



# ReadQuest

## *Meet the Cast*

ADVANCED EDITION

## Spark & Anvil

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This advanced edition collects 7 chapter books from the ReadQuest cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register. Advanced edition: upper-middle-grade register (Wonder / Hatchet / Holes band) for readers ages 11-14 ready for longer sentences + more nuanced subtext.

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*For everyone who learns by reading between the lines.*

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# Introduction

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The ReadQuest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 7 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone. Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

This is the **Advanced Edition** — written for readers who are ready for longer sentences, layered subtext, and the trust that comes with not having every joke explained. The Standard Edition covers the same characters at a lighter register; pick whichever feels right for the reader at hand.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

# Frame and Plume



A soft, persistent quiet settled over Frame's workshop that morning, broken only by the rustle of her paws sifting through wood shavings. She meticulously separated the delicate, feathery curls of pine from the coarser, shorter fragments of oak, each type destined for its own woven basket. Frame found a profound satisfaction in this pre-construction ritual. It was a way to clear her mind, preparing the space for the precise work ahead.

Three gentle, rhythmic knocks sounded at the workshop door, pulling Frame's attention from her task. She glanced toward the window, catching a fleeting, vibrant shimmer of color. An iridescent green dissolved into sapphire, then softened to a pale, luminous gold.

"Plume," Frame murmured, a small smile touching her lips.

The door swung inward, revealing Plume. Her plumage that day displayed a subtle, muted gray, edged with faint saffron highlights. This particular shade, Frame knew, was Plume's listening color, a neutral canvas she wore before immersing herself in a text. It signified an open, receptive state, awaiting the passage's true voice.

"I brought something," Plume announced, holding aloft a thick, cream-colored envelope. Its heft suggested more than a casual note. "A passage arrived in the mail, from one of our students. They specifically asked for us to read it together."

Frame brushed the fine layer of sawdust from her paws. She then pulled a tall, sturdy stool to her workbench, its surface scarred with the history of countless projects. Plume, with a graceful hop, settled onto a wider stool nearby, designed to accommodate the elegant sweep of her tail feathers. She carefully slid the single sheet of paper from the envelope, placing the passage between them on the smooth, worn wood.

The passage was concise, barely a paragraph in length.

*Last summer, the neighborhood pond turned green and stinky. Kids couldn't swim. Frogs left. The cause was something called algae bloom. It happens when fertilizer from lawns washes into water. The fix is simple. Plant a strip of tall grass between lawns and the pond. The grass catches the fertilizer before it reaches the water. By the end of summer, the pond was clear again.*

Frame read the words silently, her eyes tracing each line. Then, without a word, she read it a second time, letting the details sink in. She tapped the workbench once, a soft, deliberate sound. It signaled her mind was beginning to grasp the underlying structure, to sense the particular architecture of the text.



"This one presents an interesting challenge," she observed, her gaze still fixed on the paper.

Plume tilted her head, a thoughtful gesture. Her subtle gray plumage began to shift, slowly deepening into a curious, vibrant green, a hue that reflected her burgeoning interest.

"Let's read it aloud together," Frame suggested. "Afterward, we can identify its two distinct halves."

Frame gracefully slid off her stool, her movements fluid and purposeful. She crossed the workshop to a towering wall, meticulously organized with an array of wooden frames. Her paw glided along the smooth surfaces, brushing past the distinct forms. There were the rigid Parallel-bars, the ascending Staircase, the tapering Funnel, the mended Broken-fixed, and the ever-expanding Expanding. Each shape represented a fundamental way a story or idea could be structured.

"This passage clearly presents a challenge," Frame explained, her voice steady. "And then it offers a resolution. The pond deteriorated, then someone devised a solution. So the inherent **shape** of this passage is —" She carefully lifted down the Broken-fixed frame, holding it aloft. "— this one."

The Broken-fixed frame was crafted from two pieces of wood, unmistakably snapped apart at some point. Frame had meticulously glued the break back together, but the faint, silvery seam remained visible, a testament to its past fracture. The wood was whole once more, yet its history of breakage was permanently etched into its surface.

"Broken-fixed," she reiterated, her paw tracing the visible mend. "We also call this structure **problem-solution**. The first half delineates the trouble, the obstacle encountered. The second half articulates the remedy, the effective answer." She held the wooden frame beside the student's paper. The fractured side of the frame perfectly aligned with the passage's initial description. This included the green, stagnant pond, the absent swimmers, and the departed frogs. The mended side, in turn, mirrored the solution: planting grass, the pond's eventual clarity.

