

Ways to Foster Reading Comprehension in Children

Do you have a little reader or emergent reader at home? If so, you have the power to help him/her develop thinking patterns that proficient readers use and foster good reading comprehension. It is as easy as incorporating a few simple strategies into story times with your child!



--A Glossary of Terms --

Decoding: Using the knowledge of letters and the sounds they represent to break down and “read” text.

Comprehension: The skill of attaching meaning to words; understanding the author’s meaning of text.

Context Clues: Hints within the text that help readers identify words and understand meaning. For example, if reading a book about dogs, a reader may use **context clues** to guess that the end of the sentence, “My dog likes to _____” could be words such as *bark*, *run*, *play*, *fetch*, or other words associated with dogs. In addition, a reader using **word order/syntactic (grammar)** clues would know that the word at the end of the previous sentence has to be a verb; a noun wouldn’t make sense. Another type of context clue is **pictures**; readers can look at illustrations to figure out what the text says.

Metacognition: The ability to recognize what the brain is doing *while* doing it, or, in other words, *thinking about thinking*. Readers with high **metacognition** skills ask themselves, “Does it (the text) look right? Does it sound right?” while reading; they also think about **what they know**, and **what they don’t know**.

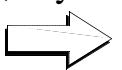
Metacomprehension: The ability to use **self-monitoring** techniques while reading, being aware whether or not understanding is taking place, and the ability to shift strategies purposely to improve understanding. Readers with high **metacomprehension** skills may ask themselves, “I didn’t understand that last sentence. What can I do to understand what I am reading?”

Good readers use the following thinking patterns. They...

- ✓ Integrate ***decoding*** text with understanding the meaning (***comprehension***)
- ✓ Visualize pictures and imagine ideas about the story while they are reading
- ✓ Think as they read
- ✓ Have high ***metacognition*** and ***metacomprehension*** skills
- ✓ Use pictures in the story and other ***context clues*** to figure out text



The next time you and your child snuggle up with a good book or children’s magazine, try to incorporate some of the comprehension boosting strategies found on the next page.





Strategies to Teach Children Thinking Patterns Good Readers Use

STRATEGY #1: TV RECALL

GOAL: To teach children how to use pictures to attach meaning to words.

While reading aloud to your children, have them “watch” a blank TV screen or blank space on a wall or close their eyes, depending on which way they feel more comfortable. Encourage them to imagine they are watching a television show or a movie in their mind about the story you are reading. Stop periodically to ask them, “What did you see in your program/movie?”
In this activity, the adult does all the reading.

STRATEGY #2: READ, PAUSE, THINK

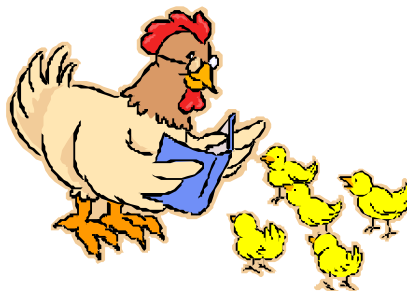
This activity should be done after your child is familiar with the “TV Recall” activity above.



GOALS: 1) To encourage children to continue **visualizing** the story being read on their internal “TV screens” while they follow the print as you read to them; and 2) To teach children that when they read independently, they should use their internal “TV screens” to picture and imagine what is happening in the story.

Start this activity before you open the book by asking your children to close their eyes and imagine a character they have seen recently in a movie or show, or a person they know whom is not present. Then have them describe that character or person to you. It could be Big Bird, Cinderella, Yoda, the neighbor next door - whomever! The point is to get the children to practicing **visualizing**.

Next, **read** the story and ask your children to follow the print as you read. **Pause** periodically to ask them, “What are you seeing in your mind as I read the story?” Even if there are pictures in the book that give your children an idea of what they could be “seeing”, have them **think** about and expand on their thoughts.



