Chapter 2

READING COMPREHENSION: STRATEGIES THAT WORK

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“As teachers of literacy ... we must have as an instructional goal, regardless of age, grade, or achievement level, the development of students as purposeful, engaged, and ultimately independent comprehenders.... No matter what grade level you teach, no matter what content you teach, no matter what texts you teach with, your goal is to improve students’ comprehension and understanding.”**

“How important it is to remember that comprehension is the essence of reading and that it has to be taught and cannot be left to chance!”**

* Rasinski et al. 2000, 1
** Opitz and Eldridge 2004, 772
Find Out More About Reading Comprehension


Research on Reading Comprehension

Reading is comprehension. “Comprehension involves what the reader knows as well as the nature of the text itself. It involves the type of text to be read—narrative, expository, poetry, etc. It involves the purpose for reading” (Rasinski et al. 2000, 1). The sociocultural context at home and at school also affects comprehension and all other learning.

(Adapted from Snow 2002, Fig. S-1)

Reading without understanding is like eating without digesting.

Comprehension: Thoughtful Literacy

To teach comprehension is to teach thoughtful literacy. Thoughtful literacy is not a separate kind of literacy, but the umbrella for all literacy learning across the curriculum. Literacy is much more than
being able to read a menu, fill in a simple form, or recall details from fiction or nonfiction text. It is about making connections with the text. Students who have mastered thoughtful literacy can do more than merely regurgitate the text: they can read, write, listen, speak, view, and represent in complex ways. Teachers whose focus is thoughtful literacy will invariably help their students to be critically literate: to question the attitudes, values, and beliefs that lie beneath the surface of written, spoken, and visual texts. Their students become aware that all texts are created from a certain perspective or bias and examine each text to see how it positions them as they read, listen, or view.

Why Is Teaching Critical Literacy So Important?

Many people read or listen to texts without questioning or analyzing the author’s viewpoint, position, or purpose. They simply accept what is presented to them, especially what appears in print, as fact. Now, with more and more avenues for accessing information (e.g., computers, online networks, electronic games, the media, and music), it is crucial that students learn to question information. They need to be aware that all texts are written from a perspective and it is important to examine the texts (including words, diagrams, photos, graphs, and charts) for issues of bias, stereotyping, and social justice.

Critical Thinking and Critical Literacy: Are They the Same?

Critical thinking and critical literacy are not the same, although they are related. Critical thinking involves logical and reflective thinking and reasoning, which helps one decide what to believe or do. A person who thinks critically asks appropriate questions, gathers and sorts through relevant information, reasons logically, and makes decisions as to how to think and live in the world. Critical literacy requires critical thinking with a specific focus on social issues and social justice.

Teachers, too, must be critical thinkers to develop critical literacy skills, especially in the area of educational research. When examining educational research, teachers will benefit from asking some key questions.

“Being a ‘critical’ citizen means questioning what one hears or reads and evaluating those texts for accuracy… Analytic skills are essential for looking ‘below the surface’ to determine what a writer is trying to do. And critiquing skills are necessary for the reader to evaluate what the text is saying.”

Fountas and Pinnell 2001, 368
Knowing how to think thoughtfully (rather than what to think) is the key to all learning. Effective teachers set up a classroom environment that promotes critical thinking and critical literacy as students read, write, listen, speak, view, and represent across all subject areas across the day.

See Developing Critically Literate Students, pages 130–34, as well as Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading–Writing Connection and Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum for more information on critical literacy.

Effective Comprehension Teaching and Learning

Research offers guidance to teachers on how best to support their students’ reading comprehension. The four key features of comprehension instruction are the amount of time engaged in reading, explicit strategy instruction, rich talk (discussion), and writing. Students not only need to read a great deal, but they also need to be taught a small number of effective comprehension strategies. In addition, students require many opportunities to solidify comprehension by discussing and writing about what they are reading, hearing, and seeing.

A research study conducted at the end of the 1970s (Durkin 1978–79, 481–533) found that from Grade 3 onward students received very little instruction in reading comprehension. Instead, teachers focused on comprehension testing. Once a reading was completed, students were often required to respond to questions based on what was read.

Researchers observed this same practice at the end of the 1990s. “Given the large volume of research on the topic in the past quarter century, there has been the potential for a revolution in schools with respect to comprehension instruction. Even so, no revolution has occurred. For example, when my colleagues and I observed fourth- and fifth-grade classrooms in the late 1990s, we, too, saw little comprehension instruction but many teachers posing post reading comprehension questions” (Pressley 2001). In other words, comprehension was more often assessed than taught.
Why Is So Little Comprehension Instruction Occurring in Classrooms?

The Language Arts curriculum (and indeed other curricula) is full, even stretched. Teachers often have a difficult time “fitting it all in.” Also, it is often faster and easier to teach students to decode than to try to get inside their heads to improve understanding. For example, teaching a student to infer or summarize is generally more challenging than teaching a word family, prefix, or suffix. “Sometimes ... comprehension instruction is delayed until the later elementary grades, even though a focus on comprehension is desirable from the very beginning of reading instruction” (Snow 2002, 5).

Many students (including ESL students) may be able to decode at very high levels. However, effective decoding and comprehension are not always synonymous. It is important for teachers to distinguish the word callers from the fluent readers.

Finally, teachers are often unsure which of the many comprehension strategies will make a difference. Effective teachers now know, however, that a few—and only a few—research-based strategies have consistently proven their worth. And, since reading is comprehension, students’ reading will improve with more selective and effective comprehension strategy instruction.

Factors That Affect Reading Comprehension

Research indicates that many students, especially those who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, become less effective readers as they move from the early to the upper-elementary grades (Chall, Jacobs, and Baldwin 1990). In other words, there is a slump in their reading beginning around the fourth grade and often increasing through high school. To understand the causes of the “fourth-grade slump,” it is important to examine the factors that affect reading comprehension in general.

Key factors that influence reading comprehension are
- students’ reading attitudes (motivation and interests)
- time truly engaged in reading
- effective comprehension strategy instruction across all subject areas
- vocabulary and world knowledge
- fluency
- type of text or genre
- opportunities for rich talk and written response
- understanding and implementing the strategies used by effective readers

Students’ Reading Attitudes

Attitudes strongly influence motivation and affect achievement in reading. Students who see themselves as readers have positive attitudes toward reading. They are motivated to read and they read for a variety of purposes (e.g., for enjoyment, to escape, to obtain new
information, to gain understanding of issues, to learn about themselves). These students also set goals for their reading and are engaged with texts. In short, they are more likely to read!

Some students, however, reach the upper elementary grades with the attitude or belief that reading is more about word calling than making meaning. Other students may know how to read effectively but choose not to. These students are often described as aliterate.

Students with poor attitudes toward reading will usually read only when they have to and will often “fake it” during independent reading. Due to their lack of reading experience, they will likely not be able to comprehend complex texts beyond a literal level.

**Time Truly Engaged in Reading**

In an extensive study of independent reading, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) investigated a broad array of activities and their relationship to reading achievement and growth in reading. They found that the amount of time students spent in independent reading was the best predictor of reading achievement gain between Grades 2 and 5. Stanovich (1986) found that students who are able to read generally read more. As they read, they become better readers, improve their vocabularies, and enhance their knowledge of the language structure. Reluctant readers, most of whom are struggling, read very little and fall further and further behind. Stanovich calls this the Matthew Effect, and it is a likely contributing factor to the “fourth-grade slump.”

However, there is a caution: “Not all students automatically improve their reading just because we give them time to read. If students are reading mostly difficult books, if they don’t understand what they read, if no one is monitoring their progress, not much changes. I have been in far too many classrooms where students are staring at books they cannot and do not read and where sustained silent/independent reading is largely a waste of time” (Routman 2002, 84).

**Effective Comprehension Strategy Instruction Across All Subject Areas**

As mentioned earlier, there is little comprehension instruction occurring in most Language Arts classrooms. In addition, there tends to be less emphasis on comprehension instruction in subject-specific classrooms where teachers are focused on content (Snow 2002). It is important for all teachers to see themselves as reading teachers. (See Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum for more information.)

**Vocabulary and World Knowledge**

The texts in Grades 4 through 8 tend to contain words and ideas that are beyond the students’ own language and knowledge of the world. Jeanne Chall found that although students’ language seemed to be sufficient for the first three grades, students were not prepared for the greater number of abstract, technical, and literary words encountered in the upper elementary grades. The language gap is yet another suggested contributing factor to the fourth-grade slump and the “chief cause of the achievement gap between socioeconomic groups” (Hirsch 2003, 10).
Research has demonstrated that comprehension improves as a function of vocabulary instruction (Pressley 2001). For vocabulary teaching to be effective, it needs to be explicit. Although students may learn vocabulary incidentally, without planned opportunities for vocabulary instruction, they may not have the breadth of experience to derive the meaning of new words in unknown contexts. The more exposure students have to a new word, the more their vocabulary knowledge increases. Although reading frequently is important, it is not enough to increase vocabulary knowledge. To really learn the meaning of a new word, students must repeatedly encounter and use the word.

Another important component of reading comprehension is world knowledge, particularly background knowledge that is relevant to the topic of the text. Researchers at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois (among others) found that reading comprehension can be enhanced by a developing reader’s prior knowledge. One way to do this is to provide readers with high-quality, information-rich texts, and then to help them relate what they already know to the texts. “[O]ne of the most effective ways to improve comprehension is to ‘activate mental files’ before reading” (Keene and Zimmermann 1997, 51). But some readers will need these mental files supported.

See also Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Learning, for more on vocabulary development and activating prior knowledge.

**Fluency**

Fluent readers read smoothly, without hesitation, and with expression. Generally, this allows them to focus on meaning making, or comprehension.

To be able to understand what they read, students first need to be able to decode the words on the page. The goal is to have students develop the capacity to have automatic word recognition (automaticity) in order to help them become good comprehenders. “A first recommendation to educators who want to improve students’ comprehension skills is to teach them to decode well.... Word-recognition skills must be developed to the point of fluency if comprehension benefits are to be maximized” (Pressley 2001).

Reading fluently and at a rate appropriate for the text enables effective readers to gain meaning from what they are reading. When readers focus on the mechanics of reading and read word by word, their comprehension is limited. They are often so concerned with saying all the words correctly that they lose track of what the words mean. “If decoding does not happen quickly, the decoded material will be forgotten before it is understood” (Hirsch 2003, 12).

Fluent readers incorporate a variety of reading strategies to understand what they are reading. Students with strong vocabulary and background knowledge more easily use syntax (grammar) and semantics (meaning) to help them figure out the words and read fluently. Phrasing and reading the punctuation also support comprehension. Additionally, fluent readers adjust the rate of their reading based
on their purpose for reading, the form of text, and their interest in and background knowledge about the text. However, some students read too quickly, which can lessen comprehension.

**Type of Text or Genre**

Most students in Grades 3 to 6 are interested in and need opportunities to read a variety of different genres. Beyond novels, short stories, and poetry, they read content from textbooks, articles, the Internet, and other resource materials in school. They also read magazines, comics, trading cards, recipes, advertisements, environmental print, and online material (Doctorow, Bodiam, and McGowan 2003). Students read about music, movies, fashion, sports, and technology. They read about the environment, animals, inventions, and people living in other places. When students read for pleasure, they make choices based on a variety of criteria, including the difficulty of the text. “The results of the 1992 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) revealed that fourth graders who reported reading not only stories but also magazines and information books had the highest [reading] achievement” (Dreher 2000, 18).

See also Using Various Text Types and Genres, pages 353–58, in Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum.

By learning to recognize the structures of different types of texts, students will be better able to comprehend what they are reading. At some point around the fourth grade there is an abrupt move from reading and writing mainly narrative texts to reading and writing expository texts. As students advance through the grades, expository text plays an increasing role in their learning. The fourth-grade slump has been attributed, at least in part, to children not having enough exposure to expository text during the third grade. Topics must be compelling enough that both teachers and students want to talk about what they read.

“The main goal is to develop students who want to read. Hooking them is the key. Magazines, a popular choice for adult readers, are one good option.”

“[We] need to place a far greater emphasis on nonfiction in early language-arts classes. This emphasis is essential for children to learn the words and concepts they need to understand newspapers, magazines, and books addressed to the general public.”

Chall in Hirsch 2003, 21
Factors That Affect Comprehension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fiction</th>
<th>Nonfiction</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Tells a story</td>
<td>• Provides information</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Vocabulary is more familiar</td>
<td>• Vocabulary is specialized and technical</td>
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<td>• Reader needs to connect with characters</td>
<td>• Reader needs to interact with subject matter</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Holds reader’s attention with plot</td>
<td>• Holds reader’s attention by the structure, organization, and content of the text</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Usually bases themes on reader’s experiences</td>
<td>• Often shares unfamiliar abstract concepts that are concisely presented</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Has a distinctive writing style</td>
<td>• Has concise content-laden writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is mainly intended to entertain</td>
<td>• Presents material to expand knowledge and solve problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Allows fairly rapid reading</td>
<td>• Requires slower, more flexible rate, and constant need to adjust rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conveys meaning mainly through words</td>
<td>• Often uses graphic aids (graphs, charts, tables, maps)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is more personal</td>
<td>• Often written in third person</td>
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(Adapted from State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Governor’s Literacy Education and Reading Network Source)

Opportunities for Rich Talk and Written Response

Talk is the cornerstone for reading comprehension, especially for students in Grades 3 to 6, because they are spending more time reading for information and for learning. Talk with adults and other students plays a critical role in helping students clarify meaning and extend their understanding of texts that contain new concepts, ideas, and information.

It is important that students make personal connections to texts, not simply recall or summarize them; group discussions and conversations help students to do this. Students must explain how they know and make sense of the passages being discussed. Sharing their understanding through talk enables students to learn thinking strategies.

Teachers encourage talk by developing classroom discussions that focus on interpretation or constructing ideas rather than on giving right or wrong answers. In this kind of discussion, teachers assume that listeners have something to say beyond the answers teachers already know. Student-led book clubs and book talks offer authentic ways for discussion to occur. (See pages 140–42 for more on these topics, as well as Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Learning.) Research indicates that cooperative learning activities for students with mixed levels of reading ability can help students to...
improve their comprehension, specifically higher-level reasoning (Klinger, Vaughan, and Shumm 1998).

Writing also supports comprehension and helps students reveal what they comprehend.

How Writing Supports Comprehension

As a prereading activity, writing helps students to
• call up background knowledge
• relate the new knowledge from their writing task to their prior experience
• make predictions

As a during-reading activity, writing helps students to
• keep track of characters
• follow a story line
• make predictions

As a post-reading activity, writing helps students to
• elaborate on the text and their understanding of it
• become more sensitive to different topics or characteristics of text
• understand the text more deeply
• retain what they have read

See Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading–Writing Connection for more on how writing can support comprehension.

Understanding and Implementing the Strategies Used by Effective Readers

Many studies over the past 20 years have come to be known as “proficient reader research.” This research set out to identify the reading strategies used most frequently by successful readers. What follows are the general characteristics exhibited by more proficient readers and less proficient readers.
The studies found that the most critical and overarching comprehension strategy is for students to be mindful of their thinking as they read. For example, when effective readers are having difficulty understanding what a piece of text means, they stop reading, think about why they might be having trouble understanding, and then try a fix-up strategy to help them understand before continuing. They monitor their comprehension. In other words, students need to learn how to think metacognitively in order to become proficient and thoughtful comprehenders of any kind of text.

“Surprisingly, many of the studies that examined the thinking of proficient readers pointed to only seven or eight thinking strategies used consistently by proficient readers. Even more surprisingly, the researchers described the same seven or eight strategies in their findings.”

Keene and Zimmermann 1997, 21

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Effective Comprehension Strategies

Students who enter third or fourth grade with limited exposure to effective comprehension strategies will likely experience a reading slump. For most students, it is imperative that teachers provide strategy instruction by modeling, demonstrating, and explaining, often through think-alouds. Students then need to apply these strategies through much shared, guided, and independent reading. (See The Think-Aloud—The Best Way to Teach Strategies, pages 145–46, and Gradual Release of Responsibility, pages 144–45.)

Metacognition, or thinking about one’s own thinking, is an umbrella term given to the following eight strategies for improving text comprehension. Each thinking strategy is a variation of metacognition (Keene and Zimmermann 1997).

