

Comprehension

Success in all academic areas is dependent upon the ability to read and comprehend. Reading comprehension is a dynamic process, which requires interaction between the reader and the text. It is one of the five essential components of reading instruction. Mastery of the other components: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and fluency, facilitates reading comprehension. The act of comprehension is so sophisticated that there is not one instructional approach that can meet the needs of all readers with all texts in all learning situations (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).

Additionally, comprehension is not merely decoding or word-level processing, but rather a process that requires readers to problem-solve and select strategies that will help them construct meaning. Effective comprehension instruction entails explicit and direct instruction in specific comprehension strategies as well as numerous opportunities for students to read, discuss, and write about text (Duke & Pearson). An effective model for teaching comprehension strategies to students is through explicit instruction, teacher modeling, guided practice and *repeated* opportunities for application.

Comprehension instruction involves a variety of principles. To begin with, teachers must ensure that children are reading different kinds of text. The text must match the students' needs, the strategies used, and the purpose for reading. Teachers must create authentic situations and reasons to read real text. Moreover, the classroom environment must be one that fosters children and has the teacher engaging in high quality talk about text (Duke & Pearson). Students create meaning through interactive discussions with the teacher and other students (Hammerberg, 2004). This type of interaction allows students to be exposed to various interpretations of text, and also to see beyond the literal. Lastly, there must be ongoing assessment to determine the students' application of strategies and knowledge.

Students who struggle with reading need a repertoire of strategies that they can employ when they read. Sharon Lubliner found that self-generated, main idea questioning is a helpful intervention because students were "forced to comprehend as they read" (Lubliner, 2004 p. 433). When students generate their own questions, the learning is more authentic because it is student-generated as opposed to teacher-directed.

Reading comprehension involves effectively using the following strategies:

- making use of prior knowledge;
- answering and generating questions;
- monitoring comprehension;
- recognizing story structure;
- summarizing, and
- using graphic organizers.

The comprehension activities in this document reflect the aforementioned strategies. These strategies require repeated modeling and practice. Good readers are in control of their comprehension through conscious selection and use of said strategies.

Considerations when instructing ELLs include the following:

- Strategic reading is essential for ELLs who are learning to read because they tend to spend more time on decoding than on comprehending the text. Thus, comprehension strategies become significantly important when ELLs engage in reading.
- Reading comprehension is influenced by the background knowledge and experiences the reader brings to the text. Research has shown that the cultural origin of the text has more effect on the comprehension of the ELLs than the level of linguistic complexity (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998). Additionally, teachers must also consider that the ELLs may have already developed a schema related to a topic in another language. Thus, activating and/or building background knowledge is especially important for ELLs.
- ELLs may translate concepts literally, causing figurative language and/or idioms to interfere with text comprehension. Teachers can examine students' text beforehand to look for idioms and discuss the difference between literal and figurative meanings.
- ELLs who are struggling with reading are often placed in remedial programs that consist of phonemic awareness, phonics activities or vocabulary development in isolation. Teachers of ELLs must expose their students to high quality literature and activities that require higher order thinking skills.
- ELLs are expected to meet the same standards as native English speakers, and as such, teachers should not lower expectations when working with ELLs. Research has shown that students are more likely to improve academically when their teachers provide academic challenges and encourage all students to succeed, provide scaffolding, and use students' prior knowledge as a basis for teaching. Given access to a challenging curriculum, ELLs can achieve the same high standards as other students.
- Teachers should take into consideration the fact that young ELLs are working toward full development of their native language as well as the acquisition of English. Children between 5 and 10 years old are still acquiring the structures of their first language. Thus, merely translating a word or phrase may help some, but not all ELLs.
- ELLs benefit from interactive read alouds where teachers read books aloud with the use of expression and the active participation of the listener through predicting, discussing, and checking for understanding. Read alouds expose the ELLs to a strong English language model as well as give them access to books that they may not be able to read independently.
- Many strategies and activities that aid reading comprehension involve student conversation about how students are applying comprehension strategies. Interactive discussions with other students are a key element in facilitating reading comprehension. Teachers must consider the level of oral language proficiency of the ELL when choosing which strategies to use.