Plume observed intently, her plumage shifting from its soft green to a brighter, more focused emerald, reflecting her deep concentration. "That's remarkably clear," she stated. "Once you visualize the frame, the underlying structure becomes instantly apparent."

Frame nodded, acknowledging Plume's insight. "Without the frame, the passage might simply feel like a collection of *words*. But with the frame, you can truly *discern* the writer's deliberate construction. They composed this passage using a recognized pattern. They intended for you to recognize: *here is something that went wrong, and here is precisely how it was made better.*"

She carefully placed the Broken-fixed frame onto the workbench, directly over the passage. This ensured the two wooden halves precisely corresponded with the two textual sections. "The shape is named. That concludes my contribution." She tapped the bench once, a quiet punctuation mark. "Now, it's your turn."



Plume gracefully descended from her stool, her plumage already beginning its subtle, anticipatory transformation.

Plume positioned herself beside the workbench, her posture poised and reflective. She closed her eyes for a brief moment, a small, private ritual she always observed before articulating a passage's underlying purpose. It was her equivalent to Frame's decisive bench-tap, a silent preparation for the intricate work of discernment.

"Purpose," Plume stated softly, her voice barely a whisper.

As she spoke, her plumage began its intricate transformation, not a sudden burst, but a gradual, deliberate shift. The green deepened, growing richer, while delicate gold highlights emerged along the tips of her feathers. A faint, warm flush of orange diffused through her chest, like a sunrise spreading across a quiet sky.

"This isn't informing," Plume mused, her eyes still closed, her voice thoughtful. "Informing is typically dry, purely factual. It's *neutral*, and it would call for my palest gray. This passage feels different."

She began to pace slowly around the workbench, her steps measured. “Nor is it entertaining. Entertaining passages are bright, often *playful*. They demand my most vibrant yellow, perhaps with playful flicks of red. This isn’t that kind of energy either.”

Frame watched, a quiet appreciation in her gaze. She admired Plume’s unique methodology, her careful process of elimination. This often revealed the truth by first discarding what it was not.

“This passage desires a specific outcome,” Plume continued, her voice gaining a subtle conviction. “It wants the reader to *act* in some way, or at least to consider action. It aims for the reader to conclude: *Oh, that approach worked. Perhaps we could implement something similar in our own community.*” She tilted her head slightly. “This is a form of **persuasion**. Yet, it’s a gentle persuasion, not forceful or alarming. The author isn’t shouting demands or instilling fear. Instead, they present a concise success story, trusting the reader to discern the inherent lesson.”

Her plumage settled into its final, resonant hue: a deep, gold-edged green, radiating warmth, stability, and a quiet sense of hope. It was the color of conviction, of *yes, this approach is effective*.

“Purpose: to persuade. Tone: hopeful, calm, and grounded in fact,” Plume declared, finally opening her eyes. “That concludes my contribution.”



She offered a small nod to Frame. “But your initial identification of the shape was crucial. The shape provided the framework that allowed me to truly hear the voice.”

Frame nodded in return. “And your discerning voice, in turn, *confirms* the shape. A persuasive passage almost invariably adopts a problem-solution framework. The shape and the voice align perfectly, revealing the writer’s intentional design for both elements.”

A quiet understanding settled between them at the workbench. The mended Broken-fixed frame lay across the student’s passage, a tangible representation of its structure. Plume’s plumage, still glowing with its soft, warm gold, pulsed gently beside it. Morning sunlight streamed through the workshop window, painting shifting patterns on the wooden floor. A faint breeze stirred the neatly sorted wood-shaving baskets.

“This is precisely why our collaboration is so essential,” Frame observed, her gaze sweeping over their shared workspace.

Plume readily agreed. “A reader who perceives only the shape, without recognizing the voice, interprets a passage merely as a *diagram*. They might understand the type of passage, but they fail to grasp the writer’s true intention. Such a reader might scan this paragraph and simply shrug, thinking, *Yes, a pond was fixed*. They would entirely miss the subtle persuasion.”

Frame carefully picked up the Broken-fixed frame, turning it gently in her paws. “Conversely, a reader who hears only the voice, without discerning the underlying shape, experiences a passage primarily as a *mood*. They might feel hopeful, they might feel persuaded. But they wouldn’t consciously register the writer’s deliberate choice of a problem-solution structure. They could read this paragraph and feel good, yet struggle to articulate *why* it works to another person.”

“Shape and voice,” Plume affirmed, her gaze meeting Frame’s.

“Frame and Plume,” Frame responded, a quiet echo.