- monitoring comprehension
- using narrative and expository text structures
- visually representing text using graphic and semantic organizers
- retelling, summarizing, synthesizing, inferring
- generating questions
- answering questions
- using prior knowledge/predicting
- using mental imagery (visualizing)

Use of these strategies requires students to think about their thinking and will assist them with improving their listening and viewing comprehension as well.

Monitoring Comprehension—The Number One Strategy

When students monitor their comprehension (or metacomprehend) as they read, they determine how well they are making sense of the text and what to do when their comprehension breaks down.

Weak comprehenders often don’t realize where or when they don’t understand. They just keep reading! Students need to know that reading must always make sense. When comprehension breaks down, it is important to use appropriate fix-up strategies. Students need to determine if a word has been incorrectly decoded or if a word or sentence has been misunderstood given the context. They also need to review whether they understand how the text is organized. Loss of interest or concentration also affects comprehension.

For more information, refer to Monitoring Comprehension—The Number One Strategy, pages 147–55, under Linking Assessment to Instruction later in this chapter.

Using Narrative and Expository Text Structures

Different kinds of texts are organized in different ways. The organization of most fiction texts is familiar to students in Grades 3 to 6. They know that the story will have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It will have at least one problem and solution and will involve one or more characters. The students know about setting, plot, and main idea.
However, by the time students are in Grades 3 to 6, they are exposed to many more forms of writing, including poetry, content-area textbooks, magazines, and information from the Internet. Many nonfiction texts reflect a variety of text features, which may include different levels of headings, words in bold or italicized print, diagrams, graphics, tables of contents, indexes, and glossaries. Text is often presented in a nonlinear format, particularly on the Internet where text is hotlinked.

To become successful, proficient readers, students need to be exposed to, and learn about, a variety of text formats. See also Using Narrative and Expository Text Structures, pages 155–59, under Linking Assessment to Instruction later in this chapter.

**Visually Representing Text Using Graphic and Semantic Organizers**

Graphic and semantic organizers help readers remember what they have read. They are an effective way to help students represent information from both narrative and informational texts and to concretely manage, retain, and recall abstract information. English as a Second Language (ESL) students, or other English Language Learners (ELL) and students with learning disabilities particularly benefit from the use. The visual representation of text content is an effective, non-verbal approach to interpreting what has been read. It is important, however, not to bombard students with organizers; rather, help them learn how and where to strategically use a few organizers effectively.

Students need to be able to strategically select an appropriate organizer to help them comprehend the text they are reading. Organizers include semantic maps or webs, story and character maps, Venn diagrams, and KWLM charts.

For more information, see Visually Representing Text Using Graphic and Semantic Organizers under Linking Assessment to Instruction, pages 159–63.

**Check It Out!**


**Retelling, Summarizing, Synthesizing, Inferring**

Retelling and summarizing are important strategies for developing student comprehension and oral language proficiency. Retelling is not, however, simply a listing of events from memory. Rather, it is an opportunity for students to select what was important to them from the text, make personal connections, and share that information either orally or in writing. When students retell, they

- identify what is important from what they have read
- provide the information in a succinct, logical order
• provide only essential information, often through synthesis
• relate what they have read to their personal experiences

A retelling is often described as a personal summary.

Summarizing is a step beyond retelling; it often involves condensing a portion of the text into a manageable chunk (Zwiers 2004) and is an important study skill technique. A summary provides the gist or essence of what has been read or heard, and may consist of only a sentence or two. Summarizing helps students to improve their grasp of the main idea, an important skill in comprehension, but it may also include making references to personal experiences or other texts.

Retelling and summarizing also incorporate students’ ability to infer—that is, to read between the lines—in order to provide a more insightful, synthesized summary. When students infer, they go beyond the literal meaning to what is implied. They use their own experiences and background knowledge to help them make sense of, and gain deeper insights into, the text. Readers might make inferences about the deeper, underlying meaning of a text character’s emotions and feelings, the significance of various events, and lessons that the author may be trying to teach. Retelling and summarizing also reveal to the teacher what students understand: information that can then be used to guide instruction.

### Synthesis at a Glance

Synthesis involves combining different sources of information in a way that makes sense. Readers incorporate what they know about the topic from previous texts or experiences and make text-to-text, text-to-self, or text-to-world connections. Whenever students retell or summarize a text, they put their own spin on the information, synthesizing it.

Synthesis at work is described in this way:

• Readers monitor overall meaning, important concepts, and themes in text as they read, understanding that their thinking evolves in the process.
• Readers retell what they have read as a way of synthesizing.
• Readers capitalize on opportunities to share, recommend, and criticize books they have read.
• Readers extend their synthesis of the literal meaning of a text to the inferential level.
• Readers synthesize to understand more clearly what they have read.

(Miller 2002, 171)
Generating Questions

Generating or asking questions about a text helps students clarify their thinking and better understand what they are reading. Effective readers are always asking themselves questions; less effective readers rarely question. Questioning can occur before, during, and after reading. The kind of questions asked often depends on the genre of the text.

Readers ask questions to
- clarify meaning
- speculate about text yet to be read
- determine an author’s style, intent, content, or format
- focus attention on specific components of the text
- locate a specific answer in the text
- consider rhetorical questions inspired by the text

(Miller 2002, 126)

Answering Questions

Students benefit from responding to questions that they, their peers, or the teacher generates before, occasionally during, and after they read. When reading fiction aloud to students, few questions should be asked during the read-aloud so as not to interrupt the flow and meaning making of the text.

Thinking about answers and listening to others explain their answers help students understand the text. It is important for students to not only be asked questions, but also to be taught how to find the answers. When higher-order responses are required, students learn to pay attention to more than just factual details. Higher-order thinking
questions require students to analyze, infer, generalize, and synthesize what they are reading. Students learn that not all questions have one answer, and some answers are not found in the text.

See Generating Questions, Answering Questions under Linking Assessment to Instruction, pages 170–76, for much more information.

**Using Prior Knowledge/Predicting**

Predicting happens before, during, and after reading. Students use information from their own knowledge base to make sense of what they're reading. This base includes personal knowledge, knowledge of reading, and world knowledge. By making connections with what they already know, students are better able to understand new ideas and information presented in a text. Since students' life experiences are diverse, all students bring their own ideas to the text being read. This diversity of backgrounds accounts for differences in students' understanding of the same text. Each reader "personalizes" the text. (See Using Prior Knowledge/Predicting under Linking Assessment to Instruction, pages 176–81.)

**Using Mental Imagery (Visualizing)**

By visualizing, or making mental images, students are able to relate what they are reading (abstract) to something concrete—a visual image, a feeling, a sound, a smell, or a taste. This ability to "image" helps anchor new ideas in the students' minds and enables them to recall the ideas in a visual way when appropriate. (See Using Mental Imagery (Visualizing) under Linking Assessment to Instruction, pages 182–84.)

Remember: The kinds of answers you get depend on the questions you ask.

"The strategy of visualizing refers to the mind’s capacity to imagine what is being suggested by the words on a page."

**State of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Governor’s Literary Education and Reading Network Source**

**Check It Out!**

Take Time to Teach Reading in Grades 3 to 6

Students in Grades 3 to 6 have spent their early years in school learning about texts and how they work. Unfortunately, many of them have had decoding emphasized at the expense of comprehension. Although upper elementary students know a great deal about reading, they need to be taught comprehension strategies across all subject areas. They also need to be provided with many opportunities to read and to make sense of what they read (hear or view) as they write and discuss.

The goal of the reading program for students in Grades 3 to 6 is to help them become thoughtful, independent readers who choose to read from a wide range of texts for a wide variety of purposes. To achieve this goal, students need long blocks of time devoted to language arts on a daily basis. At least two hours a day results in less time lost in transitions and more opportunities for students to integrate their learning as they read, write, speak, listen, view, and represent.

Students in upper elementary school need more time to read more complex texts and to respond to them. They also need more opportunities to integrate their knowledge across subject areas. A Social Studies or Science-based read-aloud and any form of response (e.g., dramatic, discussion, art) allow students to see that the same strategies taught in language arts are also used across the day. In addition, integration, especially using the project approach and lasting four to six weeks, allows teachers to “fit it all in” in a meaningful way. The project approach allows for an in-depth investigation of a real-world topic, such as pollution. Students delve deeper (rather than broader) into their learning.

Instructional approaches to support a comprehensive language arts program include oral language (talk); read-alouds; shared, guided, and independent reading; word study; and shared, guided, and independent writing. These approaches are brought to life in Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum and in Chapter 5: In the Classroom: Making It Work.

Research indicates that using longer instructional blocks often results in productive and complicated student work being achieved.

Allington and Cunningham 2002, 122

Check It Out!

Assessment

Assessing Reading Comprehension

A student’s level of listening comprehension is generally a good predictor of reading comprehension potential. If students do not understand what they have heard, it is unlikely that they will be able to comprehend the same words in written text. Students’ word and world (background) knowledge strongly affect their ability to both decode and comprehend. Therefore, it is a good idea to begin by assessing their level of listening comprehension (see Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Learning).

Virtually all methods of assessing reading are indirect, even those that claim to directly assess reading processes. Teachers cannot see the processes involved; they can only infer how students have comprehended or what strategies they used

- by what they say (language), such as discussions
- by what they do (actions), such as dramatic presentations
- by what they make (products), such as drawings

Learning Through Representing

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<th>Representation of Knowledge</th>
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<td>Actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking and Learning</td>
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<td>Language</td>
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<td>Making</td>
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<td>Products</td>
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Forms of Representation

(possible sources of evidence for assessment)

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<th>Actions</th>
<th>Language</th>
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<td>2-D and 3-D models</td>
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(British Columbia Ministry of Education 2000)

Assessment of reading comprehension and of the factors that affect it is an ongoing process that helps teachers identify the individual and collective strengths and needs of students. However, to be useful and time efficient, most assessments should be integral to, and supportive of, instruction.

If readers don’t understand a word when they hear it, then they will not be able to comprehend it when they encounter it during reading (Hirsch 2003).

“Our ways of measuring reading are limited to what we observe when students read aloud, ... what they say or write after reading, and what they say or write about the way they read.”

Fountas and Pinnell 2001, 488
There are many ways to assess students, including:

- using surveys, inventories, and interviews
- retelling and summarizing (oral and written)
- listening to students read and respond aloud
  - Informal Reading Inventories (IRI)
  - running records or miscue analyses
  - think-alouds
  - fluency assessments
  - reading conferences (having one-on-one or group conversations)
- having students respond in writing
  - written responses, such as reader response journals and reading logs
  - cloze assessments
- having students create dramatic or visual arts responses to text
- listening in on discussions such as those generated in book clubs, literature circles, and book talks
- using student self-assessments

**Assessing Using Surveys, Inventories, and Interviews**

To effectively support comprehension, teachers need to get to know their students. Students’ attitudes toward reading, their beliefs and understanding about what makes a good reader, and their reading interests are reflected through:

- reading attitude surveys
- reading interests inventories
- reading interviews

**Reading Attitude Survey**

Reading is pivotal to learning, so assessing students’ attitudes toward reading is often a first step in analyzing reading progress. Too often a negative attitude toward reading leads students to choose not to read which, in turn, affects their work in all school subjects.

The Reading Attitude Survey is a good beginning-of-the-year self-assessment. It helps teachers identify those students with negative or indifferent attitudes toward reading. Follow-up enables teachers to implement strategies that encourage students to develop positive attitudes toward reading. It’s important for students to understand that there are no right or wrong answers to the survey questions. The purpose of the survey is to find out how they feel about reading.

**Reading Interests Inventory**

Engaging Grades 3 to 6 students in reading often depends on the selection of reading materials in the classroom and the school library. A Reading Interests Inventory helps teachers find books that reflect the
students' reading interests. The inventory can be completed by the whole class or individually. Tallying the reading interests of all the students provides a useful summary of what would likely interest students.

The Reading Interests Inventory is a useful assessment tool, especially for the beginning and the middle of the school year. It helps teachers make important decisions about grouping students, developing themes, and focusing lessons.

Assessment BLM 2: Self-Assessment—Reading Interests Inventory (Student), page 207
Assessment BLM 3: Reading Interests Inventory (Class Tally), page 208
Assessment BLM 3: Self-Assessment—Interest Inventory in Chapter 5, page 526

Reading Interview

One-on-one reading interviews early in the school year help teachers pinpoint a student's beliefs about reading (what reading is and what good readers do). In addition, ongoing interviews help teachers understand each student's approach to reading, reading strengths, interests, and possible reading difficulties. By discussing the results of the interviews, teachers help students understand personal reading strategies. This awareness will help students to think about their thinking, or exercise metacognition.

Assessment BLM 4: Reading Interview, page 209
Assessment BLM 10: Informal Reading Conference, page 215
Assessment BLM 4: Informal Reading Conference in Chapter 5, page 527

Assessing Comprehension Using Retelling and Summarizing

Retelling and summarizing require an ability to recall the text and to identify the important details of what has been read. A summary provides the gist of what has been read, heard, or viewed, perhaps in a sentence or two. A summary for this book might be, “This teacher professional resource book provides the research base, assessment tools, and practical instructional strategies to support effective teaching and learning in Grades 3 to 6.”

When students retell and summarize, they synthesize what they have read. They select the most important information from the text and put it together in a logical, coherent way. In addition, retelling and summarizing encompass the ability to read between the lines, to get to the inferential level. In a retell or summary, students make sense of the text by relating what they have read to their own personal knowledge and experiences.

Students can retell or summarize either orally or in writing. One way of assessing a retell is to use a retell scale. Such a tool assesses the student's ability to

• provide an unaided retelling (some students may require prompts)
• state the main idea
• retell key ideas and supporting details (nonfiction)

“Synthesis is the ... uniquely human trait that permits us to sift through a myriad of details and focus on those pieces we need to know and remember. It is the ability to collect a disparate array of facts and connect them to a central theme or idea... It is a complex process in which children, even the youngest, engage very naturally every day.”

Keene and Zimmermann 1997, 169
• explain concepts from the passage (nonfiction)
• identify the character, problem, major events, climax, and solution (fiction)
• retell the story in sequence (fiction)
• make personal connections to the text

Summarizing can be assessed using a rubric. Typical criteria include
• selecting and describing relevant information and ideas
• inferring meaning
• interpreting, analyzing, and synthesizing information from the text
• connecting what has been read to personal knowledge and experiences

Retelling and summarizing skills need to be taught directly and explicitly to help ensure that students fully comprehend what they are reading. Too often students are assessed on their ability to retell or summarize without first being taught how to do it. They need to understand what a retelling or summary entails, to see it modeled, and to have guided practice prior to assessment.

Assessment BLM 5: Fiction Retelling Scale, page 210
Assessment BLM 6: Nonfiction Retelling Scale, page 211
Assessment BLM 7: Reading Response or Summarizing Rubric, page 212
Assessment BLM 6: Retelling/Interpreting Checklist—Narrative Text in Chapter 5, page 529
Assessment BLM 7: Retelling/Interpreting Checklist—Informational Text in Chapter 5, page 530

Assessing Comprehension Using Read-Alouds and Oral Responses

By listening to students read aloud (either in person or on an audiocassette) or asking them to summarize, teachers can determine whether students’ decoding skills (or lack thereof) and fluency may be affecting their ability to comprehend what they are reading.

Informal Reading Inventories (IRI)

Informal Reading Inventories (IRI)—leveled reading passages read aloud by students—are useful tools to determine students’ reading strengths and needs. When administering an IRI, the teacher assumes the role of neutral observer. This is not a teaching time; it is a time to observe what strategies the student uses without support. The errors (miscues) and self-corrections made by students are particularly informative. If the student appeals for help, an effective teacher may respond with “You try it” or “Give it a go.” If the student is really stuck, it is best to tell the student the word so that the reading can continue (Trehearn et al. 2004).

Questioning students after reading or asking them to retell or summarize the text will reveal their level of comprehension. Even a simple conversation reveals a great deal about the connections the student is or is not making.
Running Records or Miscue Analyses

By completing a running record or a modified miscue analysis during either a one-on-one IRI or a reading conference, teachers determine students’ reading strategies and how well they self-monitor while they read a text aloud. This diagnostic assessment tool helps identify strategies that the student uses, overuses, and does not use.