Comprehension Activities/Strategies

Reciprocal Teaching

TIP: Students must practice Reciprocal Teaching at least 20 times before they automatically incorporate the strategy.

Purpose:

To improve students' comprehension of text by integrating the processes of predicting, clarifying, visualizing, questioning, and summarizing.

Materials:

Reading passage

Procedure:

Phase I: Introduction and Modeling

1. Choose a short, well-written passage that can be divided into 5-6 logical parts.
2. Explain and define each of the five strategies: predicting, clarifying, visualizing, questioning, and summarizing.
3. Tell the students that the strategies may be done in any order, but model the five strategies in order until they are comfortable with the procedure.
4. Write the title or the topic on the board and ask the students to take a few minutes to predict the content and write their predictions. Discuss the students' predictions.
5. Read through the first paragraph. Ask the students if they found a word that was confusing in the paragraph. Clarify each word separately, guiding the students to an understanding of the word through context clues or structural analysis. In some cases, you may have to supply the definition.
6. Read the next paragraph. Ask the students to draw and describe the image that came to their minds when they read the paragraph.
7. Ask students to form simple comprehension questions that can be answered from the text. Teachers can provide question stems on the board as guides.
8. After reading the next portion of the text, ask students to tell what happened in one or two sentences. The goal is to help them synthesize the information and help them understand the main ideas.
9. Ask students to predict what the next part of the passage will be about.
10. Read aloud the next part of the passage and repeat the process.
11. Continue modeling over a period of several days until students are comfortable with the strategies.

Phase II: Continued practice and guidance: whole group instruction and cooperative groups

1. After modeling, ask a student to be the teacher and do the five strategy sequence with the class. Provide feedback.
2. When the students are ready, they can move into cooperative groups as they read lessons from assigned texts. Each member of the group will focus on a different strategy. Move from group to group to monitor progress.
3. Check comprehension by asking the class to complete a framed summary paragraph.

Phase III: Independent Reading

(Reciprocal teaching as a reading comprehension strategy is based on research conducted by Palinscar and Brown in 1984.)

Probable Passage

TIP: ELLs should be familiar with the literacy terms.
Vary the ELL levels within the groups.

Purpose:

To encourage students to make predictions, activate prior knowledge, see causal relationships, and make inferences *before* they read.

Materials:

List of eight to fourteen words, Probable Passage handout or transparency, and story

Procedure:

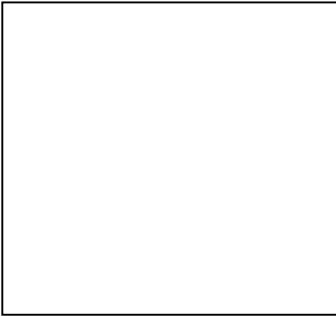
1. Choose eight to fourteen key words. Choose words that have clear relationships, some that are unknown, and some that might encourage discussion.
2. Place students in small groups (4-5). Students will place the words into different categories: characters, setting, problem, outcomes, and unknown words. Do not define the unknown words at this time.
3. Rotate around the room to help the groups as needed and to monitor student involvement.
4. Each group creates a GIST statement. It is not necessary to use the words on the list for the GIST statement. Groups will share their gist statements as well as how they categorized the words.
5. For the “To Discover” section, ask the class to generate three questions they would like answered in the story.
6. All groups will write these questions in the “To Discover” section.
7. After reading, ask students the following:
 - Can they now answer the questions?
 - Would they like to rewrite their gist statement?
 - Have they learned the unknown words?
 - Did they place the words in the correct categories?
 - Are there any additional questions that were not answered in the reading?

(See next page for organizer.)

