

# Chapter 4



## **READING COMPREHENSION: STRATEGIES THAT WORK**

**Young children are developing as readers when they are able to understand, interpret and critique what they read. Research has consistently shown that the goal of developing comprehension should go hand-in-hand with the goal of developing solid sound-letter knowledge, even for our youngest learners.**

## Find Out More About Reading Comprehension

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# Research on Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a process in which the reader constructs meaning using as the building materials the information on the printed page and the knowledge stored in the reader's head (Samuels, "The Method of Repeated Readings" 169). It involves intentional thinking, during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader (*Comprehension Strategies* 137).

Reading is comprehension. Comprehension is what reading is all about. Decoding without comprehension is simply **word barking**—being able to articulate the word correctly without understanding its meaning. Effective comprehenders not only make sense of the text they are reading, they can also use the information it contains.

## Factors That Affect Reading Comprehension

Many factors affect a child's ability to comprehend text. These include

- motivation/purpose/goals/engagement
- vocabulary/word knowledge/background knowledge
- automaticity of decoding
- fluent reading
- understanding and use of strategies employed by effective readers
- the nature of the text itself (difficulty and interest)
- the type or genre of text (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, poetry)
- the amount of reading done



*“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.”*

RASINSKI ET AL. 1

One of the best predictors of a child's ability to comprehend print is his or her ability to decode print.

*“If a student is not fluent in word recognition, he/she is thinking about the sounds of the individual letters and letter combinations rather than using that energy to make sense of the text being read. In contrast, because a fluent reader dedicates little capacity to word recognition, most of his/her capacity is available for comprehension.”*

PRESSLEY 2002, 292



## Fluency and Automaticity

Some children can read with automaticity and even with expression but still have limited comprehension. Children must be taught to monitor their comprehension and to know how and when to introduce effective strategies to support comprehension. (See Fix-up Strategies, page 450.)

## Vocabulary Development and Background Knowledge

“It is well established that good comprehenders generally have good vocabularies. And beyond that, there is evidence that teaching students vocabulary, in fact, increases their comprehension abilities” (Pressley 2002, 293). Although vocabulary can be taught, most vocabulary words are learned through reading. That is why people who read a great deal generally have large vocabularies.

Prior knowledge affects comprehension. The more one already knows, the more one comprehends, and the more one comprehends, the more one learns new knowledge to enable comprehension of an even broader array of topics and texts (Fielding and Pearson 1994, 62). It is clear to most teachers that the classroom is not a level playing field. Children who arrive at kindergarten or Grade 1 with a rich background of experiences and vocabulary are advantaged in both listening and reading comprehension. All primary children need many rich, oral language experiences. Some children need even more than others.

Along with the ability to decode print, the child’s level of listening comprehension is very predictive of potential reading comprehension level. Listening comprehension relies heavily on both vocabulary and background knowledge. (See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness.)



*“Children need time to read in school. We continue to organize the school day such that most children have little opportunity to read and write.”*

ALLINGTON 1994, 1



USSR = Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading

SSR = Sustained Silent Reading

DEAR = Drop Everything and Read

“Just right” books are not so challenging that children are solely occupied with figuring out how to decode the words and not so easy that readers are unlikely to learn anything new.

## Reading: Read! Read! Read!

The more reading a reader does, the more reading comprehension should improve. It is important during independent reading that teachers try to ensure that all children are actually reading and not “faking it.” (See Assessment BLM 1: Self-Assessment—My Book Box/Bag Report Card, page 518.) Children (after USSR) may use the Book Box/Bag Report Card to self-assess their engagement during independent reading each day. They award themselves a “grade” using a rubric developed by the class, and, most important, explain how they decided on the grade. If they were not focused on that day (and it happens to everyone occasionally), they then proceed to explain what their approach will be the following day. Books should also be at the child’s appropriate independent reading level. If they are too hard, the child will generally become frustrated and give up. If they are too easy, the child may be bored. Either way, engagement is affected.

The Matthew Effect refers to the fact that good readers tend to read much more than weak readers. Thus, strong readers tend to become stronger and weak readers, reading less, make minimal progress. Accordingly, the gap widens—the poor get poorer while the rich get richer (Stanovitch 360–407).

Independent reading (USSR, SSR, or DEAR) in which children read “just right” texts, is crucial. Yet text selection is only one element of an effective literacy program. Strategy instruction is also critical.



## Rereading

Teachers should honor and encourage children to reread texts. Research suggests that rereading leads to greater fluency and improved comprehension. (See Chapter 7: Early Intervention for Children at Risk, Improving Reading Fluency, page 739.) When all children in a classroom—or an entire school—have their own book boxes or bags, more reading and rereading generally occurs. Children keep a number of “just right” books in their book boxes/bags. The boxes/bags remain at their desks or tables. Whenever it is

independent reading time, or whenever they have “just finished” and have “nothing to do,” it is time to take a book out of the book boxes/bag. These books are read and reread. Struggling readers, who are often seen thumbing through book bins or shelves looking for a book to read, are now engaged in reading and rereading.



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**BLM 3: I Am Getting Better, in Chapter 7, page 764**

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**BLM 4: I Listen and Read, in Chapter 7, page 765**

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## Silent Reading versus Oral Reading

Children need opportunities to read both silently and orally. Beginning readers often sub-vocalize when they read, which generally supports comprehension. Comprehension is also enhanced when children read in pairs, discuss their reading, and receive feedback from an adult or a peer. (See BLM 1: Reading to a Buddy and BLM 2: Buddy Story Retelling.) It is important that the teacher monitor to make sure that one child does not do all the reading.



In order to demonstrate comprehension strategies, reading material must contain challenges (e.g., in words or ideas). If the text is too easy, there will be no need to implement fix-up strategies.

## Selecting Reading Material

Text selection is important to fluency development in the early elementary grades.



- Children need to hear books read aloud and in shared readings. Some of the books selected should be beyond the child's reading level and others at his or her independent/instructional level. Read-alouds beyond the child's instructional level support new vocabulary and concept learning. Read-alouds at the child's reading level encourage the child to pick up the book and read it after the read-aloud. By **thinking aloud**, the teacher can help children to understand effective reading strategies. For example, the teacher might say while reading, "I don't understand this. I think I'll reread it to see if I can make it make sense."



- During guided reading, children must use books at their instructional level (90–94 percent accuracy). Guided reading is a great time for comprehension instruction.
- Children must be able to easily access a variety of texts, both fiction and nonfiction.
- Initially, highly patterned texts help to support children's confidence and fluency. However, children must move beyond texts that they can easily memorize.
- During independent reading, children must use books with which they are very successful. These are books in which children can decode at least 95 percent of the words accurately (CIERA, *Every Child a Reader (Topic 4)* 4). However, along with high accuracy must come comprehension.
- Reading and writing must also be connected. Children learn to write from reading and to read from writing. (See Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading-Writing Connection.)