“A miscue is any departure from the text. Analyze the miscues to determine how they may affect the student’s understanding of the passage. Determine whether the reader was using cues from

- the meaning of the message (semantic cueing system)
- the structure of the sentence (syntactic cueing system)
- the letter–sound relationships (graphophonic cueing system)
- the features or characteristics of different kinds of texts, such as a letter, newspaper, recipe (pragmatic cueing system)”

(Doctorow, Bodiam, and McGowan 2003, 8)

An analysis of the following running record reveals that the student used graphophonics but did not consider whether the word “does” made sense (semantics) or fit grammatically (syntax). Even though the reading didn’t make sense, the reader kept on going.

“On the walk in the woods we saw seven does [read as duz] coming up the path.”

Steps for Taking a Running Record

1. The teacher sits next to the student, who holds the passage of text.

2. As the student reads the text aloud, the teacher records the reading behavior (what the student says and does) on either a running record form or a blank sheet of paper.

3. To score the errors, the teacher

   - counts any substitutions, omissions, insertions, or “told”s for a word as one error
   - counts repetitions as one error (in other words, multiple attempts at the same word are counted as one error)
   - self-corrections are not counted as errors

4. To determine the accuracy rate, the teacher

   - counts the number of words in the passage (excluding the title)

Modified Miscue Analysis Conventions

- Accurate reading (optional) ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓
- Substitution went want
- Repetition (R) R or ✓ ✓ ✓ R
- Self-correction (SC) went SC want
- Omission very
- Insertion little
- Told (T) thought T
- Appeal (A) sometimes A

(Doctorow, Bodiam, and McGowan 2003, 40)
Student Think-Alouds

Teachers use think-alouds to model strategies to make sense of a text. Students benefit when teachers model all reading strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, summarizing, clarifying, using fix-ups, and visualizing.

When students think aloud, they reveal to teachers what comprehension strategies they are using. Sometimes students will spontaneously think aloud when reading aloud. For example: “He is so ridiculous” or “I don’t know the word so I am going to skip it.” In a more formal think-aloud assessment, teachers ask students to pause during the reading to describe the strategies they are using and to share their understanding of the text. This assessment technique reveals what strategies students are (or are not) using, what they are thinking about as they read, and how they are feeling as they read. It is important for teachers to model think-alouds frequently before using the procedure as an assessment tool.

Running records reveal how students problem solve and monitor their own reading. The accuracy rate can help the teacher to determine whether the text is appropriate for the student. (All students should be reading with at least 90 percent accuracy and comprehension; for independent reading, the accuracy rate and comprehension should be between 95 and 100 percent.) The accuracy rate also helps the teacher to group students effectively for guided reading. Using a particular level of text that is “right” for a group of students will work even if each student processes text differently (Fountas and Pinnell 1996).

- counts the number of words that the student read correctly (including accurate self-corrections)
- divides the number of words read correctly by the number of words in the passage, and then multiplies by 100 to get a percentage

\[
\text{percent accuracy} = \left( \frac{\text{number of words read correctly}}{\text{number of words in the passage}} \right) \times 100
\]
Implementing a Student Think-Aloud Assessment

1. The teacher chooses a short text that is at the student's instructional level (90 to 95 percent fluency).
2. The teacher then divides the text into four parts.
3. The student reads the first part of the text silently or aloud and stops.
4. The teacher asks the student, "What is happening?" or "What is this about?" or "What are you thinking about now?" or "What do you predict will happen next?" Another great open-ended prompt—"Say something" (Harste 1988)—simply encourages the student to respond to the text in any manner.
5. Once the student responds, the teacher may prompt with one of the following questions:
   • "What made you think that?"
   • "What clues made you think that?"
   • "What information made you think that?"
6. If the student does not respond to the initial question, "What is happening?" (perhaps he or she doesn't know or is a non-risk taker), the teacher might prompt with, "How about giving me your best guess" or "Describe for me what is going on in the text."
7. If the student is really stuck, the teacher explains his or her understanding of the text and what prompted that thinking.
8. The procedure is repeated for parts 2 through 4 of the text.
9. After completing the think-aloud, the teacher analyzes the student's level of comprehension (e.g., Did he or she realize when comprehension broke down and use a fix-up strategy? Did he or she infer?).
10. The teacher groups students together for comprehension strategy mini-lessons as needed.

Written think-alouds may also be used to assess reading comprehension and strategy use. They are similar to oral think-alouds except that as the students read the text silently, they stop after each section to record their understandings and reasons for their thinking. The teacher explains to the student, "You are going to be doing exactly what you just did out loud, but this time you are going to write down your thoughts. This will help me understand your thinking." It is important to explicitly convey to students that this is a purposeful activity.

Fluency
Fluent reading involves the students' ability to decode quickly and automatically. Fluency rate often affects comprehension, but not always. As stated earlier, many students read smoothly and sometimes with expression, but still don't understand.
Reading Conferences—Having a Conversation!
During a reading conference, the teacher focuses on an individual or a small group of students to find out how well they comprehend what they are reading. Through conversations, students are prompted to think about as well as recall what they have read. Having a conversation is a more authentic form of comprehension assessment.

Scale for Oral Reading Fluency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>The student reads with expression throughout most of the text, reading in larger, meaningful phrase groups. Repetitions, hesitations, or mistakes are rare. The student appears to be very comfortable reading the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>The student reads primarily in longer phrases that preserve the author's syntax. Although there may be occasional hesitations, repetitions, and miscues, most words are identified or decoded automatically. The student is beginning to read with expression and more comfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>The student is beginning to identify more words automatically and to read in short phrases. Some word-by-word reading continues. The student reads with little or no expression, and there may be long pauses and frustration with unfamiliar words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>The student reads slowly and word by word, with many pauses and with little or no expression. Few words are identified automatically. The student may seem frustrated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from the National Center for Education Statistics 1995 and Worthy, Broaddus, and Ivey 2001, 141)
“Outside school we rely on the richness of a person’s conversation about texts to judge how well they understood it. In school we typically rely on the flat recitation of events or information to make that same judgment” (Allington 2001, 89). A teacher may simply sit down beside a student during independent reading time and have the student share personal thoughts on the text. The conversation may begin in any of the following ways:

- “Tell me what the book is about so far.”
- “What have you learned so far from what you have read?”
- “What do you remember so far about what you have read?”

Students may then be asked to talk about

- their reactions to the text
- connections between the text and their own lives (text to self)
- connections between the text they are reading and other texts they have read (text to text)
- how the author uses language to paint a picture
- how the characters are portrayed and why
- concepts the author has included
- the author’s purpose for writing
- aspects of the topic that have been omitted and why

Assessment BLM 10: Informal Reading Conference, page 215
Assessment BLM 4: Informal Reading Conference in Chapter 5, page 527

Assessing Comprehension Using Written Responses

Much of a student’s day in Grades 3 to 6 is spent reading and then responding to what has been read. Reading is required to complete tasks and assignments in all content areas, not only in the language arts curriculum.

Teachers may use various kinds of writing to help identify how well students understand what they read. They need to determine whether students are able to interpret and understand concepts they encounter, as they read more independently in all subject areas. Writing also helps students to make better sense of what they are reading and often leads to understanding.
Reader Response Journals
When students respond in writing to a text, they reflect on what they are reading and often record their thoughts in a journal format. These reflections might be in the form of questions or responses that reveal text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world connections. From these responses, teachers gain insight into how well students understand what they are reading and how deeply they are responding to a text.

Journal entries are generally free flowing and completely determined by the student. Occasionally, teachers may ask students to respond to specific prompts.

Reading Logs
Reading logs help students keep track of the texts they have read (or gave up on) and the genres of those texts. This form of record keeping helps students think about their reading and helps teachers and parents monitor students' reading interests and behaviors.

BLM 3: Keeping Track, page 190

Question-Based Responses to Text
The types of personal-response questions effective readers ask themselves as they read fall into three main categories. These types of questions may also serve as useful prompts for oral or written responses to a text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Sample Question/Prompt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text to Self</td>
<td>questions that involve relating the text to personal experiences or knowledge</td>
<td>Question: I wonder what I would have done if I had been in her shoes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prompt: If you were the main character, what would you have done and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text to Text</td>
<td>questions connecting one text to another (comparing characters, settings, problems, and so on)</td>
<td>Question: The art in these two folktales is very different. Which version do I like better?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prompt: The art in these two folktales is very different. Which do you like better? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text to World</td>
<td>questions connecting the text to issues in the world (possibly social and moral issues)</td>
<td>Question: The author makes seal hunting sound so bad. Why didn’t he tell the other side of the story as well?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Prompt: If you were writing a story on seal hunting, what point of view would you take?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Miller 2002)
As noted earlier, one effective way to assess students’ written responses is to use a rubric that provides criteria for the responses. Assessment BLM 7 in this chapter is one example. Another method for assessing and developing reading comprehension is to use a questioning framework. (See Question–Answer Relationships (QAR), pages 172–74.)

Supporting Responses
Students need to learn how to support their responses with evidence from the text and from their own background knowledge. Through mini-lessons conducted over time, students will learn to support their responses by
- supplying facts or information from specific text pages
- identifying passages in the text that contain evidence
- citing facts or information that has been inferred but not stated
- applying background knowledge or personal experiences
- using “because” statements
- providing details and examples

Assessment BLM 7: Reading Response or Summarizing Rubric, page 212
Assessment BLM 11: Self-Assessment—Making Connections, page 216

Cloze Assessments
The cloze procedure involves reading a text from which certain words have been omitted. As a form of assessment, cloze reveals how well students understand what they read and what strategies they are using. It may also be used to determine a student’s reading level and the appropriateness of reading materials chosen for guided or independent reading.

Cloze assessments enable teachers to identify how well students
- use context to help identify unfamiliar words or concepts
- predict
- use language structure to help them read
- use a variety of strategies to decode unfamiliar words

To create a cloze passage, teachers first decide what they want to assess. For example, to assess how effectively students use syntax (grammar), teachers omit structure words such as pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions. To assess semantics (meaning), teachers omit content words—nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on. To assess content and syntax, teachers omit every fifth word—the traditional cloze method. It is important for teachers to first model the cloze and then complete a cloze activity with students before implementing it as an assessment tool.

I do it. We do it. You do it.
Implementing a Close Assessment

1. The teacher selects a reading passage 10 to 15 sentences long deemed to be at the student’s instructional or independent reading level*.

2. The teacher omits words based on the purpose of the assessment, making all the blanks the same length. The first and last sentences remain unchanged.

3. The student then fills in the blanks.

4. The teacher determines how many correct words the student was able to insert. (Synonyms for the omitted word are acceptable as long as they make sense in the context of both the sentence and the passage.)

5. The teacher then calculates the number of correct words as a percentage of the number of blanks.

6. If 40 to 60 percent of the blanks are filled in with exactly the same words as those that were deleted, then the text is within the student’s instructional level. However, it is more important to consider whether the chosen words make sense in the context of both the sentence and the passage. The primary focus is not whether the student completes the text with the identical word, but rather, with a defensible word! If synonyms are accepted, then a rate of 70 to 80 percent correct indicates an instructional level, and more than 85 percent an independent level.

* Instructional Level = 90 to 94 percent accuracy and comprehension
Independent Level = 95 to 100 percent accuracy and comprehension

(Adapted from Rhodes and Shanklin 1993, 190–91)

Assessing Comprehension Using Arts-Based Responses to Text

Students’ understanding of reading can be assessed through responses involving dramatic or visual arts. This form of assessment enables students to demonstrate their thinking in a way many feel is low-risk.

To assess comprehension of content-area material (e.g., Social Studies or Science) key vocabulary words are omitted.

How Are People and Goods Transported in the Arctic Today?

Traditional methods of travel, such as by dogsled and kayak, continue to be used in the Arctic. Today, however, a variety of other ________ methods are also used.

Most people traveling to and from the Arctic go by ________ Almost every community has a small ________ or all-weather landing strip. There are regular ________ flights into the Arctic from ________ such as Montreal, Ottawa, and Edmonton. Large ________ planes bring fresh food and many ________ each week.

Smaller planes, called ________ planes, move people and goods between ________ in the Arctic. The planes can be fitted with skis, ________, or soft balloon tires so they can land on ________, water, ________, or landing strips. Helicopters can reach places where it is difficult for planes to land.

(Andrew, Griffin, and Mader 2004, 44)
Dramatic Arts Responses
By observing students’ dramatic responses to a text, teachers determine how well the students understood what they have read. Dramatic responses to text can take various forms, such as
- interviews of characters or conversations among characters
- dramatizations of selected scenes or situations
- production of commercials
- pretend walks through the story’s setting or the characters’ neighborhoods

Visual Arts Responses
When students respond to literature visually, they translate and synthesize their reading experiences to show their understanding through an arts-based medium. They might draw or paint the setting or interesting characters in the story, or create a model of a scientific concept they’ve been studying.

Assessing Comprehension by Listening In
One of the best ways to get a sense of students’ levels of comprehension is to listen in while partners or small groups discuss what they have read. These discussions may take the form of a book talk, a book club, or a literature circle. (More information on book talks and book clubs can be found later in this chapter. Information on literature circles is provided in Chapter 5: In the Classroom: Making It Work.)

When teachers are “kid watching” (observing students) or listening in, there are certain indicators to look for when assessing comprehension.
Assessing Comprehension Using Self-Assessment

Students should be encouraged to assess how much focus and time they give to independent reading. Assessment BLM 13: Self-Assessment—Independent Reading will help them do this.

In addition, it is important for students to assess their reading comprehension through reflection. Self-reflection permits students to focus on what they have learned and how they feel about their learning (Cooper and Kiger 2001), encouraging them to become strategic learners and metacognitive thinkers. To foster self-reflection, teachers provide students with time and prompts that assist them with thinking about their learning.

“Self-reflection offers students an opportunity to be actively involved in internal conversations while offering teachers an insider’s view of the learning and the student’s perception of self as learner.”

Hoyt and Ames 1997, 19

Comprehension Indicators During Literature Discussions

Does the student
- use background knowledge to construct meaning?
- make reasonable predictions?
- use the text to support predictions?
- visualize?
- personally identify or make connections with the text (text to self)?
- evaluate or analyze characters?
- question the author (to identify what was said or not said, implied or inferred, and why)?
- connect the book with other texts (text to text)?
- connect the book to what is understood in the world (text to world)?
- ask questions to further understand?
- use vocabulary effectively?
- infer?
- retell/summarize?
- use context to identify unknown vocabulary?
- mention the book’s theme?

(Adapted from Evans 2001, 105)
I Know I Understand What I Am Reading When I Can …

- get the gist of the text even if I can’t read or interpret every word and idea
- retell the text orally or in writing so that another person understands my re-creation
- connect or relate what I’m reading to what I already know, have read, or experienced
- reread a portion of text and clear up confusions
- use my knowledge of the subject or author to think and evaluate more deeply and critically—for example, to question, agree, or disagree with the text
- take clear notes that demonstrate my insights and learning
- use my notes to help me as I read or reread
- summarize or paraphrase what I’ve read
- use what I’ve read to think about other contexts and texts
- recognize gaps in my understanding and attempt to understand better by rereading, listing or highlighting key words or phrases, figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words, writing notes to myself, asking pertinent questions, conversing with others
- consider multiple meanings
- recognize and use the characteristics of the genre to help me comprehend
- consider and understand comments of others
- make new meaning

(Routman 2002, 125)
Linking Assessment to Instruction

Ongoing assessment as an integral part of instruction must drive ongoing instruction. The goal of all comprehension assessment and instruction is to develop thoughtful literacy learners. “Thoughtful literacy is more than remembering what the text said. It is engaging the ideas in texts, challenging those ideas, reflecting on them, and so on. It is responding to a story with giggles, goose bumps, anger, or revulsion” (Allington 2001, 106).

