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**Subject Area:** ELA  
**Grade Level:** Intermediate (4-5)  
**Skill Focus:** Grammar (sentence structure)

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**Mentor Text + Focus Phrase**

*Excerpt take from the “The City of Ember” by Jeanne DuPrau (2003)*

The Instructions

When the city of Ember was just built and not yet inhabited, the chief builder and the assistant builder, both of them weary, sat down to speak of the future.

“They must not leave the city for at least two hundred years,” said the chief builder. “Or perhaps two hundred and twenty.”

“Is that long enough?” asked his assistant.

“It should be. We can’t know for sure.”

“And when the time comes,” said the assistant, “how will they know what to do?”

“We’ll provide them with instructions, of course,” the chief builder replied.

“But who will keep the instructions? Who can we trust to keep them safe and secret all that time?”

“The mayor of the city will keep the instructions,” said the chief builder. “We’ll put them in a box with a timed lock, set to open on the proper date.”

“And will we tell the mayor what’s in the box?” the assistant asked.

“No, just that it’s information they won’t need and must not see until the box opens of its own accord.”

“So the first mayor will pass the box to the next mayor, and that one to the next, and so on down through the years, all of them keeping it secret, all that time?”

“What else can we do?” asked the chief builder. “Nothing about this endeavor is certain. There may be no one left in the city by then or no safe place for them to come back to.”

So the first mayor of Ember was given the box, told to guard it carefully, and solemnly sworn to secrecy. When she grew old, and her time as mayor was up, she explained about the box to her successor, who also kept the secret carefully, as did the next mayor. Things went as planned for many years. But the seventh mayor of Ember was less honorable than the ones who’d come before him, and more desperate. He was ill—he had the coughing sickness that was common in the city then—and he thought the box might hold a secret that would save his life. **He took it from its hiding place in the basement of the Gathering Hall and brought it home with him, where he attacked it with a hammer.**

But his strength was failing by then. All he managed to do was dent the lid a little. And before he could return the box to its official hiding place or tell his successor about it, he died. The box ended up at the back of a closet, shoved behind some old bags and bundles. There it sat, unnoticed, year after year, until its time arrived, and the lock quietly clicked open.

### Learning Goal

Students will dissect and rebuild a mentor sentence to grasp its grammatical structure and enhance their personal sentence writing skills.

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### Lesson Breakdown

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Activity	Materials	Description
Introduction	-Whiteboard,	With the focus phrase written on the whiteboard, initiate a discussion with students

<b>(5min)</b>	markers, eraser	<p>about its role in the prologue and potential impact on the plot of the story.</p> <p>→ Ex. “What does this tell us about the mayor?” “If the box has been moved from its hiding place, how will the other mayors know where to find it?” “If the box is gone, how will the citizens of <i>Ember</i> leave the city when the time comes?”</p>
<b>Deconstruct (7min)</b>	<p>-Whiteboard, markers, eraser</p> <p>-Sentence strips (focus phrase divided into 2 parts)</p>	<p>Prompt students to identify/label the parts of the sentence: the “naming” part (subject/who), the “telling” part (predicate/what), and the dependent and independent clauses. Students can come up to the board and point to each part, or volunteers can be selected to write the parts out under the sentence. Then, present sentence strips to students: one strip with the independent clause “<i>He took it from its hiding place in the basement of the Gathering Hall and brought it home with him,</i>” and one strip with the dependent clause “<i>where he attacked it with a hammer.</i>” Initiate a discussion about the clauses of the phrase, and their roles in contributing to the overall meaning.</p> <p>→ Ex.: “Why do we need to know that the mayor attacked the box with a hammer?” “Would the text still make sense without that knowledge?”</p>
<b>Reconstruct (7min)</b>	<p>-Whiteboard, markers, eraser</p> <p>-Sentence strips (focus phrase divided into 2 parts)</p>	<p>Reflect back on the phrase as a whole. Draw attention to the comma and conjunction “<i>where.</i>” Prompt students to consider if the sentence makes sense without the dependent clause, and if the dependent clause makes sense on its own. Play with the order of the clauses, and discuss how that affects the meaning of the phrase. Try using an alternative conjunction instead of “where” like “when” or “and.”</p> <p>→ Ex.: “What separates the 2 clauses?” “Does it make sense to just say ‘<i>He took it from its hiding place in the basement of the Gathering Hall and brought it home with him?</i>’” “What if “where” was replaced with “when?” “Do the clauses make sense in another order?”</p>
<b>Practice (10min)</b>	<p>-Whiteboard, markers, eraser</p> <p>-Students writing journals</p> <p>-Pencils</p>	<p>Write a cloze sentence on the board, “He/she/they/we _____, where _____.” Prompt students to consider another phrase using the conjunction “where” and mimicking the format of the cloze sentence. Initiate a group share back. Then, have students record 3 examples in their writing journals.</p>

## Sources

[Language Dives](#) - resource by EL Education Curriculum

“The City of Ember” - book by Jeanne Duprau