Semantic Feature Analysis
Vocabulary Strategy

Literary Text: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
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Context: This strategy will be used during reading after students have become familiar with the main characters (Jim, Huck, Tom, Widow Douglas, Widow Watson, Pap, The Phelps, Aunt Polly, etc.) The strategy can be used to delve into a deeper understanding of the characters' personalities, motivations, and ambitions. It also helps students compare and contrast characters and their underlying characteristics.

Purpose: This strategy is a categorization strategy derived from the Atheoretical construct of cognitive structure described by Frank Smith (1975). It is based upon the manner in which human beings organize knowledge. As new information is processed:
1. Mental categories are established for the information
2. Rules are formulated to allocate objects into these categories
3. Interrelationships are established between the categories to show both the similarities and unique characteristics of the objects.
It is a systematic strategy for comparing and contrasting characteristics. The strategy allows students to see words that are related that can be used in all grades. Start slowly and concrete before moving into abstract areas.

Directions:

Materials needed: Semantic feature analysis chart (attached)
Time: 60 minutes.

1. START: Start with a category name--Characterization. Make sure your word is something students will understand and be familiar with.

2. LIST WORDS: Have students brainstorm and list words that fit the characters' traits. Try to get as many words as possible. Some examples are: handsome, evil, powerful, racist, clumsy, virtuous, independent, valuable, and conflicted.

3. LIST FEATURES: Decide on the characteristics you will use. Start with fewer until students become familiar with the strategy and then increase. Basically, don't make them fill out a chart for 30 different traits; start small, requiring only three or so.

4. INDICATE FEATURE POSSESSION: Guide the students through the character chart to see if they share characteristics. (use + / - signs). A question mark can be used to indicate a trait that is not really applicable to the character.

5. DISCUSSION AND ADD WORDS / FEATURES: Have a class discussion about the various character traits and their relation to one another. At this point the students have indicated feature possession, and they should be asked to generate and add more words / features to analyze.

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6. COMPLETE AND EXPLORE THE MATRIX: Students will now fill out the matrix on their own, coming up with words to fill in on the chart. Each student's matrix will be unique. Some students' charts may even disagree concerning traits between characters. Not only is this alright, it is also encouraged, because the student papers will be more unique. Also, students will learn more through coming up with their own categorizations and justifications.

Assessment: Students will use the comparison of character traits on their chart to write a paragraph about their favorite character. Students will go across the chart of characteristics to write about their character and his/her traits. Assigning students to write a one to two-page comparison paper can also be a good final assessment.

Summary and Segue: When the lesson is complete, make sure to have students summarize what they have learned about the book's characters by asking a couple of students to share the traits they observed and how they are manifest in the characters. As an exit card, have students divide up a 3x5 card into four parts. They will write four of the characters' names on each of the four portions of the card. Underneath each name, students will write one word that describes the character the best.

Student Worksheet: Include a space for students to write their name, the date, and the period. The goal is to make an instructional guide to enrich the teaching of the book. I have included a sample chart.

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<tr>
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<th>handsome</th>
<th>Evil</th>
<th>Powerful</th>
<th>Racist</th>
<th>Clumsy</th>
<th>Virtuous</th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>Valuable</th>
<th>Conflicted</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Huck</td>
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