

Tips for Teaching Comprehension Strategies

Reading without comprehension or understanding is not reading. Many children can pronounce words fluently but when asked what they have just read, they are unable to respond. Although they may score high in terms of reading rate or fluency, they are not really good readers.

What makes a reader a good reader? A good reader is someone who has a purpose for reading, whether it is to look for specific information or to read for pleasure. A good reader is involved in a complicated thinking process as she or he reads. There are strategies that we can teach children to help them become purposeful, active readers. Research has shown that readers who receive explicit instruction in these strategies make significant gains on reading comprehension tests. These strategies include setting purposes for reading, making predictions, monitoring reading and realizing when something is not making sense, questioning during reading, making mental pictures of what is being read, drawing on prior knowledge, understanding story structure, and summarizing what is read. These strategies help make the reader make connections between the text and what they already know. The following suggests ways to help readers make use of these strategies as they read.

Make Predictions

Predictions encourage active reading and keep children interested, whether or not the predictions are correct. Incorrect predictions can signal a misunderstanding that needs to be revisited. Instruct children:

- Say: *Look at the pictures, table of contents, chapter headings, maps, diagrams, and features. What subjects are in the book?*
- Say: *Write down predictions about the text. During reading, look for words or phrases from those predictions.*
- Say: *While reading, revise the predictions or make new ones.*

Visualize

Many children think visually, using shapes, spatial relationships, movement, and colors, and can benefit greatly from visualizing what is happening as they read. Instruct children:

- Say: *Form a picture of a character or the setting in your mind. Add details to the writer's description.*
- Say: *Imagine a fiction story is like a movie taking place in your head. Imagine the characters' features. Picture the plot in time and space.*
- Say: *Imagine processes and explanations happening visually. Use nouns, verbs, and adjectives to create pictures, diagrams, or other mental images.*
- Say: *Use the graphic organizer to show information. Make sketches or diagrams on scrap paper.*

Ask and Answer Questions

Having children form their own questions helps them recognize confusion and encourages active learning. Instruct children:

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- Say: *Before reading, think about the subject based on the title, chapter heads, and visual information. Make note of anything you are curious about.*
- Say: *While reading, pause and think about or write down any questions. Be sure to ask questions if you are confused or unsure of something.*
- Say: *Look for the answers while reading. Pause and write down the answers.*
- Ask: *Were all the questions answered? Could the answers come from other sources?*

Many children don't understand where to find the answers to the questions they are asked. They need to know that some questions can be answered by looking in one specific place within a book, while others are answered by taking information from several places often spread over several pages. Some questions require combining text information with personal knowledge and experience, while others rely only on the personal knowledge of the reader. Help the child decide on the type of question and where the answer can be found.

- Ask: *Where do you think we can find the answer to this question? Let's look at the book. Can you find any of the words in the question on this page? That gives us a clue that the answer might be right there. (Answer is found on specific page.)*
- Ask: *What part of the book talked about [topic]? We could check the index [or table of contents] to see if we can find the pages that talk about this. Then let's check these pages to see if we can find the answer. (Answer found over several pages.)*
- Say: *The question asks you what you think about [topic]? You can use what you learned about [topic] in the book, but you have to also use your own ideas to answer this question. (Background is provided in text, but child needs to use prior knowledge)*
- Say: *The book doesn't talk about this, does it? You need to use your own ideas to answer this one. (Answer comes from the reader.)*

Retell and Summarize

Retelling or summarizing all or parts of the text in children's own words clears up language issues. Retelling challenges them to aim for complete retention. Summarization allows children to discriminate between main ideas and minor details.

- Say: *During reading, look for key events or ideas. Put a check mark in the book or write a note to point out these events or ideas.*
- Say: *At the ends of chapters or sections, review the information or story. Note main ideas or events and the details that support them.*
- Say: *After reading, retell or summarize the text. Focus on the important points, and support them with relevant details.*
- Say: *Feel free to look back into the book to check your retelling or summarization.*

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Using a graphic organizer such as those provided by Reading-Tutors reinforces the structure of a story and aids in a child's retelling. When the child is familiar with a typical story structure, it helps support her or his reading of the text.

- Ask: *Who are the characters in the story? Let's check the book and then write them on the graphic organizer.*
- Ask: *Where did this story take place?*
- Ask: *What happened first in the story? What happened next? Are you sure? Let's check the book? Etc.*
- Ask: *What was the problem in the story? How did the character(s) solve the problem?*
- Say: *Let's retell the story using our completed graphic organizer.*

Connect the Text to Life Experiences, Other Texts, or Prior Knowledge

Connecting a text to children's prior experiences and knowledge helps them personalize the information. It also helps children remember information when they link it to their lives. Instruct children:

- Ask: *Is the subject familiar? Do the characters resemble familiar people? Have you learned about the concept from school, home, or other experiences?*
- Ask: *Is the style or genre familiar? Does it remind you of other texts you have read? (Television shows, movies, and games can be considered "texts.")*
- Say: *Write down similarities between the current text and your experiences, knowledge, or other texts.*