This exchange was their own small, cherished tradition. Whenever a passage had been fully analyzed and understood, they would speak these two pairs of words together, always in the same sequence. Shape first, then voice. Frame’s name first, then Plume’s. It was their unique way of sealing the work, a quiet acknowledgment of their complementary expertise.

Frame gently slid the passage back into its envelope, then returned the Broken-fixed frame to its designated hook on the wall. Plume’s vibrant plumage gradually softened, easing back toward a neutral, pale gray. The passage had been thoroughly read, its voice precisely named. Plume no longer needed to maintain that particular expressive color.



“What message should we send back to the student?” Plume inquired, her voice thoughtful.

Frame paused, considering her words carefully. “We should tell them this: you have encountered a **problem-solution** passage. The writer intended to **persuade** you, gently, by sharing a small, relatable success story. Now you possess the ability to perceive both its fundamental halves. These include the precise shape the writer meticulously constructed, and the distinct voice they deliberately employed. Both of these are conscious choices. The writer made them on purpose, and you, too, can master these choices when you craft your own compelling passages.”

Plume nodded, a genuine appreciation in her eyes. “Shape and voice.”

“Shape and voice,” Frame echoed, a sense of quiet accomplishment in her tone.

A clear, resonant chime from the front room's workshop bell announced another arrival. Through the mail slot, a fresh envelope had been slipped. Two more passages awaited their attention. The morning, it seemed, was only just beginning its intricate unfolding.

Plume gracefully hopped down from the workbench, moving toward the front room to retrieve the new envelope. Her plumage flickered briefly through a rapid, almost iridescent cycle. It showed gray, then a flash of pale blue, a hint of soft orange, before settling back to gray. She instinctively sampled the potential tones the next passage might demand.

Frame remained at the workbench, rolling up her sleeves with a renewed sense of purpose. She reached for the wall, pulling down two more frames, holding them ready. The tapering Funnel, in case the new text explored cause-and-effect. The rigid Parallel-bars, prepared for a compare-and-contrast structure.

The two of them—the meticulous carpenter and the perceptive peacock-reader, the steadfast wood-and-glue and the ever-shifting feathers, the concrete shape and the resonant voice—prepared themselves for the day's unfolding challenges.

Whoever had crafted that simple pond passage had, with intention, planned both its halves. Frame had discerned the shape. Plume had interpreted the voice. Together, they possessed the unique ability to illuminate for any student precisely how an entire passage cohered.

This was the essence of their work. Frame articulated what the writer had meticulously built. Plume revealed how the writer had chosen to sound. And the reader, guided by their insights, walked away with a profound understanding of both.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/readquest/frame-and-plume>

# Crest



Crest grew up *on a mountain*.

The mountain was *Mount Comprehension* — a *real geographical feature* in the kingdom's word-woods region, *the highest peak* in the small range that surrounded the ReadQuest academy's grounds. The mountain had a *clearly visible peak* — a single sharp pointed summit, *visible for miles* in every direction. Travelers from distant towns navigated by the peak. The peak was *the most-defining feature* of the local landscape. Other mountains in the range were *taller* in certain directions, but Mount Comprehension's peak was *the most-recognizable*. When the local map-makers wanted to *show the region*, they drew the peak first. Everything else was *oriented around it*.



Crest grew up *in the village at the foot of the mountain*. The village was called *Footpath*. Footpath sat on the southern slope of the mountain. Most of the village's children — Crest included — had spent their childhoods *looking up at the peak*. The peak was *always there*. It was *the first thing visible* at dawn (sunlight caught it before reaching the valley). It was *the last thing visible* at dusk (the peak still glowed pink when the village below was already dark).

What Crest understood — from a very early age — was that *the peak was the central feature*. You could describe the mountain *by describing other features* (the southern slope, the northern ridge, the tree-line, the snow-line, the rocky outcrop, the alpine meadow) — and these descriptions would be *accurate*. But *\*if you wanted to convey what the mountain was,\** you had to point to *the peak*. The peak was *the thing the mountain was most about*. The peak was *the main idea*.

Crest applied this to passages when she was thirteen and started formal schooling at ReadQuest academy. The teacher, on the first day, had said: *\*"Reading a passage is like looking at a landscape. You see many details. But every passage has a peak — the central message. Finding the peak is the foundation of comprehension."\**



Crest had raised her hand. She had said: "*Like Mount Comprehension.*"

The teacher had said: "*What?*"

Crest had said: \*"*My mountain has a peak. The peak is the most-defining feature. You can describe the mountain by describing other features — but if you want to convey what the mountain is, you point to the peak. Passages work the same way. Every passage has a peak — the main idea. Many details surround it. The details are real. But the peak is the thing the passage is most about.*"\*

The teacher had been *delighted*. She had said: "*That is exactly right. Have you considered teaching?*"



Crest had not. She had thought about it for several years. By eighteen she had decided. She went to the academy's teacher-track. She joined the faculty at twenty-one. She has been teaching main-idea identification for eleven years.

