

The Stars

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Background

An explanatory text shows how a process works. In this case it is the life process of a star, an explanatory text within a report text which gives general information about stars. Unlike a recount, which is usually about a specific event, this text refers to any star – that is, the life cycle is common to all stars. The vital feature in this explanation is the passage of time.

Shared reading and discussing the text

- Before reading the text, ask the children what they know about stars. They will probably be aware that the Sun is a star. Ask them to speculate on what happens when a star is first originated and how a star ends. Make notes of their ideas on the board. Ask them to think about the birth and death of stars and come up with some questions about this process. Make a list of the five questions the class agree to be the most pressing. Prompt the use of the words *How* and *Why* at the start of the questions.
- Now read the text. Look back at the list and see which of the children's questions have been answered by the text and what answers have been given. Which processes have been explained?
- Point out the vocabulary used to indicate the passage of time in this text. Which words signal another stage in the process (for example, *As... Eventually...?*)
- Read this text alongside the text on the Sun (see page 72) and ask the children to pick out

the different features of structure and language, with a view towards noting the ways in which such texts can be framed. Particularly important features of most explanation texts include a general statement to introduce the topic, a series of logical steps (usually with diagrams), the use of the present tense and temporal (*then, next*) and/or causal (*because, due to*) connectives.

Activities

- Try the five question task with other non-fiction subjects. Ask the children to locate a double-page spread on a subject within a non-fiction text and, without reading the text, list five questions about the subject concerned. They should then read the text to find any answers. Encourage them to carry out some research to resolve the unanswered questions.
- Ask the children to read through the text and locate any words that are subject specific, such as *supernova* and *white dwarf*, and circle them. Can they write a short glossary, compiling a list of such terms?
- Ask the children to use the information presented in the text to create a large poster that could teach this subject matter to children in Year 4 (Primary 5). Remind them to take notes from the text, rather than copying it out in full.

Extension/further reading

Encourage the children to look for the structure of report and explanatory texts in other science texts.