Developing Critically Literate Students

Critical literacy is a way of thinking that helps to uncover social inequalities and injustices. These discoveries might ultimately lead to social change. This way of thinking occurs as students are taught to question and challenge attitudes, values, and beliefs that lie beneath the surface as they read, listen, and view. Questioning to promote discussion and writing lies at the heart of a critical literacy program. It is through talk and writing that students develop new ideas. To become critically literate, students must learn to

- examine meaning within text
- consider the text creator’s purpose and motive
- identify the audience to whom the text is intended to appeal
- understand that texts are not neutral, that they represent particular views, silence other points of view, and influence people’s ideas and ways of thinking
- notice what has been intentionally left out of the text and what is inferred (between the lines) but not stated in order to present a certain belief or perspective

“Being asked to think about the text you’ve just read is different from being asked to recall the text you’ve just read.”
Allington 2001, 87

“Students need an opportunity to voice their reactions to, feelings about, and interpretations of the texts they read. Being able to choose oral, written, even hands-on methods allows different types of readers to express their understanding in ways that match their learning styles.... The goal is to create readers who can demonstrate both a breadth and a depth of reading skills.”
Thompson 1999

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Thompson 1999

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Introducing Critical Literacy

Providing students with multiple perspectives on the same event or topic is a great way to demonstrate that text reflects an author’s personal viewpoints and values. What follows is an example based on a reading of the award-winning book *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne.

1. The teacher reads aloud *Voices in the Park*, in which the same park experience is told from four different perspectives, that of two parents and two children.

2. There is a class discussion, with the teacher using various questions to prompt students’ thoughts about perspective.

   **Questions on Perspective (Voices in the Park)**
   - “Think about each of the four characters. What kind of person do you think each character is portraying?”
   - “What view of the world do you think each character has?”
   - “Why do you think the author wrote this book using four voices?”
   - “Why these four voices?”

3. The discussion continues with a focus on student experiences involving different perspectives. For example, have any of them had a disagreement with someone and described the incident

As students talk and write about a text they have heard, read, or viewed, they understand more deeply and become more sensitive to different types of texts, characteristics of texts, and how authors get across their personal values or perspectives.

(For examples of writing activities that support critical literacy, see Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading–Writing Connection.)
Check It Out!

Here are some great children's texts for demonstrating perspective on the following social justice issues:

Age Stereotyping

*How Does It Feel to Be Old?* by Norma Farber (New York: Dutton, 1979).


*Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox (La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 1995) is a wonderful read-aloud book that promotes much discussion about age stereotyping.

*Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* describes the adventures of a young boy who befriends six senior citizens living in a nursing home next to his home. Each senior is portrayed as unique, but Miss Nancy is the boy’s favorite.

Miss Nancy is losing her memory, which is a stereotypical view of many seniors. In his search for what a memory is, Wilfrid is able to help Miss Nancy recover some of her memory. At first the storyline seems simple, but it is not!

2. *How Does It Feel to Be Old?* by Norma Farber and the poem “The Little Boy and the Old Man” by Shel Silverstein are great follow-up texts to *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* and provide other perspectives on the issue of age stereotyping. After reading these texts, students compare and contrast all three authors’ perspectives on ageism. What values do students believe each author is promoting?

For extension activities, see Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading-Writing Connection.

Displacement/Forced Relocation

*The Butterfly* by Patricia Polacco (New York: Philomel, 2000).


*So Far from the Sea* by Eve Bunting (Boston: Clarion Books, 1998).

Questions Promoting Critical Literacy (*Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*)

- “How does the author portray the child and adults?”
- “Why do you think the child and the adults are portrayed in this way?”
- “What is the topic focus, or theme?”
- “What is the story trying to make you think or feel?”
- “What wasn’t said about the topic and why?”
- “Whose voices and perspectives are not expressed?”
- “What words did the author use to make the character [fill in character’s name] funny, scary?”
- “Why do you think the author chose this setting?”
- “How do you feel toward people over 60 years of age? Please explain.”

quite differently than the other person involved? Did anyone who witnessed the disagreement have yet another perspective?

In teaching students to become critical literacy learners, it is equally important to enhance their awareness of perspective as it relates to social justice or human rights issues. Here is one approach to exploring author values. The teacher shares three texts with the class dealing with the same social or human rights issue, but told from different perspectives:

1. For example, *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* by Mem Fox (La Jolla, CA: Kane/Miller Book Publishers, 1995) is a wonderful read-aloud book that promotes much discussion about age stereotyping.

*Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* describes the adventures of a young boy who befriends six senior citizens living in a nursing home next to his home. Each senior is portrayed as unique, but Miss Nancy is the boy’s favorite.

Miss Nancy is losing her memory, which is a stereotypical view of many seniors. In his search for what a memory is, Wilfrid is able to help Miss Nancy recover some of her memory. At first the storyline seems simple, but it is not!
Further Explorations of Perspective and Social Justice

Yet another effective way to explore perspective is to share with students the same story presented in at least two different media, such as a print and video version. Students may be asked to respond to the various versions of the same story in different ways. The questions and activities that follow are some suggestions for comparing and contrasting the authors’ perspectives.

- How are the versions the same and yet different?
- How does each author present his or her perspective?
- Describe how each of the characters is portrayed in each version. Provide one example of both a similarity and a difference. Students might use a Venn diagram to show how the stories compare/contrast. (For more on Venn diagrams, see pages 162–63.)
- Are there any differences in the story line? Provide examples. Which story line do you prefer and why?
- How does the video (or audio) version differ from the print version? Which version do you prefer? Why do you think the author of the video or audio version chose to make these changes?
- If you were writing your own version of the text, how might you change the story line? Consider creating a story map comic strip. (More information on story map comic strips is provided later in this chapter.)

Books dealing with social justice issues generally help students to make emotional connections to the text. *Flying Solo* by Ralph Fletcher (New York: Dell Yearling, 1998) is such a book. The story, especially suitable for students in Grades 5 and 6, describes a sixth-grade class in which the substitute teacher never shows up. The students decide not to report that they are alone and instead run the
class themselves. At least six of the student characters are clearly portrayed and each one has private issues to contend with. Rachel is a selective mute; Bastian’s Air Force family has to move again; Sean’s father is an alcoholic.

Near the end of the book, the class comes together in how they deal with feelings of guilt, grief, and sorrow over their treatment of a developmentally challenged classmate (Tommy Feathers), who has since died. The book provides a great balance of emotions—happiness, sadness, guilt, and more.

Teaching Students to Persevere with Text

It is not uncommon for texts that increase in difficulty as the story line unfolds to begin rather slowly. *Flying Solo* is an ideal book for demonstrating this writing style and for teaching students the value of persevering.

For some readers, the major challenge of *Flying Solo* is that the issue of the substitute teacher not showing up is not presented until page 26. The first 25 pages set the stage for what is to come by dedicating a brief chapter to each of the major characters. Many students simply do not want to persevere through so many pages to get to the action; also, some students have trouble keeping track of each of the characters.

*Flying Solo* can be used to
- promote critical literacy regarding the social issue of bullying/name calling
- encourage students to realize that sometimes persevering with texts that start out slowly can be worthwhile
- demonstrate the value of using a semantic map to keep track of characters
- stimulate conversation with questions such as the following:
  - “Is this text realistic? Why or why not?”
  - “Is there anything you doubt about this text?”
  - “Whose voices do you hear?”

For extension activities related to *Flying Solo*, see Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading–Writing Connection.

Features of Classroom Instruction That Support Comprehension

Several factors support effective literacy teaching and learning in upper elementary school. These include

- maximizing opportunities to read
- allowing for opportunities to discuss what is read
- focusing on meaning and ways of constructing meaning
- modeling
- providing explicit strategy instruction
• using small-group lessons and one-on-one conferences
• using diverse assessment tools
• integrating reading and writing with other subject areas

**Reasons to Teach an Integrated Curriculum**

- Unless teachers have 50 hours a day to teach, they’ll never get it all in.
- An integrated curriculum allows science and social studies to frame reading, writing, and math.
- The brain thrives on connections.
- Life is not divided into neat little blocks of time called science, math, reading, writing, social studies, and recess.
- Problem-solving skills soar when knowledge and higher-level thinking from all curriculum areas are tapped.
- Real literature in real books provides an authentic diving board into learning all subjects. Award-winning literature provides models for problem solving, peer relationships, character development, and skill building. Students are captivated by exciting adventures with realistic characters who go through problems very much like their own or problems (like war) from which they will learn historical truths.
- Group interaction and team building inherent in an integrated curriculum depend on using various strengths and skills to create bridges to understanding.
- Inspiring students to think, to love learning, and to put their learning to work in authentic ways will equip them for whatever curves they might be thrown … on standardized tests and in life!
- Students love an integrated curriculum and thrive on its challenges!

(Adapted from Red 2003)

The characteristics of effective classrooms are demonstrated in these areas of instruction that support comprehension:

- reading
- talk and writing
- explicit strategy instruction

**Reading**

Students who are truly engaged in reading and read extensively will improve not only their vocabulary and background knowledge, but also their comprehension. Because reading is so vital to comprehension instruction, it is important for teachers to

- provide time for independent reading
- hook students on reading

“Children in classrooms with library centers read about 50% more books than children in classrooms without such centers.”

Allington and Cunningham 1996, 97
• develop a classroom reading collection
• conduct reading conferences
• provide many reading opportunities
• promote home reading
• model fluency by reading aloud
• use repeated reading

Provide Time for Independent Reading
“Kids need to read a lot to become proficient readers. They need books in their hands that they can read—accurately and fluently. They need books that are of interest to them” (Allington 2001, 110). Teachers must encourage student reading both in and out of the classroom.

Classroom independent reading time goes under many different names: DEAR (Drop Everything and Read), SSR (Sustained Silent Reading), SQUIRT (Sustained Quiet Uninterrupted Independent Reading Time). But whatever it’s called, the purpose is the same: to provide time in the school day for students to select, read, and enjoy the books that they have selected. Independent reading is an important classroom routine. Providing time for students to practice reading quietly helps them to develop fluency, establish a reading habit, and learn to value reading. When teachers intentionally schedule time for reading, at the same time every day, it conveys a message that reading for pleasure is important.

Hook Students on Reading
Recent research by Jo Worthy (2002), among others, describes classrooms in which students in the upper elementary grades want to read. Interviews with students revealed that what hooked them on reading was
• having lots of time to “just read”
• teacher enthusiasm during read-alouds
• an extensive choice and variety of reading materials

Some students do not really read during independent reading time. They may be simply flipping through books that are too difficult for them. For these students, a portion of their time may be better spent reading to an adult or peer, or reading less challenging books aloud to younger students. Fluency is developed through practice with reading easier texts.

Assessment BLM 13: Self-Assessment—Independent Reading will help students self-assess their degree of reading engagement and their choice of “just right” texts.

Assessment BLM 13: Self-Assessment—Independent Reading, page 219

Develop a Classroom Reading Collection

Classrooms need hundreds and hundreds of books in addition to other types of reading materials. The reality is that most classrooms don’t have the quantity and the quality of books needed. It is recommended that at least 400 books be made available to students in each Grades 4 to 6 classroom, with early elementary-grade classrooms having even more (Allington and Cunningham 1996). In addition, classroom collections should

• provide a range of content to match the students’ interests, including cross-curricular texts such as social studies, math, and science
• feature high-interest, motivating reading material
• comprise texts of varying levels of difficulty so that all students will be able to experience success
• contain books that reflect a variety of multicultural perspectives
• offer a balance of different genres, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry

Check It Out!


Genres to Include in a Classroom Library

- Adventure
- Autobiography
- Biography
- Classics
- Comics
- Fables
- Fairy tales
- Fantasy
- Historical fiction
- Horror
- Humor
- Informational books
- Legends and folktales
- Memoir
- Mystery
- Mystery
- Picture books
- Poetry
- Realistic fiction
- Science fiction
- Sports
It is important to provide a variety of formats, including books, magazines, and comics. The main goal of creating a well-stocked classroom reading centre is to motivate students to read, and comics are an acceptable reading choice.

For many more ideas on assembling a classroom reading collection, see Materials, pages 435–38, in Chapter 5: In the Classroom: Making It Work.

**Conduct Reading Conferences**

Holding regular reading conferences with individual students is crucial. Effective teachers use these conferences as opportunities to help students develop strategies for choosing “just right” books. They also monitor the difficulty level of each student’s reading materials to ensure that the materials are appropriate. They offer encouragement and reinforcement, and help students to develop self-monitoring and other comprehension strategies. Most important, teachers have conversations with the students about their reading. It is through conversations that the teacher develops some sense of a student’s interest in, and comprehension of, a text.

**Provide Many Reading Opportunities**

Effective teachers provide many varied opportunities for students to read, enjoy books, and talk about their reading. They

- read aloud daily to the class a variety of texts (including fiction, and poetry) linked to students’ interests and often with cross-curricular, integrated ties. They also read from different formats, including magazines, comics, and texts on the overhead.
- encourage students to share background knowledge about given topics of interest
- listen to and value students’ contributions to discussions
- provide opportunities for partnered reading with other students, classes, or with paraprofessionals and volunteers
- acknowledge that discussion is important
- encourage discussion through literature circles and book clubs
- arrange for students to read aloud to adults and receive feedback, which is especially crucial for struggling readers and those with weak vocabulary or oral language skills. This time is in addition to small-group time spent with the teacher.
- encourage students to read and share material that interests them
- provide opportunities for guided reading daily, with a focus on comprehension
- promote “family reading” events at home and at school

**Promote Home Reading**

When students see themselves as readers, they recognize that reading is done all the time, not just within the school walls. Teachers have a role to play in encouraging students to read outside formal school hours. It’s important for teachers to emphasize to parents that, even
though their child can read, they, as parents, still have an important role to play. Ideally, parents set aside after-school time for their children to read—whether novels, information books, information on the Internet, magazines, comics, or trading cards. They also spend time talking to their children about what they are reading.

**Ways to Promote Home Reading**

To encourage student reading at home, effective teachers

- send home a letter at the beginning of the school year outlining the home reading program and expectations for it. For those parents unable to read English, a conversation is equally effective.
- help parents to understand that they have a role to play in monitoring what their children read, listening for fluency, monitoring comprehension, and coaching their children as they read and talk about texts. Again, for parents unable to read English, other ways to help are suggested, such as discussion, sharing pictures, and reading to their children in another language.
- ensure that students have books from the classroom or school library that they may take home to read and exchange for new ones regularly

BLM 4: Literacy Home Links: Home Reading, page 191
BLM 5: Literacy Home Links: Choosing "Just Right" Books, page 192

**Model Fluency by Reading Aloud**

Many students struggle with comprehension because of a lack of fluency. Some students, for example, read right through the punctuation, not realizing what effect this has on meaning.

Students need to hear and understand what fluent reading sounds like in order to read fluently themselves. Teachers model fluency by reading aloud to students. They also “think aloud” to help students understand the strategies that they use to read fluently (e.g., “Did you hear my voice go up when I read this question?” or “Listen to how I read this in phrases, not word by word.”). Students also benefit when they read to a group or a partner and give each other feedback on their reading fluency.

For more information on reading fluency, see Chapter 6: Supporting Struggling and Reluctant Readers.

**Use Repeated Reading**

This strategy helps to improve students’ reading fluency. When the same passage is read over and over, the number of word recognition errors decreases, reading speed increases, and oral reading expression improves (Samuels 2002). Repeated reading can be carried out individually, with partners, in small groups, or with the whole class. (See Chapter 6: Supporting Struggling and Reluctant Readers for more on repeated reading.)
Talk and Writing

Talk and writing are crucial in supporting vocabulary development and comprehension. Research on effective classrooms shows that students in such classrooms spend a great deal of time engaged in real conversations with teachers, peers, and others. Students make sense of what they read, hear, and view through sharing their ideas with others and through gaining new ideas and vocabulary from others, whether orally or in writing. In this resource alone, two chapters have been devoted to talk and writing—Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Learning, and Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading–Writing Connection.

Here are several effective ways to support comprehension through talk and writing:

- book clubs
- book talks, reviews, and recommendations
- written or oral cloze activities
- reading logs and journals
- literature circles (see Chapter 5: In the Classroom: Making It Work)

Book Clubs

Just as adults enjoy coming together to share information about books, so do students. Discussions about texts give students an opportunity to understand what they have read. As they talk about their books, they return to the text to clarify and support their ideas. Talking about books allows students to expand connections (text to self, text to text, text to world), vocabulary, and concept development. It also promotes listening skills.