In her classroom, she begins every first-day lesson the same way. She brings, on a small wooden table, *a topographic model of Mount Comprehension* (a small carved-wood model she made herself; it shows the peak clearly with the surrounding features arranged around it). She turns to the class. She says: *"This is Mount Comprehension. The peak is the highest point. The peak is the thing the mountain is most about. If you had to describe this mountain to someone in a single sentence, you would say: it has a sharp pointed peak. The peak is the central feature. Everything else organizes around it."*

She then writes a short passage on the board. She asks: *"What is this passage most about? Not what it mentions — what it is most about. What is the peak?"*

The students try. They identify the main idea. Crest gently corrects when they confuse *details* (mentioned facts) with *the main idea* (the thing the passage is most about). She uses the mountain-model. She points at the peak. She points at the slopes. She says: *"The slopes are details. The peak is the main idea. Both are part of the mountain. Only one is the answer to what is this most about."*



The students — always — find this *clarifying*. They had often confused main idea with supporting details. Crest's mountain-and-peak distinction makes the difference *visceral*.

When students ask Crest whether finding the main idea is hard, Crest always says the same thing:

\*"It is not hard. It is *finding the peak*. Look at the passage. Ask: *what is this most about?* The answer is one or two sentences. It is the central message. It is the peak. Everything else in the passage is slopes — important, but not the peak. Find the peak first. The rest will organize around it."\*

She still carries the topographic model. The children sometimes ask to hold it. She always lets them. She has, over eleven years, *guided perhaps four thousand children to find perhaps forty thousand main ideas*. The peaks, she says, are *always there*. You just have to *look up*.

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<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/readquest/crest>

# Anchor



Anchor was a small, heavy crab-tween. She moved with a deliberate, slow shuffle, her four clawed feet finding purchase on the classroom floor. Always, she carried her small ship's-anchor. It was a real anchor, dark and pitted with salt, tied to her shell by a thick, short rope. It weighed her down, a constant, physical reminder of her purpose.

This anchor was a tool. Anchor would not accept a reading claim unless a student could find specific evidence from the passage. When a student declared, "The character is sad," Anchor would ask, "Where in the text?" The student had to point to a specific sentence or a phrase, something concrete that supported their idea. Only then would Anchor lift her small ship's-anchor. It was a slight, upward gesture, the anchor rising just an inch or two from the floor. This meant the claim had found its support.

Until that evidence was cited, the anchor stayed down. The claim remained unanchored, floating without a connection to the text. The student simply had to find the evidence.



Anchor had grown up in a coastal village called Bollard. It was a fitting name. Bollards were the thick, sturdy posts ships tied to in the harbor. Her family had been harbor-masters for generations. Their days were spent making sure every ship was properly secured before storms rolled in from the sea. The family's catchphrase, passed down through salty air and generations, was simple: "Show me the line. Show me where it ties. Then I will trust the anchor."

Anchor, whose given name was Quill, understood this deep down from early childhood. By the age of ten, she knew that every claim about a ship's safety needed visible proof. Saying, "The ship is secure," wasn't enough. A harbor-master had to see the heavy line, see the knot tied tight, and see the anchor dug deep into the seabed. Only then could they truly trust the claim.

When she was sixteen, Quill discovered this same principle held true for reading. A claim about a passage – "The character is sad," or "The author is being ironic," or "The setting is hostile" – didn't prove anything without textual evidence. A reader needed to point to the exact words that supported their idea. Otherwise, the claim was just floating, unanchored, like a boat drifting out to sea.

Quill walked to the ReadQuest academy when she was twenty. The master appointed her to the evidence-citation role, and she renamed herself Anchor. She had been Anchor for twelve years now, guiding students to find their textual proofs.



In her classroom, Anchor began every first-day lesson the same way. She sat at the front of the room, her small ship's-anchor resting heavily at her feet. The classroom was quiet, filled with the scent of old books and the faint tang of salt from her shell. She would turn to the class, her eyes calm and steady.

"I am Anchor," she would say. Her voice was deep, like the rumble of distant thunder. "I do not accept reading claims without textual evidence. If you say, 'The character is sad,' I will ask, 'Where in the text?' If you can point to a specific sentence, the anchor lifts. If you cannot, the anchor stays down. The claim is unanchored."