The information for these tip sheets on reading comprehension was adapted and inspired by many sources, including the home schooling Web site www.familyschool.com, ERIC Digest at www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests, www.earlychildhood.com, and www.eduplace.com/rdg/res/teach/rec.html

--The Title I Dissemination Project, 2002 --

STRATEGY #3: THINKING ALOUD WHILE READING

GOAL: To help children develop high **metacognition** and **metacomprehension** skills; to think about their thinking, reading, and level of understanding.

By modeling reflections and sharing thoughts out loud while you are reading to children, they will learn how to self-monitor their own reading and use strategies to make sense of text. In addition, they will learn how to connect new information to former knowledge. The next time you read to your children, show them these “think aloud” techniques.



Make predictions: Use the title, pictures, and opening sentences; let your child hear you make statements such as, “I think this part will be about...”



Describe the picture that you are visualizing while reading. Say, “I see... in my mind.”



Make analogies: Connect prior knowledge you have to new information in the text by stating, “This situation (in the story) is like...” (e.g., if you are reading about characters on a picnic, you can say, “This is like the time we went on a family picnic last summer, remember?”)



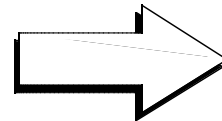
Verbalize “confusion”: Pretend you don’t understand something and say, “This doesn’t make sense to me... I’m not certain what the author is suggesting.” This will teach the child how to recognize when s/he is confused about meaning while reading.



Model ways to help with decoding or comprehension: Saying, “I’d better read this part again;” or, “If I think about the way we talk, I might be able to read this sentence better” will teach the child to go back when s/he is confused and reread troubling parts.

The final goal is for the children to apply the “think aloud” techniques when they are reading independently to boost comprehension.

Turn the page for more ideas!



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STRATEGY #4: CALLING ATTENTION TO CONTEXT CLUES



GOAL: To help children learn how to get “unstuck” while reading independently by using **context clues**.

To help children learn to use **context clues** while they reading, try these techniques:

- ❖ **Back up:** If the child misreads the sentence/word, have him/her back up and reread it.
- ❖ **Call attention to the storyline:** If the child is stuck, ask, “What is the story about? What would make sense in this sentence?”
- ❖ **Call attention to the word the child is stuck on:** Say, “Look at the first letter of the word. How does this word start? What sound does that letter usually make?”
- ❖ **Examine the word, sentence, and story for other clues:** Ask, “Do you see smaller words within the larger word?” Call attention to the beginning (prefix) & ending (suffix) of the word.
- ❖ **Call attention to pictures:** Say, “Look at the picture...does it give you a hint about what this sentence says?”
- ❖ **Call attention to syntactic/grammar clues:** If the child misreads a sentence, and it doesn’t make sense grammatically, ask, “Does that sound like the way we talk?”
- ❖ **Skip and read:** If all techniques fail to figure out a word, encourage the child to skip it and go back to it later.

STRATEGY #5: RETELLING

GOALS: 1) To determine whether your child has understood a story and; 2) To help your child improve comprehension through developing sequential memory, confidence, and focusing techniques.

...and then the
frog said...



After you are finished reading the story, close the book and have your child “retell” it back to you. You may want to give him/her a piece of paper folded into three equally-sized columns. In the first column, have him/her draw something that occurred in the beginning of the story; in the middle column, something that happened in the middle of the story; and in the last column, something that happened at the end. Encourage him/her to use the drawing as a guide for retelling. Listen, and ask yourself the following questions:

Does s/he understand the main idea of the story, report events accurately, and sequence the events correctly (in order)? Does s/he use vocabulary from the text and include information about the characters and setting? Can s/he relate information from the text to his or her own life? Can s/he determine a beginning, middle, and end of the story? How many details are included in the retelling?

The more you read to and with your child, and the more s/he retells stories back to you, the better s/he will become at focusing on important points and the order of events. The child’s confidence, vocabulary, and speaking & listening skills should improve with practice as well. ❀