## Effective Classroom Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension

A review of the research conducted over 30 years established that the following three features of instruction consistently promote comprehension:

- reading
- explicit strategy instruction
- talk

Source: CIERA, *Every Child a Reader (Topic 5)* 3.

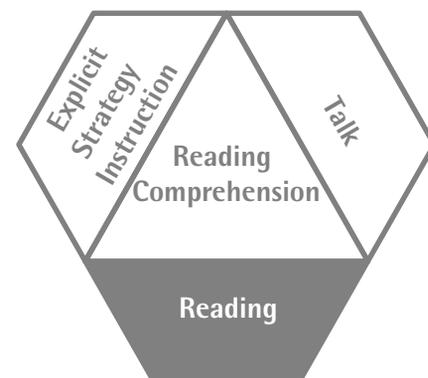
### Reading: Large Amounts of Time

Reading comprehension develops over time as children engage in the process. Allocating ample time for actual text reading and ensuring that children are actually reading text during that time are among the teacher's most vital tasks in comprehension instruction (Fielding and Pearson 1994, 62). Unfortunately, many children, especially struggling readers, often “fake it.” Children must be reading and rereading books that they can read (“just right” books) to improve comprehension. Through extensive reading, children's vocabulary and background knowledge improve, which results in improved comprehension.

However, reading comprehension is a natural co-developing process, which can (and often must) be enhanced by appropriate strategy instruction (Anders 125).

### How Much Time Should Be Devoted to Actual Reading?

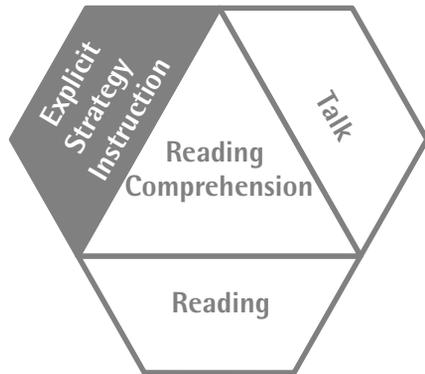
The time that teachers allocate for children to read should be greater than the total time assigned for learning about reading, and talking or writing about what has been read (Fielding and Pearson 1994, 63). The reading may be silent and it may also be reading orally to a



USSR works when it is implemented as part of a balanced literacy program that integrates the teaching of strategies.

*“For too long children have been reading extensively without becoming better readers.”*

GRAVES ET AL., 1996 IX



### Check It Out!

Patricia L. Anders, "Toward an Understanding of the Development of Reading Comprehension Instruction Across the Grade Levels," *Comprehensive Reading Instruction Across the Grade Levels*, Cathy M. Roller (ed.) International Reading Association, 2002, 111-132.

Teaching comprehension strategies using think-alouds makes the covert or hidden overt! Thinking aloud makes one's thinking processes public. Children are shown how and when strategies are used to support comprehension.

partner or an adult. Children who are struggling benefit the most from paired oral reading, feedback and discussion. (See Chapter 7: Early Intervention for Children at Risk.)

## Explicit Strategy Instruction

"Students benefit from teacher-directed instruction in comprehension strategies. Most struggling readers (and many not so struggling readers) benefit enormously when we can construct strategy lessons that help to make the comprehension process visible" (Allington 2001, 98).

See *Using Think-Alouds During Read-Aloud, Shared, or Guided Reading*, pages 446-447.

Although hundreds of thinking strategies are available in the literature, proficient readers consistently use only a small number (seven or eight) of them (Keene and Zimmermann 21). Teachers must focus their attention on one strategy at a time

- explaining *what* the strategy is
- modeling *how* to use it
- describing *when* to use it

Children then need many opportunities to use the strategies collaboratively with the teacher through guided practice and independently.



## Effective Strategy Instruction (Step-by-Step)

Research over the past 20 years has shown that children's reading comprehension improves consistently when teachers follow these steps:

- explicitly describe the strategy and when to use it
- model the strategy in action
- involve children in collaborative use of the strategy

- lead guided practice using the strategy
- provide independent practice using the strategy

From: Duke and Pearson 2002, 235.

See *An Instructional Model for Comprehension Instruction*, page 447.

## Which Strategies to Teach?

As much as possible, children should be taught strategies like those actual readers use to comprehend text successfully (Fielding and Pearson 1994, 65). Since reading comprehension occurs in one's head, how do we know which strategies are used by effective and less effective readers? Think-aloud studies have provided much evidence in this area (Pressley 2000, 550). Although each strategy should be taught specifically, it is known that good readers do not use individual strategies in isolation. Rather, they coordinate and articulate a number of strategies. As teachers model and demonstrate, they encourage the coordinated use of several strategies.

## Strategies Used by Effective and Less Effective Readers

Effective and less effective readers have different general characteristics in their approaches to reading. (See the chart *Characteristics of Effective and Less Effective Readers*, page 432.) It is important to assess children individually in order to determine specific strategy strengths and weaknesses. Children can then be effectively grouped for strategy instruction.

### Assessment BLMs

Assessment BLM 2: Class Summary, Comprehension Strategies (Fiction), pages 519–520

Assessment BLM 3: Class Summary, Comprehension Strategies (Nonfiction), pages 521–522

Assessment BLM 4: Retelling (Fiction), page 523

Assessment BLM 5: Retelling (Nonfiction), page 524

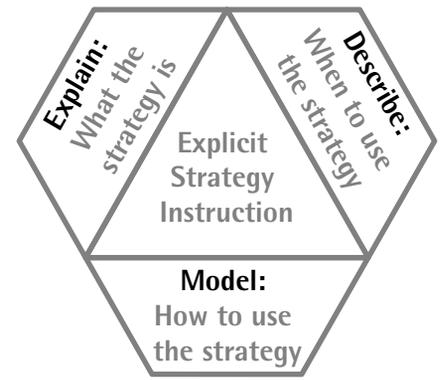
Assessment BLM 6: Class Summary Sheet—Retelling (Fiction), pages 525–526

Assessment BLM 7: Class Summary Sheet—Retelling (Nonfiction), pages 527–528

Assessment BLM 8: Self-Assessment—Comprehension Strategies (1), page 529

Assessment BLM 9: Self-Assessment—Comprehension Strategies (2), page 530

Assessment BLM 10: Self-Assessment—My Retelling (for Written or Oral Retellings), page 531



*“Comprehension instruction is best when it focuses on a few well-taught, well-learned strategies.”*

DUKE AND PEARSON 2002, 236

Teachers must focus their attention on one strategy at a time, modeling the strategy and gradually “releasing responsibility” to children to practice it independently.

Begin with a few powerful strategies that work.

### Check It Out!

Michael Pressley, “What Should Comprehension Instruction Be the Instruction Of?” *Handbook of Reading Research*, Vol. III, eds. Michael Kamil, Peter Mosenthal, P. David Pearson, and Rebecca Barr, 545–561, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000.