She always demonstrated. She picked up a well-worn book and read a short passage aloud:

"Marco sat on the kitchen step. The dog whined at the door. He did not move."

She closed the book and looked at a student in the front row, a young fox-kit with bright, curious eyes. "What is Marco feeling?" she asked.



The fox-kit hesitated for a moment, then said, "He is sad."

Anchor nodded slowly. "Show me where in the text," she said.

The fox-kit frowned, trying to remember the words. The passage hadn't explicitly said, *Marco is sad*. He pointed vaguely at the air. "It just... feels sad."

Anchor waited, her anchor still and heavy at her feet. The fox-kit shifted in his seat, his ears drooping a little. Other students leaned forward, watching. They knew this feeling, this moment of being stuck. Then, a spark seemed to light in the fox-kit's eyes. He remembered the specific actions.

"Marco did not move," he said, pointing at the imaginary text. "When the dog whined at the door, he didn't move. *That* is evidence of sadness. Or at least, of a heavy feeling that kept him still."



Anchor's small ship's-anchor lifted slightly from the floor. It made a soft, scraping sound. "The anchor lifts," she said, her voice clear. "The claim has support. The text does not state, 'Marco is sad' — that is an inference, a guess you made based on clues. Hunch would help you with those inferences. But the behavioral evidence, him not moving, anchors that inference. Your reading is supported."

A murmur went through the class. Students often made claims about stories without realizing those claims needed proof. Anchor's literal ship's-anchor made the requirement visible, something they could see and hear. It was a powerful lesson.

When students asked Anchor if finding evidence was hard, she always gave the same answer.

"It is not hard," she would say. "It is simply *showing where the claim ties to the text*. For every claim you make about a passage, ask yourself: *what specific sentence supports this?* Point to it. The claim is now anchored. Without that citation, the claim is floating. And readers cannot trust floating claims."

She still kept the small ship's-anchor at her feet during every class. Sometimes, a group of children would ask to help her lift it. It was too heavy for any single child, but together, they could manage it. She always let them. In her twelve years, Anchor had guided perhaps three thousand students, teaching them to **anchor** their reading claims to specific textual evidence, one careful lift at a time.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/readquest/anchor>

# Hunch



Hunch is a hound-tween with an unusually sensitive nose.

The sensitivity is essential for the curriculum. Hunch can smell what is not on the page. He can read a passage with his eyes — like any other ReadQuest cast member — but his nose simultaneously picks up the things the text implies without stating. The implied facts. The unstated emotions. The hinted-at details. Hunch's nose detects all of these. His tail wags slowly when he smells an inference. The wag speeds up when the inference is strong.



Hunch grew up in a *small village near the academy's word-woods*. His family — all hounds — had been *the village's trackers*. They tracked lost sheep, missing children, stolen objects. Hunch had been the youngest of seven hound-children. He had been *expected* to enter the family tracking trade. He had, however, *been more interested in books* than in tracking objects. He would read books in the family workshop while his older siblings practiced tracking-exercises. The books had been *the only things* that engaged his sensitive nose in *the way the sensitive nose wanted to be engaged*. Tracking lost sheep had been *too easy* for Hunch — the sheep-trails were *obvious*. Books, on the other hand, had been *full of small implied things* that the text *did not state outright*. Hunch's nose had been *quietly thrilled* by the implied-things.

He had realized at fourteen that *his nose was made for inference*. Tracking visible scent-trails was *one kind of work*. Tracking *implied facts in text* was *the kind he loved*.

He had walked to the ReadQuest academy at nineteen. The academy master had interviewed him. The master had said: *"Read this passage and tell me what is implied."*

The passage had been:



*"Sara walked into the kitchen at 6:00 a.m. The coffee was already brewed. Her mother's car was gone."*

Hunch had read. His nose had twitched. His tail had wagged slowly. He had said: *"The text implies several things. (1) Sara's mother woke up earlier than 6 a.m. (2) Sara's mother had time to brew coffee and leave before Sara woke. (3) Sara's mother left in a car, which is information about the household's transportation. (4) The mother left without waking Sara, which implies the mother wanted to leave quietly — implying either Sara is sleeping in a way that is to be respected or the mother is leaving for something she does not want to disturb Sara about. (5) Coffee being brewed implies the mother drinks coffee (a small fact about the household). The text states none of these things explicitly. All are inferred from what the text did state."*

The master had said: *"You are appointed."*

Hunch has been the academy's inference-teacher for thirteen years.



