)

## Visual Imagery Bookmarks & Dissect RAP

by  
Kim Short  
&  
Lauren Henry

Kim Short, a SIM Trainer in Raleigh, North Carolina submitted the *Visual Imagery* bookmarks in the adjacent column. She uses these bookmarks to reinforce her student's use of the strategy. Kim wrote an article about the implementation of the strategies in regular education classes for *Strategram*, Volume 7, Issue 4.

Lauren Henry, from Apex Elementary School, Apex, North Carolina, contributed the *Dissect RAP* on page 6. Lauren finds the RAP helpful when she is teaching the *Word Identification Strategy*.

### Subscription Information

Your subscription entitles you to ALL six issues of the current volume being published.

The current volume is Volume 7, and the publication period is from September 1994 to August, 1995.

When you subscribe, allow 6-8 weeks for processing and mailing.

► **S**earch for picture words



**C**reate or change the scene



**E**nter lots of details



**N**ame the parts



**E**valuate your picture



### REMEMBER . . .

1. Describe the scene

\* Name the scene

\*\* Describe 2 parts of the scene

2. Describe what's happening in the scene

\* Mention the majority of the detail picture words

\*\* Add at least 3 details

Is it the same scene?

Has the scene changed?

Is it an entirely new scene?

Is it an old scene?

### Sentence Writing for Elementary Students

Janice Kohler, Wedgewood Elementary, Friendswood, Texas, became a trainer two years ago. While serving as an elementary resource teacher Janice began using the *Sentence Writing Strategy* with her students. She

noticed the students occasionally had difficulty with some of the vocabulary used in the Controlled Practice worksheets. Janice adapted the worksheets in order to make the sentences meaningful to her classes. The worksheet on page 7 is one example of lessons she has created. Thanks for sharing Janice!

## THE DISSECT RAP



by

Lauren Henry  
Apex Elementary  
Apex, North Carolina



*When you are reading a book and you find a word  
That you have never seen and you have never heard,  
What ya' gonna do? Gonna' cry and pout?  
**DISSECT** that word, and figure it out!  
Discover the context, that's what you do.  
Now does that sentence make sense to you?  
Isolate the prefix (that's at the start).  
That's the next thing you do to take that word apart.  
Separate the suffix (that's at the end).  
If you think there's another, better look again.  
The stem is what's left when those steps are done.  
Say the stem out loud, now you are having fun!  
Sometimes you say it, and it comes out wrong.  
That's because your stem is too long.  
Examine the stem quick as you please.  
Don't forget the Rules of 2's and 3's.  
Now put it all together, and say it strong.  
Uh-oh, that word still comes out wrong.  
If you still don't know it, better Check with someone.  
Don't forget to say thank you when your checking is done.  
If that someone can't help you, and you've done the rest,  
Try a dictionary, and try your best.  
Don't let big words get your reading down.  
Use **DISSECT** and be the best in town!*





(continued from page 4)

Content Enhancement Series to create a powerful synergy.

- Students become actively involved in the routine as partners with the teacher for the purpose of improving learning for *all* students in the class.

The Unit Organizer Routine can be a powerful teaching tool when used by itself, but it can be especially powerful when used systematically and in combination with other routines. Specifically, the effectiveness of the Unit Organizer Routine is enhanced when used in conjunction with the Course Organizer Routine (a routine for introducing a course) and the Lesson Organizer Routine (a routine for highlighting key information and relationships among information within lessons). Training associated with the Unit Organizer Routine is now available through SIM Trainers located throughout the nation. Unit Organizer Routine manuals are available in association with training workshops. **Contact your SIM trainer for further information.**

**Strategram**

Vol. 7: Issue number 5. Published six times per year by The University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, Dole Human Development Center-Room 3061, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045-2342. Subscription rate: \$13 per year. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher, unless otherwise stated.

©1995 by The University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045. All rights reserved.

**Editor**

*Mary Lee*

**Consulting Editors**

*Keith Lenz*

*Don Deshler*

*Jean Schumaker*

**Strategram Renewal Form 1995-96**

(Send this form in with your check)

**1995-96 STRATEGRAM  
RENEWAL FORM**

Mail a \$13 check or money order  
and this form to:

Strategram  
University of Kansas Center for  
Research on Learning  
Room 3061 Dole Human  
Development Center  
Lawrence, Kansas 66045

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

(please place school district orders in the name of one employee)

The University of Kansas  
Center for Research on Learning  
Rm. 3061 Robert Dole Bldg.  
Lawrence, Kansas 66045-2342  
1-913-864-4780

**Address change requested**

Non Profit Org.

U.S. Postage

**PAID**

Lawrence, Kansas

Permit No. 65