## Characteristics of Effective and Less Effective Readers

EFFECTIVE READERS	LESS EFFECTIVE READERS
<b>Before Reading:</b>	<b>Before Reading:</b>
have goals in mind and know their purpose for reading	do not know why they are reading
preview text—title, pictures, headings, drawings	start reading without thinking about the topic
reflect (and often share) what they know about the topic	do not preview the text
make predictions about the text	do not make predictions
use various strategies that suit the text (fiction, non-fiction)	read all text (e.g., fiction and nonfiction) the same way
may decide to read all, some, or none of the text	do not think about how much they will read
<b>During Reading:</b>	<b>During Reading:</b>
continue to reflect on the text, anticipate, and make predictions	may not know whether or not they understand the text
confirm or correct predictions	do not confirm or correct predictions
monitor comprehension	do not monitor their own comprehension
use fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks down	seldom use fix-up strategies
read selectively by deciding what to read carefully, quickly, what not to read, and what to reread	often give up or read on without understanding meaning—the text is not revisited
use text structures and text features to support meaning	may not use text structures and text features to support meaning
generate questions about text	rarely generate questions about text
react intellectually and emotionally to text (reader response)	frequently do not make personal connections to the text
<b>After Reading:</b>	<b>After Reading:</b>
decide if goals were achieved	do not know what they have read
reflect on how text matched or did not match predictions	do not confirm or correct predictions
compare characters, incidents, content (nonfiction) to self, real life, and other books	do not make personal connections
summarize major idea(s)	do not summarize major ideas
may seek additional information	do not seek additional information
react to text intellectually and/or emotionally (reader response)	frequently do not react to text intellectually and/or emotionally

Fluent readers know which reading strategies to implement, and how and when to use them. They use this skill to support and monitor their reading comprehension. This awareness and monitoring—or thinking about their thinking—is known as **metacognition**.

### Comprehending Nonfiction Versus Fiction

It is important for children to understand that not all reading is story reading. Fortunately, many strategies are used to make sense of both fiction and nonfiction. With both forms of writing, effective readers

- preview the text
- set a purpose for reading
- make predictions
- reflect knowledge of topic

- often share knowledge of topic
- create mental pictures
- determine the main idea(s)
- ask questions of the text
- monitor their comprehension
- use appropriate fix-up strategies
- react to the text
- make personal connections

Children must also learn that nonfiction is structured to be read differently from fiction. For example, they may start reading nonfiction at the beginning, middle, end, or in between, depending on their purpose. Again, depending on purpose, children may read only part(s) of the text. Children must also become familiar with and use the text features and structures of nonfiction text, including headings and sub-headings:

- indexes
- pictures
- graphs
- captions
- charts
- tables of contents
- glossaries
- bolded print

Early classroom experiences with informational texts help children to build vocabulary and background knowledge. In fact, many children prefer nonfiction, and discussions around nonfiction readings are often very rich. Not surprisingly, children with little exposure to reading and writing nonfiction in the early years later find content-area reading very difficult and often experience a fourth, fifth, sixth, and even seventh grade “slump.”

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**Assessment BLM 3: Class Summary, Comprehension Strategies (Nonfiction), pages 521–522**

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**Assessment BLM 5: Retelling (Nonfiction), page 524**

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**Assessment BLM 7: Class Summary Sheet—Retelling (Nonfiction), pages 527–528**

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See Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading-Writing Connection, Reading and Writing Nonfiction, page 359.

## Tried-and-True Teaching Strategies That Improve Comprehension

Metacognition, or thinking about one’s own thinking, is the umbrella under which all other strategies fall, and each strategy is a variation of metacognition (Keene and Zimmermann 25). Metacognition is affected by children’s attitudes toward reading and their knowledge of the strategies used by effective readers. The numbered strategies that follow are some of the most effective:



**Visualize or make mental pictures in your head.**

**Graphic organizers** illustrate concepts and their interrelationships by using diagrams or other pictorial devices (e.g., maps, webs, charts, graphs, frames, and clusters).

**Semantic organizers** (semantic maps or webs) are graphic organizers that resemble a spider's web.



### Check It Out!

*Put Reading First, The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read.* National Institute for Literacy, 2001.



#### 1. Monitoring Comprehension

Children must be taught to

- be aware of what they do understand
- identify what they do not understand
- use appropriate fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks down

#### 2. Using Mental Imagery/Visualization

Mental images or pictures help readers to understand and remember what they have read.

#### 3. Visual Representation of Text

Children's comprehension improves through the use of graphic and semantic organizers.

#### 4. Making Use of Prior Knowledge/Predicting

Using strategies to activate prior knowledge will support effective prediction and comprehension.

#### 5. Summarizing/Retelling

In order to summarize, children must determine the important information (the gist) and condense this into their own words. Children who can summarize

- identify or generate main idea(s) (the gist)
- connect the main, or central, ideas
- eliminate redundant and unnecessary information
- remember what they have read (*Put Reading First* 53)

#### 6. Using Text Structure

Comprehension also improves when children are taught to recognize and use

- story structure
- informational (expository) text structure

(See chart opposite.)

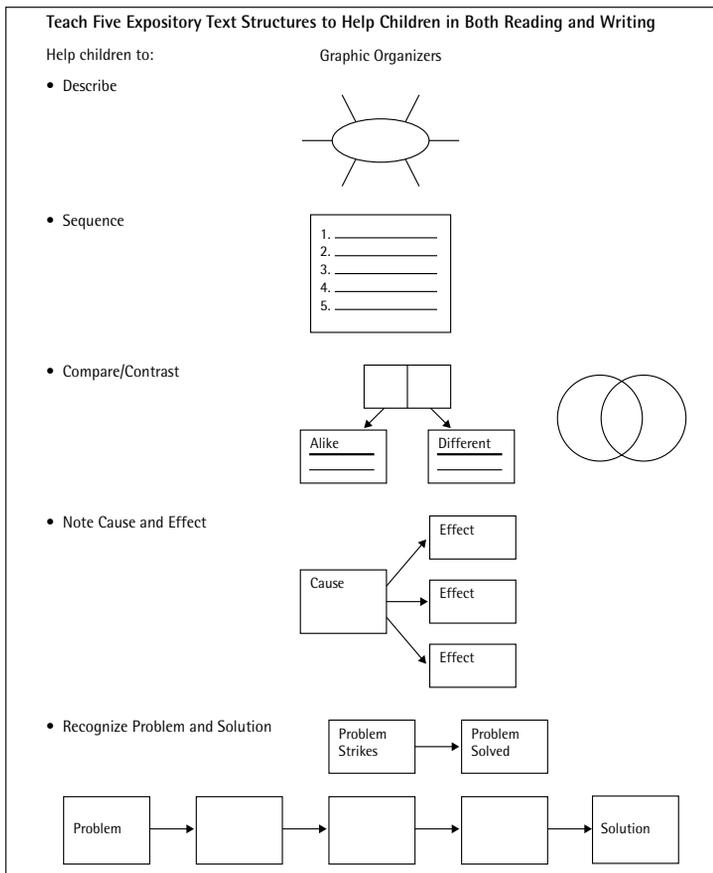
#### 7. Generating Questions

Effective readers are always asking themselves questions. Children must be taught how to ask questions about the text and they must also be given practice in asking questions. Readers ask questions for clarification, to predict, and to integrate information from different segments of the text.