In his classroom, he begins every first-day lesson the same way. He sits on a small cushion at the front. He has, on his lap, a small book. He says: "I am Hunch. My nose detects what the text implies but does not state. Watch."

He reads a short passage aloud — usually the *Sara-and-the-coffee* passage. His nose twitches. His tail wags. He says: \*"Inferences detected: mother woke before 6, brewed coffee, left in a car, intentionally did not wake Sara. The text *did not state* any of these. It only stated the time, the coffee, the missing car. The implications follow."\*

He then teaches the students to *read with the same eye-and-nose attention*. He explains the *core method*: (1) *read what the text says explicitly*, then (2) *ask: what does this imply? What background fact is needed for this to be true? What emotional state is consistent with this behavior? What would explain this detail?* The implied facts are *real comprehension content*, not guesses.

He cautions: \*inferences must be *supported by the text*. You cannot infer things the text does not signal. *Sara's mother was happy* is *not* a supported inference from the coffee-and-car passage (the text gives no emotional signal about the mother's state). *Sara's mother left before Sara woke* IS a supported inference (the car-is-gone + Sara-just-walked-in signals it).



(Anchor — see her chapter — is Hunch's frequent co-teacher on this point. Inferences need anchors. Hunch and Anchor often demonstrate together: Hunch makes the inference; Anchor points to the textual evidence that supports it.)

When students ask Hunch whether inference is hard, Hunch always says the same thing:

\*"It is not hard. It is *reading what is not on the page*. The text gives signals. The reader assembles signals into implied meaning. *What background fact is needed for this to be true? What would explain this detail?* The answers are inferences. The nose detects them. With practice, the eye will too."\*

He still keeps the small book on his lap. The children sometimes ask to read from it. He always lets them.

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<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/readquest/hunch>

# Frame



Frame is a beaver-tween carpenter.

Her *small workshop* contains *every kind of wooden frame*. Parallel-bar frames (two long parallel pieces with cross-supports between). Staircase frames (stepped rising pieces, each one slightly above the previous). Funnel frames (wide-mouthed-narrow-bottomed, channeling toward a single point). Broken-fixed frames (a damaged frame visibly repaired). Expanding frames (a frame that *grows* from a small center outward in all directions). Each frame-shape *matches a text structure*.



Parallel-bar frames match *compare-contrast* passages. Staircase frames match *sequence* passages. Funnel frames match *cause-effect* passages. Broken-fixed frames match *problem-solution* passages. Expanding frames match *description* passages. Frame demonstrates by *building the appropriate frame* for each passage and *holding it up* to show the structural shape.

Frame grew up in a *beaver-family of dam-builders*. Her parents had built actual dams in the kingdom's small rivers. Frame had learned, by age six, that *dams have specific structures*. Some are *straight-bar dams* (a single long structure across a narrow river). Some are *staircase dams* (multiple small stepped dams down a slope). Some are *V-shaped dams* (focused flow toward a central spillway). The structure of a dam *determined how it worked*. Frame had grown up thinking of *structures as having intrinsic shapes*.

She had applied this to passages at thirteen. Her village schoolteacher had said: "*Some passages are organized as compare-contrast. Some as sequence. Some as cause-effect. Some as problem-solution. Some as description. Knowing the structure helps you read.*" Frame had said: "*Like dams. Each dam has a shape. Each shape does something specific. Passages must work the same way.*" The teacher had been *delighted*.



Frame had walked to the ReadQuest academy at nineteen. She has been the academy's text-structure teacher for eleven years.

In her classroom, she begins every first-day lesson the same way. She has, on her workbench, *one of each kind of frame*. She says: "*I am Frame. I build wooden frames in different shapes. Each shape matches a text structure. Watch.*"

She picks up the *parallel-bar frame*. She says: "*Compare-contrast structure. Two things are placed side by side. Their similarities and differences are listed in parallel. The parallel-bar frame matches this structure visually — two parallel pieces with cross-supports between.*"

She picks up the *staircase frame*. She says: "Sequence structure. Events are listed in order — first, then, next, finally. Each event builds on the previous. The staircase frame matches — stepped rising pieces."



She picks up the *funnel frame*. She says: "Cause-effect structure. Multiple causes converge toward a single effect (or a single cause produces multiple effects). The funnel matches — wide at the input, narrow at the output."

She picks up the *broken-fixed frame*. She says: "Problem-solution structure. A problem is presented. A solution is then proposed. The broken-fixed frame matches — a damaged piece visibly repaired."