“While more children learn to ‘read’ with increased phonics instruction, there have not been commensurate gains in reading comprehension. What is missing from many children who master phonics but don’t understand well is vocabulary, the words they need to know in order to understand what they’re reading.”

BIEMELLE 2001, 25
Students meet regularly in groups to talk about books they have read. One structure is to organize clubs according to different fiction and nonfiction genres: novels, plays, autobiographies, and so on.

**Implementing a Classroom Book Club**
1. Groups of three to five students read the same “just right” book, selected by them or by the teacher. It’s important that the book contains rich ideas and information that inspire students to think, ask questions, and make connections to their own lives, other texts, and the world around them.
2. As they read, students record responses in their reading journals.
3. Students meet after finishing the book, or an agreed-upon section of the book, to share the ideas and questions they have recorded in their journals. Teachers may also have book clubs meet after a guided reading lesson.

**Book Talks, Reviews, and Recommendations**
“The reading experiences of children can be extended by what other people reveal to them about their reading and what they reveal to others about their reading” (Booth 1996, 39). Book talks, reviews, and recommendations promote and encourage reading and offer ways of extending students’ experiences.

Providing opportunities for students to talk about and report on books to others allows them to
- encourage or discourage others from reading the same book
- engage in authentic talk about texts
- share a broader range of texts than they would likely read on their own

Although book talks are oral, book reviews may be presented in written form (see BLM 6: Book Review); as a dramatic response, in which students re-enact parts of the text; or as a visual response, where they create a collage, poster, or book cover.

Students may recommend books through posters or short speeches that provide book summaries. When students recommend books, they encourage others to read what they have read; however, they may also discourage reading of a title. What one person recommends, another will not—this can lead to discussion and debate.

**Implementing a Book Talk**
1. The teacher first explains that in a book talk or review, students respond personally to what they have read.
2. The teacher then models a book talk for the class. Good ideas include providing some information about the author or illustrator, reading aloud a brief excerpt from an interesting or special part of the book, and commenting on whether the book is worth reading and why or why not.
3. Students prepare talks during or after the reading of a book.

“I think it helps me because sometimes when I read I get lost and I just keep on reading and then after I stop (and discuss), it helps me to remember what happened.”

Grade 5 student in Evans 2001, viii

**Check It Out!**
Planet Book Club:
http://www.planetbookclub.com
4. The teacher reminds the students that not all books are winners. It is all right not to like a book or to discourage someone from reading it, as long as the reason is shared. (See Persuasive Writing, page 230, in Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading–Writing Connection.)

5. Students present their talks to a small group or to the whole class.

6. The listeners participate by asking questions or adding to the response if someone else has also read the book.

Implementing a One-Minute Book Talk
1. Students select a book they have read. In a one-minute time frame, they provide an overview and share their opinion of the book.

2. Alternatively, students may prepare and tape-record or videotape a 30-second radio or TV advertisement that recommends a book that they have read and think others will enjoy.

Written or Oral Cloze Activities
A cloze procedure is a useful technique for helping students improve their vocabularies and apply fix-up strategies (e.g., reading forward and back), thus increasing comprehension. Using cloze with fiction and nonfiction texts is a good check to see how well students have learned and understood the concepts being taught or the story being told.

Implementing a Cloze Activity
1. The teacher omits selected words from a written passage. Omitted words may be randomly chosen to target parts of speech, such as nouns, verbs, and prepositions; or chosen based on a pattern, such as every fifth word. The words chosen might also be specific to content vocabulary, for example, to social studies or science content.

2. The teacher models how to effectively complete a cloze before assigning this activity to students.
3. Students use context clues, prior knowledge, and fix-up strategies to predict the missing words.

4. The teacher monitors students’ understanding by asking them to give reasons for their word choices. Other students may be asked to “judge” the words chosen. Do they sound right and make sense in the context of both the sentence and the passage?

5. The teacher lets students read the original passage to compare their word choices to the original text. Which words do they prefer and why? This is where the real vocabulary learning occurs.

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**Reading Logs and Journals**

Keeping a reading log allows students to easily track what they read, how much they read, and any information they’d like to remember. When students incorporate additional components, the record becomes a journal where they respond in a variety of ways to their reading.

**Making Reading Logs and Journals Work**

1. The teacher ensures that students have a place to keep their log or journal entries, such as a notebook, binder, or notepad.

2. Students are encouraged to record personal thoughts, descriptions, questions, and reflections about their reading. Their reflections may take the form of prose, point-form notes, diagrams, drawings, and so on.

3. Although the best writing usually comes from a spontaneous text-to-self, text-to-text, or text-to-world connection, the teacher may provide occasional prompts, such as those that follow.

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**How to Complete a Cloze**

1. Read the entire passage before completing any blanks.
2. Use only one word in each blank.
3. Skip blanks that you are stuck on. Try them again when you are finished.

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“Do we have to have journal entries every time we read?”

Worthy 2002, 568

Students should not have to respond to their reading each and every time that they read.
Explicit Strategy Instruction

Much research over the past 20 years indicates that the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model (Pearson and Gallagher 1983) is a highly effective instructional framework. Teachers focus on one strategy at a time, first explaining and then modeling its use through think-alouds. Students are then provided with many opportunities to develop each strategy through repeated application. The goal is for students to apply each strategy automatically.

Gradual Release of Responsibility

As students gain experience and expertise using the strategies that support comprehension, effective teachers gradually give them more responsibility for using each strategy independently in authentic situations across the curriculum. Teachers continue to release responsibility to students until students demonstrate during independent practice that they are able to consistently use the strategies on their own. Nevertheless, teachers continue to monitor student strategy use. The ultimate goal is for students to make these strategies their own and to know how, when, and why to apply them to help them make meaning from what they are reading, hearing, or viewing.

Elements of the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

- Explicit description of the strategy and when it should be used
- Teacher or student modeling of the strategy in action
- Collaborative use of the strategy in action
- Guided practice using the strategy with gradual release of responsibility: For example, the students may read silently, but are stopped every few pages to apply the strategy; they might be asked, "What do you think will happen next?" (prediction)
- Independent strategy use

“Reading comprehension is a skill with a knowledge base just like all of the elements that support it, and as such, it can and should be taught explicitly.”

SEDL 2000

“Good comprehension instruction includes both explicit instruction in specific comprehension strategies and a great deal of time and opportunity for actual reading, writing, and discussion of text.”

Duke and Pearson 2002, 2
The Think-Aloud—The Best Way to Teach Strategies

The single most effective method of teaching comprehension strategies is the think-aloud.

Thinking aloud is a technique modeled by teachers and practiced by students to improve comprehension. It involves orally identifying strategies being used while reading. When students apply this strategy with a partner or a group, they are using a metacognitive process to help them understand the comprehension process that is taking place inside their heads as they read, listen, or view.

Think-alouds remove the cloak of mystery surrounding how one comprehends. They make thinking public.
Implementing Think-Alouds

1. The teacher selects a shared reading or read-aloud passage and begins reading it aloud.

2. The teacher models the think-aloud process by stopping periodically and talking about the thought processes taking place. For example: “The title of this story makes me think that the story will be about a child who is unhappy to be moving. I’ll read some more to find out ... I’m not sure what this word means, but I’ll read on to see if I can figure it out ... Oh! Here’s some new information about looking for a new house. It makes me think my prediction was correct.”

3. In guided practice, students in small groups or on their own read silently or aloud and identify elements that made it difficult or easy to read and understand the text.

4. Students identify either orally (thinking aloud) or in writing the fix-up strategies that they used.

### Key Think-Aloud Techniques to Model

- Making, checking, and modifying predictions
- Making mind pictures (visualizing in your head)
- Making connections; linking new information with previous knowledge (e.g., “This is like when ...”)
- Monitoring comprehension (e.g., “This doesn’t make sense ...”); demonstrating fix-up strategies (e.g., “I am going to reread this part” or “I will skip over it now ...”)

(Adapted from Davey 1983, 44–47)

See also Student Think-Alouds, pages 120–21.

### Strategies Used by Effective Comprehenders

As noted earlier, research has established that effective readers, listeners, and viewers use the following strategies to make meaning from texts:

- monitoring comprehension
- using narrative and expository text structures
- visually representing text using graphic and semantic organizers
- retelling, summarizing, synthesizing, inferring
- generating questions
- answering questions
- using prior knowledge/predicting
- using mental imagery (visualizing)

As students become more proficient at selecting and using the comprehension strategies listed above, they should also be introduced to
strategies for applying their comprehension skills in a more integrated way. (See Combining Strategies, pages 184–85.)

A Strategy Caution
Strategies are options to help learners construct meaning. They are a means to an end, rather than an end in and of themselves. Having students complete numerous graphic organizers will not necessarily improve their comprehension. Students have to understand the purpose of a particular graphic organizer, why using the graphic organizer will help them, and when and how to use it. Teachers must balance how much time is spent completing graphic organizers and responding in other ways versus more time reading.

“Students can ‘know’ lots of strategies and also document their use of particular strategies. But being able to complete a strategy exercise is not the same as knowing how and when to use and apply a strategy in the act of reading to gain understanding.... We teachers need to give explicit demonstrations not just on how to use a strategy in isolation but also on how to make the strategy a part of our unconscious reading process, so that students are able to combine any number of strategies to problem solve before, during, and after they read” (Routman 2002, 129).

“Metacognition—thinking about one’s own thinking—is the umbrella under which all other strategies fall. Each strategy is a variation of metacognition” (Keene and Zimmermann 1997, 25).

Monitoring Comprehension—The Number One Strategy
Effective readers constantly check to see if what they are reading makes sense to them. Students who monitor their comprehension know when their reading does and does not make sense. These students also self-correct to ensure that they understand the text. Conversely, many less proficient readers are often unaware of when and where their comprehension has broken down.

When students pay attention to the text to determine whether it makes sense, they understand that reading is a meaning-making activity. Using the appropriate strategies will help students become better at monitoring their own reading comprehension. These same strategies will assist students with monitoring their listening and viewing comprehension as well.

Self-monitoring comprehension teaches students to
• be aware of what they understand
• identify what they do not understand
• use appropriate fix-up strategies to resolve their comprehension problems

"Before students can monitor themselves and apply ‘fix-up’ strategies, they need to know what understanding entails. That is, when they understand what they are reading, what are they doing, what’s happening inside their head? And do they recognize when meaning breaks down, when they no longer understand what they are reading? Too many of our students don’t have this awareness. We need to teach our students to ask themselves, as they read:
• Does this make sense?
• Does this sound like language?
• Do I know what is happening in the text?"

Routman 2002, 125
Click and Clunk

To help students self-monitor their comprehension, teachers may introduce the click and clunk technique. A click is a part of the text that is understood; a clunk is a part of the text that is not understood and causes the reader, listener, or viewer to stop. Through think-alouds, teachers model the technique. They then explain to students that as long as their reading makes sense, everything clicks and rolls along smoothly. When there is a “clunk,” the student’s comprehension is halted—something is broken, not quite right.

The click and clunk technique enables students to create both an auditory response (click and clunk) and a visual image—a car clicking along and then breaking down (clunk!). Teachers note the clunks using question marks placed on sticky notes. Once students find that their comprehension has broken down, it’s time to use a fix-up strategy.
Fix-Up Strategies

Effective comprehenders use fix-up strategies when they cannot readily understand what they are reading, hearing, or viewing. Not all students automatically use these strategies, though, so it’s important for teachers to identify them, model them, and teach students how and when to use them.

Teachers instruct students in these strategies:

• Skip what is not understood and move on. Clarification of the meaning may come as the student reads further in the text.
• Slow down or speed up. Slowing down when reading a difficult text sometimes helps students make more sense of their reading. Reading faster, to look ahead, sometimes gives the reader clues to the meaning of the text.
• Delay judgement about what the text means. When students keep reading, they may find that the writer fills in gaps in their understanding.
• Make an educated guess about the meaning of the word, sentence, or paragraph that may be unclear. By keeping these “hypothesized” meanings in mind as they read, students can determine if their guesses make sense.
• Reread the sentence or an earlier part of the text. Often, rereading text quietly aloud helps. By rereading a difficult sentence or a larger piece of previously read text, students may gain the information they need to incorporate the meaning of the new sentence.
• Use pictures, graphs, and charts to help.
• Try to make a mental picture of what is happening.
• Explain to someone else what is understood so far.
• Consult a dictionary, thesaurus, or another student to help or clarify understanding.
• Ask for help, consulting the teacher only as a last resort.

When to Use a Fix-Up Strategy

You know you need a fix-up strategy when ...

☒ the pictures inside your mind stop forming
☒ you cannot answer your own questions
☒ your mind wanders from the text; you read it, but are thinking about something else
☒ the page you are now reading has nothing to do with what you thought the text was about
☒ you cannot explain what you have just read
☒ characters appear and you cannot remember who they are

(Adapted from Zwiers 2004, 134)
**Say Something**

“Say something” (Harste 1988) is a simple technique that forces students to stop, reflect, share their thoughts, and thereby monitor their comprehension and learn from others.

**Implementing the “Say Something” Technique**

1. The teacher begins by reading aloud a passage from a text. A non-fiction text that promotes much discussion is often good to start with.

2. At a logical and enticing point, the teacher stops and asks the students to each turn to a partner and “say something” about what they just heard.

3. A few students share their thoughts with the large group. Were most of their comments similar? Were any very different?

4. The process continues until the text is complete.

Teachers may use this same technique during shared and guided reading. In the case of guided reading, it is necessary to designate a stopping point ahead of time so that the students know where to stop.

(Adapted from McLaughlin and Allen 2002, 132)

**Self-Monitoring Using Questions**

Asking themselves questions as they read, view, or listen to a text will help students self-monitor their comprehension. This is what effective comprehenders do. The questions in the chart on the facing page may prove useful.
Summarizing Mini-Lesson

The purpose of this mini-lesson is to help students get into the habit of taking time to stop as they read, listen, or view to make sure that the text is making sense. Weak comprehenders rarely stop and reflect, but instead continue on whether the text makes sense or not.

It is important that students are stopped at natural breaks and only occasionally (once or twice in a short text and four or five times in a long text). Stopping too frequently, especially with fiction text, often decreases comprehension as the flow is disrupted.

Implementing a Summarizing Mini-Lesson

1. The teacher previews the text with the students. The class looks at
   • the front cover (and sometimes the back cover) of the text
   • information about the author and illustrator
   • a few pictures or other visuals in the text
   Students then predict what the text will be about.
2. The teacher reads the text aloud to the students and stops every page or two, or at the end of a section, to provide a summary by thinking aloud (e.g., “So far the text is about.... I know this because....” Do the students agree or disagree?)

Questions to Ask When Reading, Listening, or Viewing Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Type</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To get the gist of what I'm reading, hearing, or viewing | What is the story about?  
What is the problem?  
What is the solution?  
What do I need to know more about? |
| To predict/verify/decide              | What's going to happen next?  
Is my prediction still a good one?  
Do I need to change my prediction?  
What makes me think so?              |
| To visualize/verify/decide           | What does this (person, place, or thing) look like?  
Is the picture in my mind still good?  
Do I need to change the picture?  
What makes me think so?               |
| To summarize                          | What's happened so far?  
Who did what?  
What makes me think so?                |
| To think aloud                        | What am I thinking right now?  
Why?                                      |
| To solve problems when I don't understand | Should I ...  
• stop and review?  
• reread or look back?  
• ignore and move on?  
Why?                                      |

(Adapted from Allington 2001, 105)
Fig Pudding by Ralph Fletcher is a great read-aloud, with chapters ideally suited to summarizing. This moving book describes the antics of a family with six children and offers many opportunities for students to make personal connections. The book is also useful for teaching study skills, such as note taking and monitoring comprehension.

3. The teacher reads the next section aloud and stops. The students are given time to summarize in their heads.

4. Students may then make one of two choices:
   - Verbalize their summaries with a partner. Their summaries consist of two parts: a summary statement and a statement explaining “I know this because....” This statement may share evidence from the text or simply be something inferred. Some summaries may then be shared with the large group for discussion or debate.
   - Write down their summaries, which will become a written record or outline of the text.