#### 8. Answering Questions

Research shows that children's learning from reading is strongly supported and advanced by teachers questioning children and teaching them how to answer questions. This occurs because questions

- give children a purpose for reading
- focus children's attention on what they are to learn
- help children to think actively as they read
- encourage children to monitor their comprehension
- help children to review content and relate what they have learned to what they already know



Adapted from Gail E. Tompkins, *Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product*. 3rd ed. Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2000, 252-253.

- help children to understand the nature of question–answer relationships; some answers are
  - explicitly stated in the text: In the book (right there on the page)
  - implied in the text: In the book (hidden)
  - not found in the text at all: In my head or off the page (the reader just has to know the answer) (*Put Reading First* 51)

In Grades 1 and 2, it is best to focus on simply two categories of questions: In the book (right there on the page) and In my head (off the page).

Effective readers do not use a single, individual strategy (e.g., questions, using text structure) but coordinate a number of strategies. Thus, good comprehension instruction should be balanced and include 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, 207).

## A Strategy Instruction Caution

Asking children to do random activities (lots of maps, webs, and so on) will not necessarily improve comprehension. The activities may indicate to teachers what children have understood or remembered, but children themselves need to understand why and how using a map or web will help them to make sense of what they are reading. Children who do understand how the use of strategies helps their

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.

Through think-alouds, the teacher makes the covert overt! The mystery of the thinking process is removed.

Effective teaching involves teaching children the strategies used in real life by effective readers and writers.



reading will use them across the day—in content areas such as social studies, science, and math.

Teaching children a great number of skills in isolation will not improve their comprehension. Focused comprehension mini-lessons must target the thinking as it occurs during shared, read-aloud, and guided readings. Teachers must not only talk about books, they must also talk about the thinking processes involved during reading.

### Effective Comprehension Strategy Instruction: A Summary

All comprehension Mini-Lessons—shared, read-aloud, and guided reading—should focus on teaching students to

- identify their purpose for reading
- preview text before reading
- make predictions before and during reading
- activate relevant background knowledge for reading
- think aloud while reading
- use text structure to support comprehension
- create visual representations (make pictures in their heads)
- determine the important ideas in the text
- summarize what they read
- generate questions about text
- handle unfamiliar words during reading
- monitor their comprehension during reading
- use fix-up strategies

(Duke and Pearson 2002, 235)



## Comprehension Strategy Teaching: Is It Happening?

Research indicates that the teaching of comprehension strategies—long and consistently endorsed in the reading-research community—is uncommon in elementary schools (Pressley 2000, 557).

The Language Arts curriculum (and other curricula) is indeed full, so much so that it seems stretched. Teaching children to decode is often faster and easier than trying to get inside their heads to improve understanding. However, since reading is comprehending, it remains that children’s reading will improve with increased and more selective and effective comprehension instruction. Comprehension instruction, using the few research-based strategies, has consistently proven its worth. In other words: Teach few strategies and teach them well. Children need many guided practice opportunities to internalize their use.

## Talk About Text



Group discussions and conversations help children to make personal connections. It is through talk—in which children share their understandings—that children learn thinking strategies. Children must explain how they know and how they make sense of passages being discussed. Children need to make personal connections to the text, not simply recall or summarize it.

“Children’s comprehension of text and topics, as well as their repertoires of strategies, grow as a result of conversations about text” (CIERA, *Every Child a Reader (Topic 5) 4*).

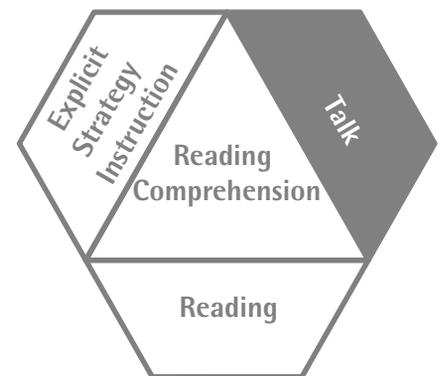
Teachers encourage talk by creating classroom discussions that focus on interpretation or constructing ideas rather than on giving right or wrong answers. In this kind of discussion, teachers assume that listeners have something to say beyond the answers teachers already know (Walker 286–287).

Child-led book clubs and book talks offer authentic ways for discussion to occur. (See more about book clubs in this chapter,

*“We have done a better job of teaching the basic literacy skills (word recognition and literal comprehension) than the higher-order or thinking skills and strategies.”*

ALLINGTON 2001, 8

Comprehension is more often assessed than taught.



*“Individuals ‘talk themselves into understanding.’”*

BOOTH 91

The teacher’s role is to guide the talk. The teacher probes during discussions: “Tell me more!” “Can you find an example in the story?”

pages 477, 478–479, and more about book talks in Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, page 65.) Research indicates that cooperative learning activities that include children with mixed levels of reading ability can help children to improve their comprehension, specifically higher level reasoning.

## Oral Language and Second Language Learners

Children learning English as a second language may face special challenges with listening and speaking comprehension. Often, their level of decoding surpasses their level of comprehension. Informational text provides great support for ESL children. The concrete nature of the real world (informational text) is often much easier to understand than that of narrative writing. Idiomatic expressions, such as, “It’s raining cats and dogs,” often found in narrative writing, can be very confusing!

(See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Oral Language and English as a Second Language Children, pages 30–31, and Assessment Considerations for ESL Children, pages 48–50.)



# Assessment

## Assessing Reading Comprehension

Because comprehension is a mental process, it can only be observed and assessed indirectly. We cannot get inside a reader's head to observe comprehension, but we can infer comprehension strategies or make them more visible (Rhodes and Shanklin 213).

Listening and reading comprehension can be inferred and assessed through

- oral or written retellings
- read-alouds (e.g., Informal Reading Inventories, or IRIs) and think-alouds
- answering questions
- running records: Do miscues make sense? (See Chapter 2: Word Work and Spelling, Running Records, Reading Records, and Miscue Analysis, pages 149–151.)
- filling in missing words in a cloze: Is the word defensible?
- the arts/acting out stories through puppet plays or Readers' Theater; art
- written responses
- group discussions (e.g., book clubs, Author's Chair)
- peer and self-assessments
- questionnaires
- interviews
- audiotapes of children's readings

### Using Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs)

The purpose of Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs) is to allow teachers to listen to children's oral readings to identify the use of strategies in both decoding and comprehension. IRIs often involve

- miscue analysis/running records
- anecdotal notes (e.g., the child gives up easily)
- retellings/questioning
- graded word lists

Spontaneous children's think-alouds (e.g., "I'll skip that word," "This story is funny") can tell the teacher a great deal about strategy use and comprehension. "Informal Reading Inventories provide useful information to students about their progress, to parents about achievement and skills that need improvement, and to teachers about appropriate instruction and texts to provide" (Paris and Carpenter 579).