She picks up the *expanding frame*. She says: "Description structure. A central subject is presented and then described from multiple angles. The expanding frame matches — a small center growing outward in all directions."

The students always — always — find the frame-and-structure pairing *clarifying*. They had often read passages without recognizing their structural pattern. Frame makes the patterns *visible*. They learn to *identify the frame-shape* of each passage they read. The identification helps them *anticipate* the passage's content and *integrate* it.



Frame teaches the *signal-words* for each structure: *like / unlike / similarly / however* for compare-contrast; *first / then / next / finally* for sequence; *because / since / therefore* for cause-effect; *problem / solution / however / instead* for problem-solution; *for example / such as / specifically* for description.

When students ask Frame whether identifying text structure is hard, Frame always says the same thing:

\*"It is not hard. It is *seeing the shape*. Read the passage. Ask: what shape does this make? Compare-contrast? Sequence? Cause-effect? Problem-solution? Description? Each shape has signal-words. Each shape has a wooden frame in my workshop. Pick the frame. The structure is identified."\*

She still keeps the five frames on her workbench. The children sometimes ask to hold them. She always lets them.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/readquest/frame>

# Plume



Plume is a peacock-tween whose plumage shifts color depending on the author's tone.

The color-shifting is *real and visible* — bright cheerful gold when the tone is joyful; cool deep blue when the tone is somber; sharp red when the tone is angry or urgent; muted brown when the tone is neutral or informational; soft mauve when the tone is reflective. The shift happens *automatically* as Plume reads a passage. He does not consciously control it. The plumage *responds* to the author's voice.



Plume grew up in a household of theatrical performers. His parents had been touring actors — they performed in market squares, town halls, small village fairs. Plume had spent his childhood watching audiences respond to different theatrical tones. He had learned, by age eight, that the same story told in different tones produced different audience-experiences. A joyful tone produced laughter. A somber tone produced tears. An urgent tone produced suspense. An ironic tone produced a particular kind of knowing smile. The tone was as important as the words.

He had applied this to written passages at fifteen and realized that authors of written passages have tone, too. The tone is not in the words themselves — the same words can have different tones in different contexts. The tone is in the author's choices: word selection, sentence rhythm, what is emphasized, what is downplayed, what is included, what is omitted. The reader hears the author's tone, even without sound.

Plume had walked to the ReadQuest academy at eighteen. He has been the academy's author's-purpose-and-tone teacher for ten years.



In his classroom, he begins every first-day lesson the same way. He stands at the front. His plumage is currently in neutral-brown (default resting color). He says: "I am Plume. My plumage shifts color with the author's tone. Watch."

He reads a passage aloud. The passage is from a science textbook explaining how plants photosynthesize. His plumage stays neutral brown. He says: "Informational tone. The author is conveying information without strong emotion. The plumage stays neutral. That tells you the author's purpose: to inform."

He reads a second passage — a children's story about a puppy's first snow. His plumage shifts to bright cheerful gold. He says: "Joyful tone. The author is celebrating the puppy's experience. The plumage brightens. The author's purpose: to entertain and to share delight."



He reads a third passage — a news article about a community responding to a flood. His plumage shifts to *cool deep blue with edges of soft urgency*. He says: *"Somber tone with urgency. The author is conveying serious news while acknowledging community resilience. The plumage colors this combination. The author's purpose: to inform with appropriate emotional weight."*

He reads a fourth passage — a satirical opinion piece. His plumage shifts to *sharp red with a particular shimmer of irony*. He says: *"Ironic tone. The author is saying one thing but meaning another. The plumage colors with the irony-shimmer. The author's purpose: to persuade through indirect critique."*

The students always — *always* — find the plumage-shifting *visually striking*. They had been told that *author's tone* was a thing to attend to. Plume *shows* them what tone looks like as a real-time signal. They learn to *attend* to tone the way they learn to attend to weather.



Plume then teaches the *common author-purpose / tone pairings*: inform / neutral, persuade / urgent or ironic, entertain / joyful, reflect / contemplative, warn / somber or urgent. The pairings are not rigid — a single passage can blend purposes and tones — but the pairings are a *useful starting framework*.