5. The teacher continues reading subsequent sections until the entire text is completed.

6. Students write overall summaries of the whole text (one or two sentences), which may then be shared orally with a partner, a small group, or the entire class. Alternatively, students’ summary statements may be submitted to the teacher for review.

Skimming and Scanning

Skimming is a technique readers use when they want a quick and general sense of what is covered by a text, whether it is fiction or nonfiction. The reader looks for key words (character names, subject-specific vocabulary, and so on), headings, diagrams, pictures, words in bold print, and opening and closing paragraphs. The purpose of skimming is to identify the author's main ideas at a high rate of speed.

Scanning is another reading technique used to quickly locate something specific in a text. The reader glances through the text, focusing on key words and sentences that relate to the information being sought. A reader may scan a text such as a phone book to find a phone number, a recipe to see what ingredients are needed, or a reading passage to identify the setting or the name of a character.
Skimming for Key Words
1. The teacher provides the class with a short reading passage on chart paper or an overhead, or distributes individual copies to students.
2. The teacher then explains the term skimming (see the previous page). Students are asked to read the passage quickly, without stopping, to read every word, and to note any key words that help them understand what the passage is about. The teacher explains that often these words are found in headings, diagrams, pictures, and words in bold type.
3. Students identify the key words that helped them understand the passage.
4. The group discusses how these key words were found and in what way they facilitated understanding.

Scanning to Locate Specific Information
1. The teacher provides the class with a short reading passage on chart paper or an overhead, or distributes individual copies to students. The topic that the students will be learning about is introduced (e.g., recycling).
2. The teacher explains the term scanning to the students (see the previous page).
3. Students find key words in the passage that provide specific information about the topic. They may want to highlight or underline these key words if they have their own copies of the passage. Alternatively, the teacher asks students to scan the text to find a specific word or sentence (e.g., “On page 44, find another word for garbage [waste] that is used in the text.”).
4. The group discusses how they found these key words and how these words helped them find the information they needed.

SMART
SMART, an acronym for Self-Monitoring Approach to Reading and Thinking, is a metacognitive technique that helps students think about how their reading is going and what strategies they may need to use. It is about students talking to themselves as readers. When students use the SMART technique, they know what questions they need to ask as they read, listen to, or view a text in order to gain meaning. They use this technique to recognize what they understand and do not understand—the basis of effective comprehension. The SMART technique
- provides students with a system for monitoring their reading success
- allows students to verbalize what they do and do not understand about a text
- encourages students to persist until a text is understood
- provides clear steps to resolve misunderstandings
- involves students in summarizing the text in their own words
- helps students to remember key ideas in a text
Check It Out!

More information on the SMART technique can be found at My Read: http://www.myread.org/guide_stages.htm

Implementing the SMART Technique

1. The teacher models the technique for students during shared reading by choosing several paragraphs with a few words or ideas that the students might find challenging. The teacher stops at the confusing part, places a sticky note with a question mark in the margin, and then thinks aloud about which fix-up strategy to use. One or two are tried.

2. Working in small groups (guided reading) or with a partner, students silently read a text. Students may place a check mark on a sticky note at the end of each paragraph or page if they understand it, or a question mark if they do not (some teachers prefer to use only the question mark).

3. Students reread the text with question marks after they have finished reading the paragraph or section. They then try fix-up strategies.

4. If they are still confused, students determine what might be the problem (e.g., vocabulary or concepts). They discuss the confusing part with their partner or small group, and then together determine how to solve the problem (e.g., use a dictionary).

5. After the problem is solved, the question mark is changed to a check mark or the sticky note is removed.

(Adapted from Rhodes and Shanklin 1993, 256)

The steps in this technique can be outlined on a large wall chart, much like the sample on the facing page.

See also the Click and Clunk technique, page 148, and the INSERT Strategy, pages 379–80, in Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum.
Using Narrative and Expository Text Structures
The majority of reading and writing that adults do is nonfiction and much of the content is informational. In fact, the era in which we now live is known as the Information Age. The Internet is increasingly used as the resource of choice for finding out information, and most of the sites are expository in form. As students move into Grade 3 and beyond, their academic achievement in a wide range of subjects depends, in large part, on their ability to read and write informational text.

Students’ ability to comprehend a text often depends on the type of text and the particular characteristics of that text. Students need to pay attention to text structure, or the way that the ideas in the text have been organized, as well as to special features intended to help readers as they read, such as pictures, graphs, size and type of font, headings, punctuation, and so on.

The two general types of texts that students are presented with most often are narrative texts, which tell a factual or fictional story, and expository texts, which provide and explain information. When students recognize the structure of a text, they begin to organize their
thinking as they read to match the text structure. This makes comprehension easier.

Some techniques used by effective readers to help understand narrative and expository texts follow.

### Story/Text Rebuilding

By rebuilding an unfamiliar piece of text that has been cut apart, students learn to recognize the organizational structures and elements of different kinds of texts. The piece might be a story, a chapter, or a section of informational text.

#### Implementing the Story/Text Rebuilding Technique

1. The teacher chooses a piece of text that is unfamiliar to students, copying and cutting it into meaningful segments and then modeling the text-rebuilding process.
2. The teacher chooses another piece of text that is unfamiliar to the students, copying and cutting it into meaningful segments.
3. The teacher distributes the segments to groups of three to five students each. All groups may work with the same piece of segmented text, or different groups may work with different texts, depending on the purpose of the activity.
4. Students work together to determine where their text parts fit into the sequence or organization of the whole piece.
5. Students share their thinking about why the segments go together in a particular order.
6. Once the text is rebuilt, students reread the completed text to determine if it makes sense and why. There is not necessarily a single correct way to rebuild the text. As long as the text makes sense grammatically (syntactically) and is meaningful (semantically) it is acceptable.
7. The teacher reads the original text aloud to the students. How do the students’ versions compare with the original? Do they prefer their version? Why or why not?

### Story Grammar

Story grammar consists of the various common elements of stories:

- setting—when and where the story takes place
- characters—who is in the story
- plot—what happens in the story and why
- problem—conflict, issue, disagreement
- solution—how the problem is solved

---

**Check It Out!**

National Geographic for Kids: http://www.nationalgeographic.com/kids/

Sports Illustrated for Kids: http://www.sikids.com


"Teaching students in grades 3–6 to identify and represent story structure improves their comprehension of the story they have read."

Snow 2002, 33
When students use this technique, they are learning to identify and understand these elements. Fairy tales and fables are particularly well suited to demonstrating the story grammar technique.

**Implementing the Story Grammar Technique**

1. During shared reading time, the teacher helps students to identify and understand the elements of a story by first defining the key story-grammar terms (see the previous page).

2. The teacher reads a familiar story to the class.

3. Students are asked to use the story grammar definitions to identify the various parts of the story. The teacher records their responses in chart form on chart paper or an overhead (e.g., under Set, “Los Angeles apartment building, summer 1997”).

4. Students then apply this technique on their own after a read-aloud or an independent reading session, or in small groups after a guided reading lesson.

5. The teacher monitors students’ understanding and use of this technique to support comprehension. Students could be asked to complete story grammar charts or to identify the elements of a story just read when in a reading conference.

BLM 8: Story Grammar, page 195

**Nonfiction Text Features and Structures**

Much of students’ time in Grades 3 to 6 is spent reading nonfiction materials. This is because they spend more time throughout the day reading to learn. By learning how to read informational texts and nonfiction content in narrative texts across subject areas, students will develop the strategies needed to understand the concepts and information being presented.

This makes a great classroom chart or poster!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Captions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagrams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using Text Features to Help Students Preview Nonfiction Text

• During shared and guided reading, the teacher presents texts that include a variety of nonfiction text features.

• The teacher models for the students how to preview the text by looking at the text features, such as headings, subheadings, graphics, and the index. (For example, "The headings in this chapter of my math text tell me that the focus of the lessons will be on graphing, collecting data, and graphing with technology. I’m going to need some graph paper and will need to use the computer.")

• During guided reading, the teacher provides the students with many opportunities to practice their previewing skills using text features. Students may be encouraged to refer to a summary poster of text features or a shared reading/writing chart to help them identify and think about the purpose of each feature. They could also take turns adding the name of the book to a chart and checking off the text features found (see adjacent chart).

• The teacher also models writing using text features during shared writing.
Beat the Clock
Beat the Clock is an engaging activity that gives students practice with finding and describing text features. Pairs of students or individuals are given a limited amount of time to review an informational text and to write down at least one example of every text feature they can find. The student or pair group who notes the most text features and explains their purposes within the time limit provided will "beat the clock."

BLM 9: Beat the Clock, page 196

Visually Representing Text Using Graphic and Semantic Organizers
When students represent text visually, such as with a graphic organizer, they are prompted to remember what they have just read in a concrete, visual way. For many students, this strategy is a helpful method for organizing and remembering a text, which they may perceive as confusing and too abstract to readily recall and understand. Using graphic organizers also helps students to activate and organize prior knowledge around a topic.

Students benefit from using graphic organizers as a tool to support discussion and writing. Too often, however, students prepare a graphic organizer as an end product, not as a foundation for further thinking, discussion, and writing. The graphic organizer is just like the word processor on the computer—it is only a tool.

Graphic organizers, such as those described in this section, provide students with many different ways to represent and make sense of what they read. There are a wide variety of graphic organizers, including semantic maps, webs, charts, and frames.

Key Types of Graphic Organizers
• Plot organizers
• Semantic maps or webs
• Venn diagrams
• Story maps
• Story map comic strips
See also the diagram on page 158 for other graphic organizers not listed here.

Plot Organizers
Plot organizers are visual ways to organize and analyze story plots. They can be used to help students understand and summarize a text.

Creating a graphic organizer must be a more valuable activity than simply more time spent reading.
Implementing Plot Organizers

1. As part of a shared or guided reading discussion, the teacher asks students to identify the elements of a story, which are recorded on chart paper or an overhead. If no one identifies the story’s problem and solution, then the teacher identifies them for the students.

2. The teacher shows students the plot organizer and talks about how it can help them understand and remember the elements of a story.

3. The teacher reads a familiar story aloud and asks students to work in their group to complete the parts of the plot organizer. (Reading a familiar story enables students to focus on the strategy.)

4. Students use a plot organizer themselves or with a partner once they are familiar and comfortable with the strategy.

Semantic Maps or Webs

Semantic maps, or webs, provide students with a graphic way to organize, remember, and represent relevant information from a text or from a research project. Semantic mapping, or webbing, enables students to show relationships between or among many different story elements, such as characters, events, emotions, or settings. It also enables students to show relationships between or among facts, events, or ideas in a research project. This technique is equally useful for developing vocabulary and retrieving and organizing prior knowledge.
Using Semantic Maps or Webs

- The teacher uses chart paper or an overhead to create a semantic map or web with the class. If students are completing a web on their own or with a group, the teacher might provide them with a template (e.g., the Event Map that follows, or BLM 11: Main Idea and Supporting Details).
- The teacher reviews the students’ work to ensure that they are able to sequence events, organize information, and make judgements and inferences from what they read.

![Character Web Showing Cinderella's Emotions](image)

**Character Web Showing Cinderella’s Emotions**

- disappointed, sad, angry
- surprised, amazed
- happy, excited
- worried, sad

**Using Semantic Maps or Webs**

- The teacher uses chart paper or an overhead to create a semantic map or web with the class. If students are completing a web on their own or with a group, the teacher might provide them with a template (e.g., the Event Map that follows, or BLM 11: Main Idea and Supporting Details).
- The teacher reviews the students’ work to ensure that they are able to sequence events, organize information, and make judgements and inferences from what they read.

**Event Map**

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was involved?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
Using Semantic Maps to Keep Track of Characters

Another type of semantic map involves drawing pictures (visuals) of characters and adding their names, nicknames, and roles. It is often difficult for students to keep track of numerous characters in more complex texts as the characters may appear infrequently.

Although it is a great read-aloud book, *Holes* by Louis Sachar tells three stories at once, which students may find confusing. In addition, the characters have nicknames, which can also lead to confusion. Creating a semantic map as the story is read aloud helps students to keep track of the characters and establish how they connect to one another.

Venn Diagrams

A Venn diagram, often referred to as a compare/contrast diagram, is made up of two or more overlapping circles. Students describe, compare, and contrast attributes and characteristics of things, people, places, events, characters, stories, and nonfiction texts using a visual representation. The Venn diagram is a good way for students to see how ideas are related.

**Venn Diagram: Brown Bears vs. Polar Bears**

- **Brown Bears**
  - brown fur
  - hibernate during winter
  - omnivore (vegetation main part of diet)
  - live in forests and meadows
  - most active at night

- **Polar Bears**
  - white or off-white fur
  - only pregnant females hibernate in winter
  - carnivore (seals are main part of diet)
  - live in the Arctic and tundra
  - most active in the morning and evening

**Check It Out!**

More information on graphic organizers is available from http://www.graphic.org

If you want help creating a Venn diagram, visit http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/venn
Implementing Venn Diagrams

1. The teacher may introduce Venn diagrams by asking whether and how students have used them in mathematics (to show how objects are similar and how they are different).

2. The teacher explains that Venn diagrams in reading are used for the same purpose.

3. The teacher reads a familiar story with a number of key characters or different settings to the students. The teacher then works with the class to create a character or setting Venn diagram. Alternatively, the teacher could select a research theme, such as animals, and ask students to identify what is the same and what is different about each animal. The information is recorded using a Venn diagram.

4. Students may then be asked to create a Venn diagram on their own or with a partner after guided or independent reading. Students then have the opportunity to share and explain their diagrams to a small group or the whole class.

Story Maps

This technique requires students to create a pictorial or written representation of the settings in a story, the actions of the characters, and the conclusion of the story. Mapping the story allows students to visualize in sequence to see how the plot and characters are related to the setting. Story mapping is also a useful technique for helping students develop their organizational skills as they write their own stories.

A story map is a tool intended to support students as they read and write. However, story maps used too frequently do not allow students the time needed to make sense of text through more personal and authentic ways, such as response journals and discussions.

Story Map Comic Strips

Creating story map comic strips provides students with a motivating and artistic way to demonstrate their understanding of a story and create a personal response to the text. A story map comic strip lesson plan for Grades 3 to 5 and tools to help students create their own comic strips are available at http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=236 from ReadWriteThink.
Retelling, Summarizing, Synthesizing, Inferring

Students’ overall comprehension of text is improved when they are able to retell, summarize, synthesize, and infer. When students retell and summarize, they are doing more than just listing events; they are making decisions about what is and isn't important in a text, making inferences to draw conclusions about a text, and synthesizing concepts and ideas to pull their thinking together. Often, they are also adding their own personal connections to the text. “[S]ynthesis is as much about what a reader does during reading as it is about a coherent retelling after reading” (Keene and Zimmermann 1997, 176).

By Grade 3, most students will have experience in retelling stories and will be familiar with the retelling format; however, they may not have had experience with summarizing. Some students may find summarizing a difficult task. “[O]lder and more proficient readers summarize better than younger and less skilled readers” (Irvin 1998, 206). The techniques and activities that follow will improve students’ skill and understanding and help to support their comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Techniques for Retelling and Summarizing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Summarizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• GIST procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Book clubs and book talks, reviews, and recommendations (see pages 140–42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Literary news reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Literature circles (see Chapter 5: In the Classroom: Making It Work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Readers Theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Summarizing, Making Connections, Responding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who Wants But So (Then)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reciprocal teaching (see also Chapter 6: Supporting Struggling and Reluctant Readers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summarizing

Being able to summarize what has been read is an important comprehension and study skills technique, but it is often difficult for students to do. Students have to learn how to select the most salient points of the text (the essence or the gist) and need to ensure that their summaries include inference, synthesis, and analysis. They may summarize orally or in writing.

Implementing the Summarizing Technique

1. The teacher provides students with a short story or an informational piece. The text either can be read aloud by the teacher or silently by the students.
2. After reading, students ask themselves one of these two questions: “What should I be able to tell someone else about this?” or “What are the most important points that were made in the text?” Students identify these important points.

3. The teacher reminds the students that a summary includes only essential information that readers need to remember. This information includes important ideas, events, details, and characters from the text.

### One Approach to Summarizing

When students summarize a piece of text, they may find the following steps helpful.