See Chapter 2: Word Work and Spelling, for a detailed description of Informal Reading Inventories, page 154.

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**Assessment BLM 2: Class Summary, Comprehension Strategies (Fiction), pages 519–520**

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An Author's Chair

Retellings (summaries), answering questions, using clozes and the arts, group discussions, and audiotapes, among other activities, can serve as both assessment tools and effective instructional strategies for reading comprehension.



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Assessment BLM 3: Class Summary, Comprehension Strategies (Nonfiction), pages 521–522

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## Comprehension—Oral Reading Assessments: Cautions

- Teachers should not make quick assumptions about comprehension with children who read out loud quickly, accurately, or children who struggle during oral readings. Many children are
  - “word callers” or “word barkers,” who say the words without understanding the meaning of the text
  - “gap fillers,” who stumble through the oral reading task but understand the text surprisingly well (Paris and Carpenter 63).
- Other factors to consider include the following:
  - Oral reading often makes children anxious, which may affect assessment results.
  - During oral reading, children often focus so intensely on stating words correctly that they do not comprehend what they are reading.
  - Teachers must be trained to give Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs) in a manner that is uniform and objective and that does not change from child to child. Undue prompts or supports often reduce the validity of assessment results, especially of independent reading levels.
  - Teachers must also be trained to interpret oral reading miscues and strategies uniformly.
  - When reading out loud, children often do not go back and reread, look forward, or stop and paraphrase meaning—all of which are strategies used by effective readers.
  - Using different texts (and levels) with the same children during a year may make it difficult to interpret growth. One passage may provide much greater support than another, depending on the individual child’s background knowledge.

In addition to using different texts for assessment, try taping the child's reading of the same passage at several points in the year. This allows both parents and children to clearly note improvement or lack of improvement in reading fluency.

## Comprehension—Silent Reading Assessments

Children spend most of their reading time in school reading silently in content areas across the day. Assessing silent reading can be effective in balancing oral reading assessments. During silent reading, children more readily use effective strategies—such as rereading, looking back and forward in the text, stopping or paraphrasing the meaning—than during oral reading. As well, children who read silently can focus more on meaning than on “saying the words correctly.”

Oral reading allows for diagnostic assessments. Silent reading allows teachers to determine what children can do when reading independently, as they do during uninterrupted sustained silent reading, or while reading content area materials, such as in social studies, science, and math.

Silent reading assessments also serve a purpose in Grade 1 and Grade 2 classrooms.



## Retellings

Usually, retelling is considered a recall of what the child remembers from reading or listening. Retellings indicate

- what the child remembers
- what the child deems important
- how the child organizes and sequences information
- how the child makes sense of the text
- what personal connections the child makes.

Practice in retellings improves comprehension, grasp of story concept, critical thinking, and oral language development (Benson and Cummins 7). Assessing retellings is one piece: Retellings must be taught, not merely assessed.

See *How to Teach Children to Retell Effectively*, pages 464–465. See also Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Retellings, pages 65–68.

## Retellings BLMs

BLM 2: Buddy Story Retelling, page 487

BLM 3: Story Elements—Retelling, page 488

BLM 4: Group Retelling Cards, page 489

BLM 5: Story Map, page 490

BLM 6: Story Pyramid, page 491

BLM 7: Story Retelling Frame, page 492

BLM 11: Can You See It?, page 496

Assessment BLM 4: Retelling (Fiction), page 523

Assessment BLM 5: Retelling (Nonfiction), page 524

Assessment BLM 6: Class Summary Sheet—Retelling (Fiction), pages 525–526

Assessment BLM 7: Class Summary Sheet—Retelling (Nonfiction), pages 527–528

Assessment BLM 10: Self-Assessment—My Retelling (for Written or Oral Retellings), page 531

Assessment BLM 12: Story Retelling Scoring Guide, page 533

## Interviews and Questionnaires

Interviews and questionnaires provide information on children’s attitudes toward, and understanding of, the reading process.

Assessment BLM 13: Tell Me About Your Reading—A Child Interview, page 534

Assessment BLM 14: How Do You Feel?, page 535

Assessment BLM 15: A Reading Survey—What Do You Think?, page 536

## Using a Cloze

The cloze was originally developed to assess children’s use of strategies, but it is also a very effective way to teach reading comprehension strategies. A cloze may also be used to determine the child’s reading level. Cloze passages are written texts from which words or letters have been deleted. When completing a cloze, children practice using effective strategies.

The following points describe how to create a cloze:

- Select a short passage (up to ten sentences).
- Leave the first and last sentences intact.
- Keep the blank spaces (deletions) the same length.

### From Assessment BLM 15: A Reading Survey—What Do You Think?

1. Why do people read?

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2. When you are reading and come to a word you don’t know, what do you do?

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3. How do you know if a book you have chosen is for you?

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- Delete structure words (pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions) if the focus is syntax or grammar.
- Delete content words (e.g., nouns, verbs, and adjectives), if the focus is semantics—meaning.
- A traditional cloze has every fifth word deleted.
- To use as an assessment tool, have each child independently complete the cloze. The research indicates that if 40–60 percent of the blanks are filled with the same word as was deleted, the text is within the reader’s instructional level (Rhodes and Shanklin 190). However, what is more important to consider is whether the chosen words make sense in the context of both the sentence and the passage. If synonyms are accepted, then a rate of 70–80 percent correct indicates an instructional level, and over 85 percent, an independent level.

### How to Administer the Cloze

Tell children to:

1. Read the entire cloze to yourself before filling in any blanks.
2. Write only one word in each blank.
3. Skip blanks that you are stuck on. Try them again when you are finished.

- To use as an instructional tool, have children complete the cloze in pairs or groups. The real strength of this activity is that it involves children in discussion. Children have to debate (defend or justify) their word choices. (See *Using a Cloze After Guided Reading*, pages 452–453.)

## Answering Questions

The purpose in asking questions is to teach children to analyze questions in order to effectively respond. (See *Question-Answer Relationships (QAR)*, pages 472–473.) Responses may also be analyzed as to the types of questions to which children can successfully respond (e.g., literal versus inferential).

## The Arts

Children’s personal responses through the arts (i.e., plays, Readers’ Theater, art) also reveal levels of reading comprehension. (See *Art/Drama*, pages 454–456.)

## Group Discussions

Group discussions (e.g., book clubs, book talks) are probably the best way to examine reading comprehension. Listening to children’s talk reveals what level of comprehension and involvement was evident in the reading.