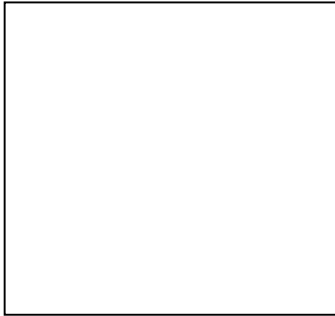
Probable Passage Organizer

Title of Selection: _____

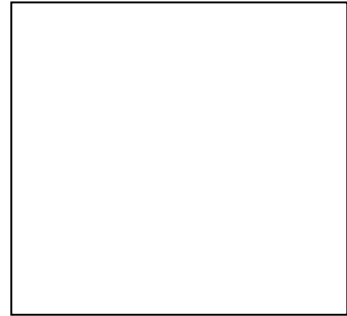
Characters



Setting



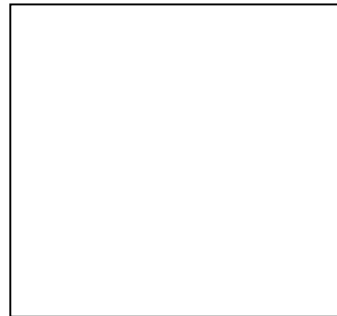
Problem



Outcomes



Unknown Words



GIST Statement:

To Discover:

It Says-I Say-And So

TIP: Teachers should not give more than five questions. Students can work in pairs or small groups.

Purpose:

To help students internalize the process of how to infer using a visual scaffold.

Materials:

Reading passage, It Says-I Say Chart

It Says-I Say-And So			
Question	It Says	I Say	And So

Procedure:

1. Introduce the strategy using a short, familiar story such as “The Three Bears” or “The Three Little Pigs.”
2. Review the text with literal questions.
3. Ask a question that requires the students to make an inference.
4. If a student answers correctly, ask the student to explain how the inference was made. If no one can make the inference, the teacher can answer it, putting the answer on the chart.
5. Students complete the “It Says” column with information from the text.
6. Students complete the “I Say” column with what they know about the information in the “It Says” column.
7. Students complete the “And So” (inference) by combining what the text says with what they know.

Sketch to Stretch

TIP: Older and/or more advanced ELLs can write a paragraph explaining their sketches.

Purpose:

To visually represent the theme(s) of a story.

Materials:

Sketch paper and crayons or colored pencils

Procedure:

1. After reading and discussing a story, students work in small groups to draw sketches that reflect what the story means to them. Students can use lines, colors, shapes, symbols, and words in their sketches. Focus is on the meaning of the story, not on a favorite part.
2. Students share sketches with classmates in small groups. Encourage student discussion about the sketches.
3. Each group chooses one sketch from the group to share with the class.
4. Students can revise sketches and make final copies.

Read and Say Something

TIP: Students first need to practice with very short texts. Teacher can direct the stopping points.

Purpose:

To assist students in constructing meaning from text. This strategy is especially helpful for struggling readers because it helps them infer meaning *before* the end of the reading task.

Materials:

Reading material

Procedure:

1. Students can choose partners or teachers can pair students. Students should be paired according to reading and language proficiency. Do not pair a very proficient student with a beginner. This may frustrate both the beginner and the proficient student.
2. Obtain reading material.
3. Students will divide the reading task into thirds.
4. Each person “says something” by doing one or more of the following: predicting, summarizing, clarifying, questioning, making a connection or making a comment. It is the partner’s job to offer a response to what was said.
5. The teacher rotates around the room to monitor activity and to help as needed.
6. Students continue to stop and “say something” at the second and third point.
7. Students then discuss, as a group, the material read.

Question Stems

Make a Prediction

- I predict that . . .
- I bet that . . .
- I think that . . .
- Since _____ happened, then I bet the next thing that is going to happen is . . .
- Reading this part makes me think that _____ is about to happen . . .
- I wonder if...