**Step 1:** Delete unnecessary material. Eliminating information that is unnecessary or trivial is much easier than eliminating redundant material, even for students in Grades 4 and 5 (Pearson and Fielding 1991).

**Step 2:** Delete information that is repeated (redundant) and is not useful.

**Step 3:** Choose a word to replace a list of items. For example, the text may indicate that the character has bought peaches, pears, apples, cherries, and bananas. This would be summarized in one word—fruit.

**Step 4:** Choose a word to replace individual parts of an action. For example, the text may indicate that the character unlocked the car door, put the key in the ignition, looked behind him, and drove out of the parking lot. This idea could be summarized as, “The character drove out of the parking lot.”

**Step 5:** Select a topic sentence if there is one.

**Step 6:** If there is no topic sentence, create one.

(Adapted from McNeil 1987, 157)

4. Through teacher modeling, as well as group and individual practice, students learn to apply the steps to create brief summaries of text.

5. The teacher records summary points in jot-note form so everyone can read them.

6. The class discusses and numbers these points.

7. In discussion with students, the teacher rewrites the points so they become full sentences. The class reviews the sentences and their order to ensure that a short summary of the information or story has been completed.
The GIST Procedure

A second approach to summarizing is the GIST procedure, developed by Patricia Cunningham. “In GIST, students create summaries of 15 or fewer words for increasingly large amounts of text, beginning with single sentences and working incrementally to an entire paragraph” (Duke and Pearson 2002, 221).

 Teachers begin by working with the whole class to create a GIST summary. They then direct students to work in small groups, and finally have students create a GIST summary on their own.

Literary News Reports

Students learn to summarize when they turn stories into front-page news reports. They also learn what constitutes a news report. (See also News Stories, under the topic Authentic Reasons to Write in Chapter 3, pages 258–61.)

Implementing Literary News Reports

1. The teacher brainstorms with students the types of information that appear in a news report. Elements include headline, dateline, byline, and body of the report. A newspaper article or report is shown to students to demonstrate.

2. The class then identifies the order of the contents of a news report: the lead, the specific details arranged from most to least important, and the ending.

3. The teacher models the technique using a familiar story. The group then completes a literary news report together. For example, a headline for the story of Little Red Riding Hood might read, “Wolf captured!” The lead might be, “A quick-thinking hunter saved a grandmother and granddaughter from a hungry wolf yesterday in the forest outside of town.”

4. Students work in pairs or small groups to create literary news reports based on a read-aloud, shared, or guided reading text. They then share their reports with other groups.

Check It Out!

New York Times Learning Network
http://www.nytimes.com/learning/

Yahooligans
http://yahooligans.com
Readers Theater
Students dramatize a rehearsed story, poem, or story adaptation, using mainly their voices. Readers Theater is generally performed without costumes or much movement. In bringing a piece of literature to life, students not only understand and summarize or retell a text, but they also interpret mood, character, and events.

Implementing Readers Theater
1. Small groups of up to five students rewrite a story, poem, song, or chant as a short play with a narrator. This could be a piece that they’ve read together during shared or guided reading or through a read-aloud. They may add sound effects or music.
2. Students rehearse the selection until they are confident and comfortable about their parts. There may be times when the group combines their voices for special effects and other times when individuals speak alone. In some ways, Readers Theater is like a musical composition.
3. Students perform their reading in front of an audience. Since there are few actions, the goal is for the audience to be able to visualize the story, based only on the reading performance.

For more information on Readers Theater, see Chapter 5: In the Classroom: Making It Work.

Summarizing, Making Connections, Responding
This technique requires students to summarize what they know. They then make connections to personal experiences and memories, ideas, books, and so on. Finally, they respond or reflect by asking questions, wondering, and thinking about their reading and experiences.

Summarizing, making connections, and responding encourage students to make personal connections and inferences, thus improving their comprehension.
Implementing the Summarizing, Making Connections, Responding Technique
1. The teacher may model the technique after a read-aloud.

Teacher Model Based on Silverwing by Kenneth Oppel

Summarizing: This story traces the adventures of Shade, the runt of a silverwing bat colony, who becomes separated from his family during his first winter migration. In his struggle to return to his colony, Shade learns an important lesson about the dangers of reckless curiosity. But he also learns that within him are the instincts, intelligence, and courage to survive.

Making Connections: This story reminds me of the time I went shopping with my family and got lost because I decided to go look at something without telling anyone.

Responding: I wonder why people, even when they know something might be dangerous, do it anyway.

2. Students, working either in pairs or small groups, practice summarizing, making connections, and responding after a read-aloud, shared, or guided reading session.

3. The teacher encourages students to use this technique in their own personal responses to reading. They might choose a response journal, a book talk, or other form of response.

4. This activity also works with literature circles.

Who Wants But So (Then)

This simple technique can be used by students to quickly summarize the main conflict and resolution in fiction.

Implementing the “Who Wants But So (Then)” Technique
1. The teacher models the technique for students by completing a Who Wants But So chart for a familiar story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Title: Aladdin</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aladdin, a poor street orphan,</td>
<td>to marry princess Jasmine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Then</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the king’s evil advisor Jafar, who seeks the power of the genie for himself, reveals Aladdin’s identity and has him killed. But the genie saves Aladdin’s life and together they save the kingdom from Jafar. Jasmine is permitted to marry Aladdin and they live happily ever after.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Students may then use this technique on their own when summarizing fiction by identifying
   * the character(s) (Who)
   * what the character(s) wants (Wants)
   * what is preventing the character(s) from achieving the goal; i.e., the problem (But)
• how the problem is solved (So)

Recently, a modification of this technique has been seen in classrooms. Then has been added to make the ending more complete.

(Adapted from Boyle and Peregoy 1990, 194–99)

Reciprocal Teaching

This indirect form of summarizing instruction involves four comprehension strategies: summarizing, asking important questions, clarifying unclear segments (monitoring comprehension), and predicting. This approach has proven very successful in improving text comprehension, especially for struggling comprehenders.

Implementing the Reciprocal Teaching Framework

1. The teacher prepares by selecting and reading the text that students will use.
2. The teacher thinks about how to help students predict what the selection or section will be about, or review or summarize what was read during the previous session. (See Using Prior Knowledge/Predicting, pages 176–81.)
3. Students then read the text selection silently.
4. The teacher asks two or three questions to promote discussion of the text selection. Some of these questions should be “thick” questions (high level) or “off the page” questions. (See Thick and Thin Questions, page 176, and Question–Answer Relationships (QAR), pages 172–74.)
5. Students are prompted to clarify any confusions (e.g., “Is there anything that doesn’t make sense?”). Alternatively, the teacher uses a think-aloud to model a confusion and how it is clarified.
6. The teacher determines how to help students summarize the section of text read.
7. Steps 2 through 6 are repeated with the next section of the text.

The reciprocal teaching framework can be used during read-alouds, shared and guided reading, and literature circles. Students learn the strategies through teacher modeling and think-alouds so that they can eventually take turns coaching other students through the process. Following the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model, only when students understand and use the four comprehension strategies with support should they be expected to apply them independently.

Older struggling readers who use reciprocal teaching to support younger readers will themselves develop skill in

• generating and responding to questions
• making and checking predictions
• summarizing
• clarifying thoughts
• fluency

They will also develop confidence as readers!

See also Chapter 6: Supporting Struggling and Reluctant Readers for more information on the reciprocal teaching framework.

A review of numerous studies concluded that reciprocal teaching is effective at improving comprehension (Duke and Pearson 2002).

“[The order in which the reciprocal teaching strategies are used is not fixed; it depends on the text and the reader.]”

Oczkus 2003, 14

He who teaches learns.

Check It Out!

Both students and teachers need to ask questions. Teachers need to model questioning through think-alouds. They also need to model a variety of questions and techniques, such as thick and thin questions and question-answer relationships (QAR) (see pages 172–74). This will help students understand the process of questioning and how to find the answers. Research undertaken in Grades 3 to 5 indicates that “engaging students in elaborative questioning improves their comprehension of text read during instruction and their comprehension of new text read independently” (Snow 2002, 33).

When asking questions, effective teachers

- include open-ended questions
- focus on the thinking process, not a specific answer (students’ responses need only be defensible). Teachers ask students further questions, such as “What makes you think so?” and “How do you know?”
- allow a wait time of at least 8 seconds. This may seem lengthy but it is important. Students need time to reflect on the question and to contemplate a meaningful response. Bombarding students with one question right after another may result in superficial answers (simply what comes into the student’s head, with little or no reflection), and in the same students responding repeatedly.
- repeat or rephrase questions for the students who are struggling. When students understand that the teacher will persevere with them until they succeed, they become engaged in a different way and respond successfully (Bergman 1992).
- provide the response if the student continues to struggle, and then have the student repeat or paraphrase it.

### Steps in Reciprocal Teaching*

**Predict**
What will happen?

**Question**
Ask questions about the text being read.
- *who, what, when, where, why, and how* questions
- *thick and thin* questions
- *on the page and off the page* questions

**Clarify**
Clear up any confusion. Are there words or ideas that need to be explained?

**Summarize**
What are the most important ideas?

*The order of the steps may change, depending on the text and the reader.

If students are asked simple questions, simple thinking is often the outcome.

Ask fewer questions and give students more time to explain how they know.

In some classrooms three or four students give 95 percent of the answers.

### Training Others in Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal teaching is also an ideal framework for supporting comprehension coaching. Volunteers, buddies, and paraprofessionals must have opportunities to see the framework modeled and to practice it with feedback before working independently.

- The teacher models the strategy several times. (I do it.)
- The coach is given several opportunities to work with the teacher in employing the framework with a group of students. (We do it.)
- The coach is then allowed to take the lead in assisting students using this technique. (You do it.)
- Feedback is provided as needed.

### BLM 6: Intervention Lesson Framework: Reciprocal Teaching in Chapter 6, page 597

#### Generating Questions, Answering Questions

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- provide the response if the student continues to struggle, and then have the student repeat or paraphrase it.
Students become active participants in the reading process by evaluating or making judgements about what they are reading. When students evaluate a text, they try to identify the author's viewpoint and purpose, distinguish fantasy from reality and fact from opinion, and make value judgements.

Students learn to evaluate texts by asking questions as they think about the meaning of the selection. Questions can be literally based, where students look for responses that are evident in the text, or inferentially based, where they read between the lines to determine the meaning of the text. However, students don’t naturally know how to find the answers to questions. That skill has to be explained, modeled, and demonstrated.

Learning how to generate and answer questions is an important skill for students to learn. The following techniques will help students improve their skills in this area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do ...</th>
<th>Do not ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• ask students to explain their thinking (e.g., “How do you know that?”); thinking aloud makes their thought processes public</td>
<td>• ask too many closed questions (e.g., simple yes or no questions); the quality of the response depends to a large degree on the quality of the question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• encourage students to self-question as they read (see Self-Monitoring Using Questions, pages 150–51)</td>
<td>• follow-up any student response with “good”; this ensures that students who do not receive this affirmation do not interpret it to mean that their response was wrong or inferior</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Most children are interrogated after reading but have limited opportunity to receive instruction in the comprehension strategies needed to answer the questions posed.”

Allington 1994, 22
KWLM is a good activity for generating many questions about an informational topic. This technique encourages students to
- think about what they know about the topic
- predict what they think they will learn or generate questions
- reflect on what they learn
- perhaps question and research further

See Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum for more information on the KWLM technique.

**Question–Answer Relationships (QAR)**

This technique involves teaching students how to create and then find answers to questions. Teachers often bombard students with questions, but don’t often teach them how or where they might find the answers. QAR also helps students to learn to ask a variety of questions, including those that require higher-level thinking and promote self-questioning. Again, this is what effective comprehenders do naturally.

“*The absence of comprehension is related to not knowing the relevant questions to ask, or not knowing how to find the relevant answers.*”

Smith 1994, 53
There are two basic QAR divisions, which can be further subdivided, as the chart that follows shows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the Book (on the page)</th>
<th>In My Head (off the page)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Right There:</strong> The answer is in the text and stated clearly, usually within a single sentence. The words used to form the question and the words to answer it are “right there” in the book.</td>
<td><strong>On My Own:</strong> The answer is not in the text. The reader comes up with the answer based on what he or she already knows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The answer is right there “in the book” and easy to find. It is usually found within a single sentence.</td>
<td>• The answer can only be found “in my head.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Think and Search (hidden):</strong> The answer is implied in the text but it is not directly stated. It is “hidden.”</td>
<td><strong>Author and Me:</strong> The answer is not in the text. The reader must think about what he or she knows and what the author says, and then put them together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The answer is in the text but it’s not easy to find. It requires information from more than one sentence or paragraph.</td>
<td>• There is no answer unless the reader’s knowledge and the author’s information connect.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question–answer relationships help students to understand that
• comprehension depends on both text (what is on the page) and reader (what is in the reader’s head)
• there can be more than one right answer
• not all questions are answered in the text
• some questions will not have answers

During or after a read-aloud, it is a good idea to model all four question types for students using think-alouds.

**Introducing QAR Using Visuals**

QAR supports visual literacy, which involves making meaning from, or comprehending, visual stimuli. A great way to introduce the QAR technique is a mini-lesson during which students look very carefully at the details of a picture to make meaning.

Just like reading print, some pictures provide all the specific information needed to answer the question. In other cases, the information may be implied or the students may need to figure it out on their own. For many students, learning to “read pictures” using QAR is initially easier than applying the technique to print. And using the picture context is less threatening for many students, especially ESL students and those struggling with decoding print.

**Implementing the QAR Technique**

1. The teacher introduces QAR and the category terms and explains that there are two main categories of questions and answers:
   • In the Book (on the page): answers are stated in the text

**Check It Out!**

• In My Head (off the page): answers are not specifically stated in the text

The teacher then explains and models (using think-alouds) the two types of question–answer relationships for each category:
• In the Book = Right There and Think and Search
• In My Head = On My Own and Author and Me

2. Pairs of students are provided with a variety of questions to answer and then classify.

3. During read-aloud and guided reading, students are given opportunities to ask each kind of question.

4. Students formulate their own questions during guided reading. They work with a partner or a small group to first answer the questions. Then they classify the questions as “right there,” “think and search,” “on my own,” or “author and me.” Encourage students to engage in debates and discussions as they make their decisions about question types.

(Adapted from Raphael 1986, 516–22)

“[T]eaching students in grades 3–9 to self-question while reading text enhances their understanding of the text used in instruction and improves their comprehension of new text.”
Snow 2002, 33

Teachers can facilitate questioning by having students take part in a range of activities, such as
• KWLM (see page 172)
• coming up with questions that correspond to supplied answers based on a familiar text
• taking turns asking one another questions about a small segment of text
• conducting in-role interviews in which partners take turns playing the interviewer and the interviewee
Questioning the Author (QtA)
When students use the Questioning the Author technique (QtA), they learn that it’s important to ask questions as they read in order to think more deeply about their reading. They also learn to question what the author has said (or not said) or implied, and why.

Students who are struggling with comprehension often do not ask questions before, during, or after reading, listening, or viewing. They do not connect with the text, so they don’t question what the author is saying or why it is being said. The QtA technique permits more student talk and less teacher talk. It is important for teachers to avoid asking too many questions before, during, and after reading. Rather, provide students with many opportunities to come up with the questions. Use of this technique during read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading results in improved listening and reading comprehension.

Implementing the QtA Technique
1. When reading aloud, the teacher promotes discussion by asking questions such as, “What is the author’s message?” or “What is the author trying to tell us?”
2. The teacher further focuses students’ attention on the author’s message by saying, “This is what the author says, but what does it mean?” More discussion occurs.
3. The teacher then helps students link information by asking such questions as, “How does this new information connect with what the author has already told us? Does this make sense with what the author told us before?”
4. The teacher also helps students make inferences by asking, “Did the author tell us that? How do you know that if the author didn’t tell us?”

(Adapted from Duke and Pearson 2002, 205–42, 230)

“[S]tudents become much more successful at higher order comprehension and monitoring their comprehension as a result of participating in Questioning the Author.”
Duke and Pearson 2002, 39
Questions That Support Critical Literacy

Teachers scaffold critical literacy through the questions they ask during classroom discussions. The questions that follow help students to examine an author’s perspective.