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**BLM 8: Let’s Talk—Beginning the Discussion, page 493**

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**BLM 9: Let’s Talk—Ending the Discussion—Our Group Thinks, page 494**



# Think-Alouds

In think-alouds, readers verbalize their thoughts before, during, and after reading. Think-alouds reveal how children are using strategies in action. Think-alouds may be a spontaneous response to reading (e.g., “He is so silly!” “I don’t understand what she meant.” “I don’t know that word, so I am going to skip it.”). They may also be elicited by the teacher (e.g., “What are you thinking?”).

See Teacher Questions and Prompts to Help Children Think About Thinking (Metacognition), pages 471–476.

Listening to their own taped readings is a great self-evaluation tool for children.

Rereading often supports fast, effortless word recognition and comprehension. It is a great center activity. Children read to a buddy/volunteer first and then onto the tape.

## Using Audiotapes to Monitor Children’s Strategy Use and Self-Monitoring

**Purpose:** An audiotape of the child’s oral reading helps the child, teacher, and parent to

- note which strategies are being used effectively and which new strategies could be added
- note progress over time
- monitor children’s choice of reading material

### Description and Procedure

#### During the taping

- Children receive an audiotape labelled with their name.
- Once a month children tape their reading of a text of their choice. The text may be one that they are reading independently or one previously used in guided reading.
- The child may choose to read it to a buddy/volunteer before reading into the tape.
- Each child begins the reading with

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

Today is \_\_\_\_\_. (month, day, year)

I am going to read \_\_\_\_\_. (name of book and author)

#### After the taping

The teacher, volunteer (or buddy), and the child listen to the tape together. A discussion ensues and the child is asked questions that help the child to reflect on the reading. The questions/prompts may include

- Tell me about your reading.
- Did you like your reading? Why, or why not?
- Why did you choose this book?
- What strategies did you use when you were stuck on a word?
- What other strategies might you use?

- What is your favorite part and why?
- Is the book easy, just right, or too hard for you?
- What makes you think that?

See Assessment BLM 16: Self-Assessment—Thinking About My Reading (Taped Reading).

After the taping, the child may retell the story or nonfiction text. He/she may then use the tools found in the following BLMs.

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**Assessment BLM 10: Self-Assessment—My Retelling (for Written or Oral Retellings), page 531**

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**Assessment BLM 16: Self-Assessment—Thinking About My Reading (Taped Reading), page 537**

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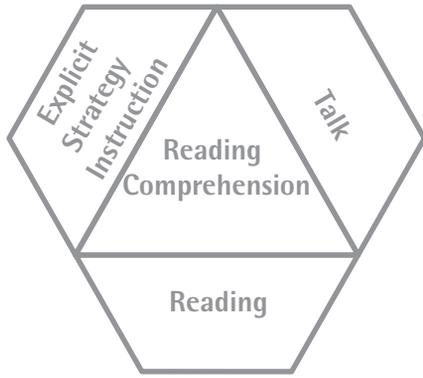
**Assessment BLM 1: Fluency: Children’s Record Form, in Chapter 7, page 778**

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**BLM 4: I Listen and Read, in Chapter 7, page 765**

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# Linking Assessment to Instruction

The research is clear. Three—and only three—features of classroom instruction support comprehension:

- reading
- explicit strategy instruction
- talk

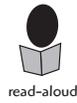
Comprehension Strategies are conscious plans—sets of steps that good readers use to make sense of text when reading.

## Explicit Strategy Instruction

### How To Teach Comprehension Strategies Effectively

Children listen to read-alouds and shared readings. Many children hear words, phrases, and sentences, but don't make the connections. They hear peers respond to questions or make comments but do not understand how they are making sense of the text. "I look at their heads and wonder what is happening in there," one child struggling with comprehension reportedly said of good comprehenders. Again, comprehension is a thought process that happens inside the head. It must be taught. The most effective method for teaching comprehension strategies is the think-aloud.

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



### Using Think-Alouds During Read-Aloud, Shared, or Guided Reading

Think-alouds are an invaluable instructional tool during read-alouds, shared and guided reading. The following are important strategies to model for children:

1. Making a prediction/checking a prediction/modifying a prediction
2. Making mind-pictures (visualizing in your head)
3. Making connections (linking new information with previous knowledge (e.g., This is like when ...))

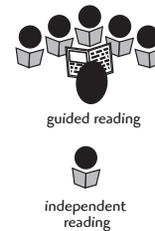
- Monitoring comprehension (e.g., This doesn't make sense ...); demonstrating fix-up strategies (e.g., I am going to reread this part; I will skip it for now ...)

Adapted from B. Davey, "Think Aloud: Modeling the Cognitive Processes of Reading Comprehension." *Journal of Reading* 27(1): 44–47.

## An Instructional Model for Comprehension Instruction

Much research over the past 20 years indicates that there is an instructional model that works: Teachers focus on one single strategy and provide children with many opportunities to develop that strategy through repeated application. The model is as follows:

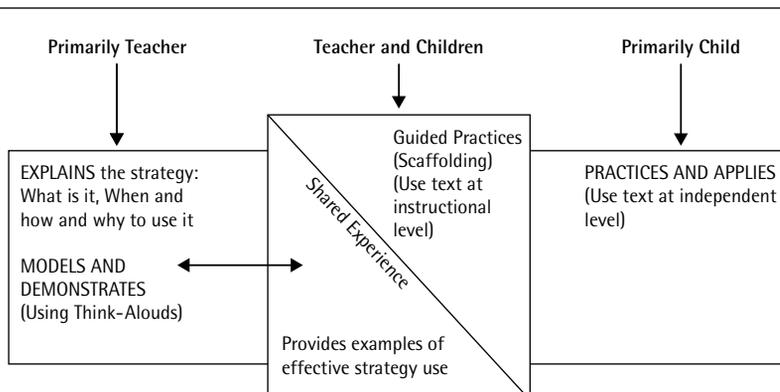
- The teacher explicitly describes the strategy and when and how it should be used. [I do it]
- The teacher and/or a child model the strategy. [I do it]
- The strategy is used collaboratively in action—children and teacher work together on a text. [We do it]
- The strategy is used during guided practice—children may read silently, but they are stopped every few pages to apply the strategy (e.g., predict). [We do it]
- The strategy is used independently by children (e.g., During silent reading, children are instructed to make predictions every two or three pages and to check if the predictions come true.) [You do it]



## Teaching Comprehension Strategies

This chart shows how strategy instruction begins with strong teacher support through modeling and demonstrating, moves to the teacher and child working together, and culminates with children applying the strategy independently. There is a gradual release of responsibility.

Teaching Comprehension Strategies



Adapted from P. David Pearson and Linda Fielding, "Comprehension Instruction." In R. Barr, M. Kamil, P. Mosenthal, and P. David Pearson. *Handbook of Reading Research*. Longman Publishing, 1991, 815–860.

The Goal: Strategy use becomes automatic!