When students ask Plume whether reading for author's tone is hard, Plume always says the same thing:

\*"It is not hard. It is *listening for the author's voice*. The author has a purpose — a thing they are trying to do. The author has a tone — a way of sounding while doing it. The purpose and the tone together create the reading-experience. Listen for both."\*

He still stands at the front. His plumage shifts gently as students read aloud. The students see the shifts. They calibrate.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/readquest/plume>

# Pith



Pith was, quite literally, a small, round coconut. His smooth, brown husk formed his body. Two dark dots served as his eyes, and a tuft of fibers stood up like wild hair. He wasn't like the other teachers at ReadQuest Academy, but then, he wasn't meant to be. His unique appearance was key to the core lesson he taught. In some botanical traditions, the inside of a coconut is called **pith**. More often, people call it the meat or endosperm. But *pith* worked perfectly for him. His body was a small, round coconut. The outside was the husk. The inside was the meat. Pith's main teaching point was simple: the meaning of an unfamiliar word hides in the surrounding text, not in the word itself.

Pith grew up in a tropical village by the sea. Coconuts were the main food source there. Every day, the villagers, including Pith's family, dug out coconut meat. They split open the tough husk and used small tools to scrape out the sweet flesh. Pith spent his childhood watching this process. By age six, he knew one thing for sure: the meat was never visible from the outside. You couldn't tell how much meat was inside a whole coconut just by looking at it. You couldn't tell its quality either. You had to crack the coconut open. Then you looked at its surroundings—the husk's thickness, the fibers, the "eyes"—to make your best guess. The outside context told you what was inside.



He remembered the exact moment the idea clicked. He was eleven, sitting by the ocean, watching his father crack coconuts. The lesson wasn't just about food. It was about words. The meaning of a strange word, he thought, was like the meat inside the coconut. You couldn't see it from the outside. You had to look at everything *around* it – the husk, the fibers, the eyes – to guess what was hidden within. The surrounding sentences were the husk. The meat was the meaning.

Pith walked to the ReadQuest Academy when he was eighteen. He had been the academy's vocabulary-in-context teacher for nine years.

In his classroom, Pith began every first-day lesson the same way. A small, actual coconut sat on his desk. He picked it up. The students leaned forward. He cracked it open right in front of them. The sharp *thwack* echoed in the quiet room. He showed them the rough husk on the outside. Then he pointed to the white, creamy meat on the inside.



"You couldn't see the meat before I cracked this coconut," he said, his voice soft but clear. "The husk itself told you nothing directly about the meat. But the husk's thickness, the fibers, the three dark eyes—they gave you clues about the meat's quality. That's external context. The same principle works for vocabulary."

He turned to the whiteboard. He wrote a sentence in neat, block letters:

*"The hiker felt his quadriceps burning as he climbed the steep slope, the muscles in his thighs straining with every step."*

He tapped the word *quadriceps*. "This is an unfamiliar word for many of you," he explained. "Do not look it up. Look at the surrounding text. The sentence says: *muscles in his thighs*. That is the husk—the surrounding context. The meat—the meaning of *quadriceps*—is *muscles in the thigh*. The surrounding text gave you the meaning without a dictionary."



He gave another example. He wrote:

*"The sun was beginning to wane as evening approached, its light dimming and the sky darkening."*

He pointed at *wane*. "Look at the husk," Pith instructed. "*Beginning to \_\_\_ as evening approached, light dimming, sky darkening.* The meat—*wane* means to *decrease or diminish*. The context gave you the meaning."

The students always found this empowering. They had often been told that unfamiliar words required a dictionary. Pith showed them something different. He taught that the surrounding text was usually enough. You could find the meaning right there.



Pith taught the types of **context clues**. These were different ways the husk surrounded the meat. Sometimes, the text offered a *definition*. It would explicitly state what the word meant. Other times, it gave an *example*. The text might use a *synonym*, a similar word nearby. Or it might use an *antonym*, an opposite word, signaling by contrast. Finally, there was the *general sense*. The surrounding tone and topic would give a general feel for the word.

When students asked Pith if deriving vocabulary from context was hard, Pith always said the same thing:

"It is not hard. It is *looking at the husk, not the meat*. The unfamiliar word is the meat. It's invisible from outside. The surrounding text is the husk. It's visible. Look at the husk. The meat will reveal itself."

He still kept a small, fresh coconut on his desk. He cracked open one new coconut each academic year. It was always his first-day demonstration. After being cracked, the coconut was shared with the students for a snack. They liked that very much.

**Listen along + meet more of the cast at:**



<https://spark-and-anvil.com/cast/readquest/pith>

## About Spark & Anvil

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ReadQuest is one of 140 educational iOS apps from Spark & Anvil — a 501(c)(3) public charity making free, ad-free, tracking-free learning apps for ages 9-14.

Every app uses distributed-narrative methodology: named recurring characters embody curricular concepts. The cast you just met appears in the matching app, in mentor scaffolding, in puzzle solutions, in celebration moments. Reading the chapters first means meeting old friends when you open the app.

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