- “What is the topic? How is it presented? What themes are being expressed?”
- “How are the characters presented? Why are they presented in this way? How might you change a character(s) and why?”
- “What is the purpose of the text? What is it trying to make you think or feel?”
- “What wasn’t said about the topic? Why was it left out? What would you add or delete if you were writing on this topic?”
- “Who is writing to whom? Whose positions are being expressed? Whose voices and positions are not heard?”


Thick and Thin Questions

The terminology thick and thin questions has been cited by researchers such as Harvey and Goudvis (2000) and McLaughlin and Allen in Guided Comprehension: A Teaching Model for Grades 3–8 (2002). The technique helps students to understand that questions have different depths ranging from strictly recall (thin) to complex and open-ended (thick). Students learn that the types of questions they ask themselves as they read affects the kind of meaning they make.

Implementing Thick and Thin Question Classification

1. The teacher explains the concept of thick and thin questions.
2. After reading aloud a text selection, the teacher asks a thick question and a thin question, and then labels each one to serve as a model.
3. The teacher reads the text selection aloud again, asks a series of questions, and then has the students classify the questions as thick or thin.
4. During the next read-aloud, the teacher has the students come up with questions, and then answer and classify one another’s questions as thick or thin.
5. After guided reading, the teacher may have the students work in pairs to create thick and thin questions for one another to answer and classify.

Using Prior Knowledge/Predicting

In order to make sense of a text selection, students need to call on their background or prior knowledge. It is very difficult for students to understand material if they have little or no personal knowledge of the topic. Comprehension depends on readers, viewers, and listeners connecting what they already know with what the text is about. By using prior knowledge, students are able to draw on what they already know to help them confirm information and learn new ideas.
from the text. The techniques listed in the box that follows will help students identify what they already know before and as they read, listen, or view.

### Techniques for Supporting Prior Knowledge/Predicting

- Anticipation guide
- Identifying, categorizing, and sorting
- Vocabulary prediction—Let’s Predict
- Sort and predict
- KWLM (see page 172 and Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum)
- SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review)
- CATS (covers, author, title, skim)

### Anticipation Guide

An anticipation guide, also known as a prediction guide, is a useful prereading and post-reading activity, best used with topics or themes about which students are likely to have different opinions and attitudes. It activates prior knowledge, prompts students to make predictions, and can be used to set a purpose for reading. It can motivate discussion and interest. After reading, it can also help some students focus on inaccuracies and misconceptions about a topic as they accept, reject, or modify their prior knowledge and predictions. This technique can be used with read-alouds, shared reading, and guided reading.

### Implementing the Anticipation Guide Technique

1. Once the teacher decides whether to introduce the activity to the whole class, a large group, or a small group of students, he or she selects a fiction, nonfiction, or poetry text to work with.

2. The teacher identifies the main themes/ideas in the text by writing four to six statements related to them. These statements might be written on chart paper or an overhead, or distributed to students in the form of a handout. A few statements may come directly from the text.

3. Students respond to these statements orally or in writing, either agreeing or disagreeing with them. Their decisions should be based on what they know or think they know, and should be supported by reasons. “I believe this because....”

4. Students discuss the statements as a class, with a small group, or in pairs, being sure to justify their responses. They may then choose to revise their initial responses based on new information shared by peers.

5. Students read or listen to the text to confirm their predictions, and then revise their original responses to the statements where applicable.
6. The activity concludes with the teacher prompting discussion about what students have learned from the text by asking questions such as those that follow.

- "What statements support your original opinions?"
- "What statements contradict your original opinions?"
- "Where have you changed your opinion?"
- "Where you haven’t changed your opinion, why do you still agree or disagree with the statements?"
- "What would help you change your mind?"

**Identifying, Categorizing, and Sorting**

Students use this technique to activate, expand, and revise prior knowledge by gathering information they already know about a topic or selection. Identifying can help them see the connections among ideas, concepts, and words. It is also a tool to help them see another’s point of view and justify their decisions.

**Implementing the Identifying, Categorizing, and Sorting Technique**

1. The teacher asks students who are working in large or small groups an open-ended question about a specific topic or theme (e.g., “Which musical instruments can you name?”).
2. The teacher records all responses on individual index cards without making any value judgements. If desired, the teacher may add further ideas.
3. Responses are then categorized and sorted. The teacher models the sorting of one or two cards and then distributes the remainder to students, who bring forward one card at a time. A student reads the card and the teacher begins to sort the cards into the categories identified by the students, encouraging debate and discussion.
4. If some words or ideas fit more than one category, the teacher makes duplicate cards.
5. After the sorting stage is complete, students reread the words in each category to ensure all cards are sorted appropriately.

6. The responses may be charted or organized as a semantic map, which may be used for note taking. (See Semantic Maps or Webs, pages 160–62.)

7. Categorized and sorted words and ideas may remain posted in the classroom as the theme or topic is developed. They may also be added to students’ personal word lists.


**Vocabulary Prediction—Let’s Predict**

This partner activity is a good way to introduce a new book. It helps students to develop vocabulary as well as learn how to predict.

**Implementing the Vocabulary Prediction Technique**

1. From a new text, the teacher chooses 10 to 20 "strong words"; that is, words that elicit images and are key to comprehending the text selection. Students are asked to predict what the story might be about based on the words chosen.

2. Students work in pairs to discuss the vocabulary and to make predictions. This step provides an excellent opportunity for purposeful learning.

Bringing in actual items for the students to categorize and sort is especially helpful for students learning the language or for those weak in vocabulary or concept development.
conversation, which often leads to new understandings of word meanings.

It is not critical for students to correctly predict how the words might be used in the story. What is important is the opportunity to reflect on what the words might mean in relation to one another.

3. Students share their predictions with others and then revisit their predictions after they have read the story. This step engages students in rich talk to enhance their comprehension of the text selection.

**Sort and Predict**

This activity uses 20 to 30 words, which students sort into categories and use for prediction. It supports prediction, categorization, and vocabulary development.

**Implementing the Sort and Predict Technique**

1. The teacher chooses 20 to 30 key words from the text and writes them on index cards for sorting purposes. The same words selected for Vocabulary Prediction—Let’s Predict may be used.

2. The students work in pairs to sort the words into categories. The teacher may choose the number of categories or leave it open-ended. Students label index cards with the category names and manipulate the vocabulary words under their various categories.

3. Students walk around the classroom, looking at how other pair groups categorized the words and comparing how their categories are the same or different. The predictions about the content of the text selection may then be shared as a whole group.

4. The teacher then charts three or four predictions about the text and three or four questions the students may have. Students may also be asked to write their own prediction and questions. After reading, listening to, or viewing the text, students check their predictions. Were their questions answered?

An individual teacher or student chart may look like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prediction</th>
<th>Confirmed (Yes/No)</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answered (Yes/No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review)**

Use of this framework helps students effectively preview, read, and remember content-area reading information. It is a great study-skills technique.

**Implementing SQ3R**

- **Survey:** Students preview the selection by reading the first paragraph, headings, subheadings, last paragraph, and summary, if applicable, to predict what the text will be about.
• **Question:** Students are directed to come up with several questions that the selection might answer. They may choose to turn each heading into a question before reading the selection. This will result in more engagement with the text as students search for answers.

• **Read:** Students read each section of the text to answer their questions. New questions may be added as they read.

• **Recite:** Students ask the questions again and respond to them from memory, either orally or in writing. If they can't answer a question, they should reread the selection.

• **Review:** After the entire selection has been read, students summarize their responses to their questions.

See also SQRQCQ in Chapter 4: Literacy Learning Across the Curriculum, pages 378–79. This strategy, which is modeled on the SQ3R reading strategy, supports learning in mathematics.

**BLM 16: SQ3R Chart, page 203**

**CATS**

CATS is a pre-reading activity that helps students to learn the prereading strategies that most effective readers use. Effective readers preview the text before seriously beginning to read. They predict what the text will be about and decide if in fact they want to read any or all of the text.

**Implementing the CATS Technique**

It is important for teachers to model the CATS technique before read-alouds, as well as before shared and guided reading sessions. Encourage students to use CATS whenever they are choosing a new book.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>What do the front and back covers tell us about the book?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>What do we know about the author and other books he or she may have written?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>What does the title suggest the text may be about?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>Skim the text. Notice any pictures, charts, drawings, diagrams, and maps. Now, make your prediction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**BLM 17: The CATS Technique, page 204**
Using Mental Imagery (Visualizing)

Students who create mental images during and after reading understand the text with greater depth. The text becomes more memorable as students use these images to recall details from it and create their own interpretations of what they have read. Outlined below are suggested activities and techniques to help students learn to develop and use mental imagery to understand a text.

**Techniques for Developing Mental Imagery**
- Can you see it?
- Dramatic arts responses (interviews, tableaux)
- Visual arts responses (sketch to stretch, stretch a paragraph)

**Can You See It?**

This activity encourages students to visualize or paint a picture in their minds as they listen to a text being read aloud.

**Implementing the “Can You See It?” Technique**

1. The teacher might model the strategy first by describing orally or sketching on chart paper a picture that comes to mind after a student volunteer reads a text selection aloud.

2. Two students work together. One partner reads a text selection aloud while the other partner listens with eyes open or shut, visualizing what she or he is hearing. After the reading, the listener orally describes or sketches the image visualized.

Alternatively, one student might read aloud a text selection to a small group while the rest of the group creates their sketches. Afterward, the group shares and discusses the sketches.
Dramatic Arts Responses
Using drama as a way of responding to a text enables students to deepen their understanding of situations, characters, problems, relationships, and concepts of a story, poem, or nonfiction piece. Interviews and tableaux are effective methods of dramatic response. Interviews provide opportunities for students to plan questions that enable them to delve deeper into what they are reading, hearing, or viewing. Students might interview each other in role as the author or illustrator, or as characters in factual, narrative, or poetic texts. Alternatively, they may create tableaux—frozen action shots or pictures that capture the essence of a text scene, historical event, or significant moment.

Implementing Interviews
1. Students plan in advance the questions they will ask, writing them down if necessary.
2. Working in pairs, one partner plays the interviewer while the other acts in role as the character (or other individual being interviewed). They then switch roles.
3. Character role-plays/interviews may also be presented to other groups of students.

Implementing Tableaux
1. Small groups of students read a story, poem, or other text and together consider what still picture they might create based on a scene or situation from the reading. Alternatively, the tableau could show what they think might have come before the situation in a text or what they think might happen next.
2. Before presenting the tableau, students plan how they will use their bodies and faces expressively. They may also use simple props and costumes to help create the scene. Positions should be held as long as is comfortable (about 30 seconds).
Visual Arts Responses

By using art to respond to a text, students can often provide greater detail and description than they might provide in an oral or written response. Sketch to stretch and paragraph sketches are two effective visual arts responses.

Implementing Sketch to Stretch

1. After a read-aloud, shared-reading, or guided-reading session, the teacher has students sketch an event or idea from the story. Some students may need prompting and could be asked to sketch what they learned or felt was the most important part.
2. Students are given about one minute to sketch after being reminded that a sketch is a quick doodle, not a finished piece of art.
3. Students share their sketches with a partner or small group. They describe the sketch’s contents and explain why they decided to sketch this part of the text.
4. Students may decide to revise their sketches in response to ideas shared during the discussion that led to deeper understanding.

(Adapted from Seigel 1984, 178)

Implementing Sketch a Paragraph

1. After guided, shared, or independent reading of a descriptive paragraph, students interpret the content, mood, and characters by creating a quick drawing or sketch.
2. Students share their drawings, discuss their different interpretations, and make changes if they so choose.

Combining Strategies

Once students have been introduced to and understand the reading strategies outlined on the preceding pages, some of the strategies may be combined to encourage students to use and apply their comprehension skills in a more integrated way. Three of these combined strategies are Reciprocal Teaching, SQ3R, and SAIL (Students Achieving Independent Learning). For more on Reciprocal Teaching, see pages 169–70, as well as Chapter 6: Supporting Struggling and Reluctant Readers. Information on the SQ3R strategy can also be found on pages 180–81. The SAIL strategy is outlined below.

SAIL (Students Achieving Independent Learning)

The SAIL framework emphasizes predicting, visualizing, questioning, monitoring comprehension, making connections, and summarizing. After introducing these strategies individually, teachers should teach students how to integrate the strategies as they read across the curriculum.

Implementing the SAIL Strategy

1. The teacher selects a book, shows the cover to students, and asks them to predict what it will be about.
2. The teacher begins to read the book aloud, using think-aloud. For example, the teacher may think aloud a prediction or simply wonder aloud.

Check It Out!

Nell Duke and David Pearson discuss the SAIL strategy in Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension, available at http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/reports/reports/ed%2Dresearchrep/03/march%5F03%5F03.htm
3. Students take turns reading aloud and are "cued" to apply various strategies when and as appropriate (e.g., "What do you think will happen next?"; "Summarize what you just read.").
4. The teacher encourages students to use strategies such as monitoring comprehension and visualizing.
5. When the reading is finished, the teacher prompts students to check their early predictions to determine how accurate they were.

Assessing Reading Comprehension Instruction
Nell Duke and David Pearson suggest that when teachers examine their own classrooms, they should consider whether students are being taught the full range of effective reading comprehension strategies.

Are students being taught to
- identify their purpose for reading; preview texts before reading; make predictions before and during reading; and activate relevant background knowledge?
- use text structure to support comprehension and create visual representations to aid comprehension and recall?
- determine the important ideas and summarize what they read?
- generate questions for text?
- handle unfamiliar words?
- monitor comprehension and use appropriate fix-up strategies?

Does instruction about strategies include
- explicit description of the strategy and when to use it?
- modeling of the strategy in action?
- collaborative use of the strategy in action?
- guided practice using the strategy and the gradual release of responsibility to the student?
- independent practice using the strategy?

Teachers might also ask themselves the following questions:
- Are students being helped to orchestrate multiple strategies, rather than to use only one strategy at a time?
- Are texts used for instruction being carefully chosen to match both the strategy and the students being taught?
- Is there an active concern with student motivation to engage in literacy activities and apply newly learned strategies?
- Are students’ comprehension skills being assessed regularly?

(Adapted from Duke and Pearson 2002, Fig. 10.6)
Closing Thoughts

“Comprehension involves what the reader knows as well as the nature of the text itself. It involves the type of text to be read—narrative, expository, poetry, etc. It involves the purpose for reading. And, it requires a variety of strategies to be shared with students.... In addition, as children progress in their reading development, comprehension becomes increasingly sophisticated. As they mature, readers need to become increasingly strategic in their ability to construct meaning from text” (Rasinski et al. 2000, 1).

To become increasingly strategic readers, listeners, and viewers, students need to have the strategies that work modeled, demonstrated, and explained to them. Think-alouds help to remove the mystery of what effective comprehenders do; the covert becomes overt.

Students need many opportunities to practice these strategies during authentic literacy experiences across all subject areas. They are required to do more than recall details; they need to know how to make personal connections as they think thoughtfully about the ideas, characters, and events in the texts they are engaged with. The ability to explain various strategies is not enough; students need to consistently and spontaneously select, apply, and synthesize the strategies that effective readers use to support comprehension.

When students have internalized the strategies described in this chapter, they will be metacognitive thinkers. They will negotiate text in its many forms, make meaning from it, and participate as thoughtfully literate members of our complex world.

The ultimate goal of all comprehension instruction is to develop proficient, thoughtful literacy learners; however, as effective teachers know, this does not happen by chance. Teachers have an important role to play in this development. Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading–Writing Connection demonstrates how writing becomes more important in supporting comprehension as students move through Grades 3 to 6.
Chapter 2

BLACKLINE MASTERS

BLM 1: Character Pyramid
BLM 2: Character Trait Map
BLM 3: Keeping Track
BLM 4: Literacy Home Links: Home Reading
BLM 5: Literacy Home Links: Choosing “Just Right” Books
BLM 6: Book Review
BLM 7: Planning My One-Minute Book Talk
BLM 8: Story Grammar
BLM 9: Beat the Clock
BLM 10: Plot Organizer
BLM 11: Main Idea and Supporting Details
BLM 12: Story Map
BLM 13: Literary News Report
BLM 14: Question–Answer Relationships (QAR)
BLM 15: Anticipation Guide
BLM 16: SQ3R Chart
BLM 17: The CATS Technique