## Which Instructional Strategies Really Work?

*“Comprehension instruction is best when it focuses on a few well-taught, well-learned strategies.”*

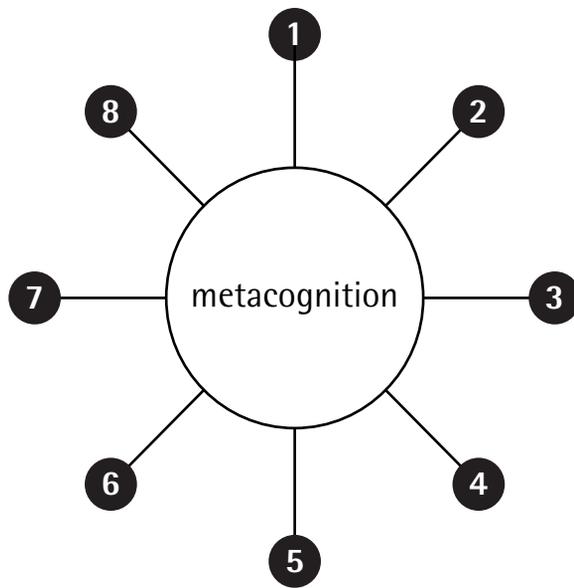
DUKE AND PEARSON 2002, 236

Only a small number of individual comprehension strategies have proven to be effective in teaching developing readers. Teachers could be overwhelmed by the thousands of activities to be found in professional books that are touted as supporting improved comprehension. Using many different activities or techniques, however, is counterproductive. It is far better to focus on the credible few.

## Focus on These Strategies—The Credible Few

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

Introduce one or two strategies at a time over the course of several weeks or months. In the process, children both learn *what* they are learning—the strategies—and *why* they are learning them (Pressley and Harris 32–33). Children need to be coached in using these strategies across the day in all content areas.



1. Monitoring comprehension
2. Using mental imagery/visualization
3. Using visual representation of text
4. Using prior knowledge/predicting
5. Summarizing/retelling to assess and improve reading comprehension
6. Using text structure—story and informational text
7. Generating questions
8. Answering questions

# 1. Monitoring Comprehension

Monitoring comprehension teaches children to self-monitor:

- to be aware of what they do understand
- to identify what they do not understand
- to use appropriate fix-up strategies to resolve the comprehension problems

(Put Reading First 49)

Readers must learn how to consider the meanings in text, reflect on their understandings, and use different strategies to enhance their understanding. This process is best learned by watching and listening as the teacher effectively models think-alouds. As developing readers learn these processes, they can gradually take responsibility for monitoring their own comprehension as they read independently (Keene and Zimmermann 44).

## What Readers Do

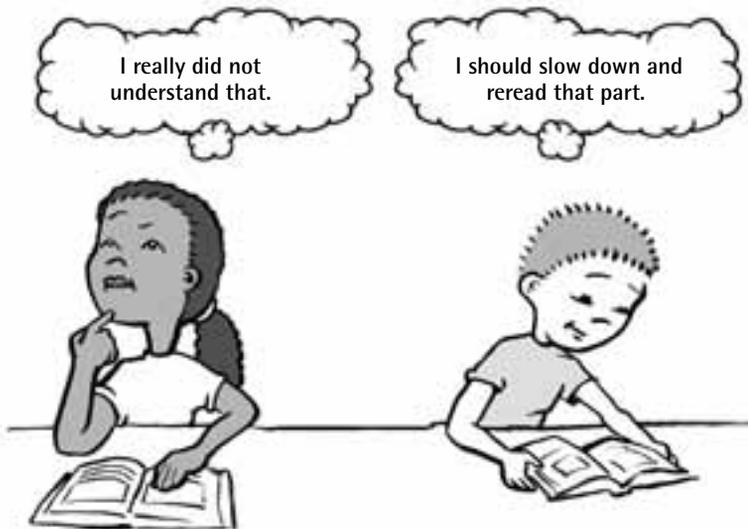
These three points could be made into a classroom poster to support self-monitoring:

- Good Readers Think About the Meaning.
- All Readers Make Mistakes.
- Good Readers Notice and Fix Most Mistakes.

## Teacher Prompting to Use Fix-up Strategies

During a reading conference, or at any time when a child is reading aloud, the child is encouraged to crosscheck. That is, the reader must ensure that the word stated

- looks right (Does it look like the word that was said?)
- sounds right (Does it sound like the way people talk?)
- makes sense (Does it make sense?)



When a young reader starts self-correcting, it means that he or she is crosschecking and it is truly a time to celebrate.

## Prompts

- What do you do when you are stuck on a word?
- What do you do when you don't understand what you are reading?

Teacher Think-Aloud

It is important that the word makes sense at both the sentence and passage level. It is not adequate to simply decode a word that looks right or sounds right if it does not also make sense.

S

## Fix-up Strategies

Some children can articulate fix-up strategies but not use them, while other children can apply fix-up strategies but not articulate them or explain how they are using them. Once the child knows comprehension has broken down (something doesn't make sense) and where it has broken down, he or she should know which strategy or strategies to try:

M

- look back—reread ←
- look forward—skip ahead →
- slow down (occasionally, speed up)
- reread out loud
- ask questions and look for answers
- explain what is understood, so far, to a friend
- use pictures, graphs, and charts
- discuss the confusing part with someone
- visualize—make a picture in one's head
- ask for help

A

R

## Children Self-Monitor Their Comprehension

T

### SMART: Self-Monitoring Approach to Reading and Thinking

#### Procedure

- The teacher models the process during shared reading.
- Children then read a text silently in small groups or pairs.
- At the end of each paragraph or page, children place a checkmark (on sticky note) if they understand what they have read, a question mark (on sticky note) if they do not. (Some teachers prefer the question mark only.)
- After they have completed the reading, children go back and reread text with question marks. (Do they understand it now?)
- If still confused, a child identifies what he or she thinks might be the problem (e.g., a word, the sentence).
- The child discusses confusion with a friend. (What strategies could they use to solve the problem?)
- Once the confusion is overcome, the child changes the question mark to a checkmark.

(Rhodes and Shanklin 256)

Use

**SMART**

with a  
buddy  
at a  
center.



## Self-Monitoring During Read-Aloud/Shared Reading

### The Click or Clunk Strategy

To help children self-monitor their comprehension, teachers can introduce the “click or clunk strategy.” Teachers model and explain to children that as long as their reading is making sense, everything clicks and rolls along smoothly. When there is a “clunk” the reading gets bumpy; there is a halt—something is broken, not quite right. Once the reading has broken down, it needs to be fixed (using a fix-up strategy).

(See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, The Click or Clunk Strategy, and the Click or Clunk Strategy Bookmark illustration, pages 59–60.)

These steps follow the “click or clunk strategy”:

1. The teacher reads a book aloud, all the way through, to the group.
2. As the teacher reads, children indicate whether they understand by raising their fingers. One finger = yes (click); two fingers = no (clunk).
3. The teacher reads the text again. This time, he or she stops if any of the children display two fingers in any section. Other children then share their understandings and any strategies they used (or could use) to make sense of the text.