Ask a question

- Why did . . . ?
- What’s this part about . . . ?
- How is _____ like _____ . . . ?
- What would happen if . . . ?
- Why . . . ?
- Who is . . . ?
- Do you think that . . . ?
- I don’t get this part about...

Make a comment

- This is good because . . .
- This is hard because . . .
- This is confusing because . . .
- I like the part where . . .
- I don’t like this part because . . .
- My favorite part so far is . . .
- I think that...

Make a connection

- This reminds me of . . .
- This part is like . . .
- This character _____ is like _____ because . . .
- This is similar to . . .
- The differences are . . .
- I also (name something in the text that has also happened to you) . . .
- This character makes me think of . . .

Clarify something

- Oh, I get it . . .
- Now I understand . . .
- This makes sense now . . .
- No, I think it means . . .
- At first I thought (fill in detail), but now I think . . .
- This part is really saying...

Summary Statements

TIP: Students can create class-generated SWBS statements.

Purpose: To summarize a narrative and analyze story structure, using a graphic organizer. When students generate different **Somebody Wanted But So** statements (SWBS), it allows for meaningful discussion about the text. The summary statements can be for the whole text or selected parts.

Materials:

Graphic organizer of **Somebody Wanted But So** for each student or on the board

Procedure:

1. Teach students how to use this graphic organizer by modeling how you create a **Somebody Wanted But So** (SWBS) statement using a narrative poem.
2. Read the poem aloud and then discuss with students which *somebody* to include, what that somebody *wanted*, what caused a problem (*but*), and how that problem was resolved (*so*).
3. If the text is long, students may need to break it into chunks using connecting words such as “then,” “later,” and, or “but” between the statements.

Somebody	Wanted	But	So
Cinderella	wanted to go to the ball,	but her stepmother said she had to finish her chores,	so Cinderella worked really hard and finished her chores.
THEN			
Cinderella	wanted to go to the ball,	but she didn't have a dress,	so Cinderella's fairy godmother made Cinderella a dress for the ball.

4. You may ask students to change the character in the “Somebody” column to teach students about point of view.
5. Students can share their SWBS statements to generate a class discussion and review of the text.

Other Forms of Summary Statements

1. Descriptive: A _____ is a kind of _____ that....
2. Compare/Contrast: _____ a _____ and _____ b _____ are similar in that they both ..., but _____ a _____ while _____ b _____....
3. Sequence: _____ begins with..., continues with..., and ends with....
4. Cause/Effect: _____ happens because....

Paraphrase Concentration

TIP: The students can work in teams with peer scaffolding. The game can also be played as whole class instead of individually.

Purpose: To have the student improve comprehension by focusing on phrase meaning rather than word identification.

Materials:

A set of 3 X 5 cards of phrases; another set of 3 X 5 cards containing paraphrases corresponding to each phrase on the first set of cards

Procedure:

1. The cards are shuffled and randomly placed face down in rows.
2. Player A turns over 2 cards. If they match, Player A keeps them and has another turn.
3. If the cards do NOT match, Player A turns them down again and Player B takes a turn. (All players need to concentrate in order to remember the position of the cards.)
4. Play continues until all cards are matched.
5. The player with the most pairs is the winner.

Variations: It can be used for practice in areas such as: synonyms/antonyms, present/past verb tenses, singular/plural nouns, etc. The cards can also be generated from main events in a story/novel that is being studied.

Paraphrase Concentration

The boy scout picked out a book about frogs.	Ten cents fell on the sidewalk.	Kevin ate a hamburger.	Everyone celebrated Kelly's birthday.	Mom worked late on Wednesday.
The frog book was selected by the boy scout.	There were ten pennies that fell on the sidewalk.	The hamburger was eaten by Kevin.	Kelly's birthday was celebrated by all.	On Wednesday, Mom worked late.
That boy helped father mow the grass.	Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep.	John painted the house yellow.	Cinderella was her favorite storybook character.	Oscar and Olivia graded the tests.

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