## Self-Monitoring During Independent Reading/ Guided Reading

- Children are encouraged to use “clicks” and “clunks.”
- Children may use sticky notes during reading. Those with a question mark are used to flag confusing points (clunks); those with a 😊 or checkmark indicate that a fix-up strategy has been used successfully (clicks).

(Keene and Zimmermann 40)



read-aloud



shared/modeled  
reading

### Children's Discussion

Were there fewer confusions the second time reading through the text?

If so, why?



guided reading



independent  
reading

## From Assessment BLM 16: Self-Assessment—Thinking About My Reading (Taped Reading)

1. Something I did really well when I read this book was

---

---

I know this because

---

---

2. Something I want to work on when I read my next book is

---

---

I want to work on this because

---

---

I will do this by

---

---

5. This book is \_\_\_\_\_ for me.

*Easy    Just right    Hard* (Circle one)

I know this because

---

---

6. I think this book is: (Circle one)

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10



Yuck

Great

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Assessment BLM 8: Self-Assessment—Comprehension Strategies (1),  
page 529

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Assessment BLM 9: Self-Assessment—Comprehension Strategies (2),  
page 530

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Assessment BLM 16: Self-Assessment—Thinking About My Reading  
(Taped Reading), page 537

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guided reading

## Using a Cloze After Guided Reading

After guided readings, the cloze can be used to assess and teach reading comprehension strategies. A cloze is a passage in which certain words have been deleted and replaced with blank spaces. Based on the lesson focus, teachers select which words to delete. The first

and last sentences are left intact to support comprehension. A cloze, generally up to ten sentences, is created based on the text that was used for the guided reading.

(See Using a Cloze, pages 442–443, for a fuller description of cloze procedures.)

1. After guided reading, children individually (or in pairs) complete the cloze.
2. Children, in pairs or fours, compare and defend their choices.
3. Children read one another's completed cloze, beginning to end, to ensure that the words make sense in the context of the sentence and the whole passage.
4. All children come back together and the teacher shares some of the completed clozes with the class—perhaps on an overhead projector or on chart paper. The purpose of this step is to help children realize that there is no single “right” word for each blank. What is important is that the word chosen can be justified, or is “defensible,” and that children themselves defend and argue their choices.



## Using a Modified Cloze

Unlike a traditional cloze, a **modified cloze** may provide a word bank. This gives extra support to beginning or early readers, who will have less difficulty because words have been provided.

## Why the Cloze Procedure Works

The cloze supports comprehension in both fiction and nonfiction, including content areas. The cloze's strength is that it forces children to

- use fix-up strategies (e.g., reading forward, back) to complete the cloze
- work together to discuss and learn language as they defend word choices

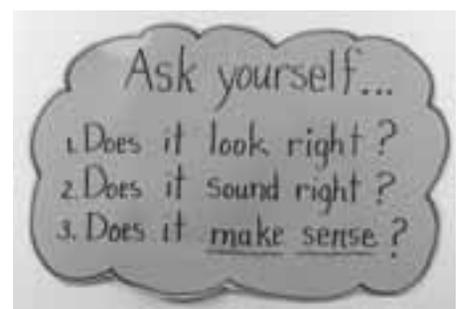
A cloze can also be used as an anticipation guide. See Using an Anticipation Guide in Shared and Guided Readings and Read-Alouds, pages 460–461.

Children love to compare their clozes with their teacher's, which reinforces the procedure's value as a learning and instructional tool.

Children should be reminded:

Remember!

The word must look right, sound right, and make sense in the text.



## 2. Using Mental Imagery/Visualization

Comprehension can be both assessed and developed through drama, discussion, Readers' Theater and the visual arts. Reading is comprehension, and comprehension requires personal connections. Retelling and responding to questions may seem to be the only way personal connections can be demonstrated and developed in the classroom, but they are not—drama and the visual arts work, too!

Visualizing helps children to

- organize the information
- remember ideas

Visualization, or using mental imagery, is the ability to create mental pictures of characters and scenes. It allows children to add in all those little details that authors have left unsaid. Research on mental imagery demonstrates that it enhances text comprehension. When children are taught to generate mental images as they read, they experience greater recall. The ability to draw inferences and make predictions is also enhanced (Hibbing and Rankin-Ericson 759).

One teaching strategy that will foster visualization is to engage children in artwork after reading—perhaps having children sketch characters or settings they have just read about.

Visualization is not automatic. Many struggling and reluctant readers do not know how to create mental images during reading.



See also Chapter 7: Early Intervention for Children at Risk, Fluency Intervention Lesson Framework 4: Readers' Theater, pages 749–750.

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**BLM 10: Look At Us, page 495**

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**BLM 11: Can You See It?, page 496**

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### Art/Drama

Having children “act it out” is another way to promote active reading (Allington and Cunningham 74).

- In pairs, children draw a picture of a scene.
- Children act out the scene (e.g., *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, by Kevin Henkes: “Lilly wants desperately to share her purse. She just can't wait ... Mr. Slinger the teacher was not amused ...”).

*“Drama evokes higher order thinking, problem solving, feeling, and language as students strive to demonstrate their language orally.”*

HOYT, *MANY WAYS* 581

- Children and teachers create and perform a Readers' Theater (See Chapter 7: Early Intervention for Children at Risk, and Assessment BLM 5: Readers' Theater Self-Reflection.)
- Children Sketch to Stretch (Seigel 178)

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Assessment BLM 5: Readers' Theater Self-Reflection, in Chapter 7, page 782

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BLM 12: Sketch to Stretch, page 497

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## The Sketch to Stretch Process

Sketch to Stretch serves as a stimulus for discussion and writing—and it supports thinking, talk, and writing. For it to work effectively, the teacher must model, demonstrate, and explain the process.

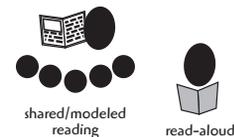


### Sketch to Stretch Steps:

1. The teacher reads aloud or does a shared reading (fiction, non-fiction, newspaper article, poem).
2. Each child chooses an "event" or fact to sketch. Children who need a stimulus may consider
  - what I learned
  - what I liked
  - what I felt
  - the most important part
3. A brief time limit is allocated. Children should sketch their thoughts quickly (doodle), not create detailed artwork. They should understand their art will not be judged on the quality of the art.
4. Each child shares his or her sketch with a partner or with a small group and describes
  - the sketch's contents
  - the reason the sketch was created
5. After sharing with one another, children may choose to revise the sketch as understanding deepens.

*"When children draw before they write, the writing tends to stay focused and often includes more detail than writing which occurs without benefit of drawing."*

HOYT 1998, 171



When using Sketch to Stretch with a chapter book, a good place to stop and sketch is at the end of each chapter.

6. Children write a brief personal response to the text they have heard. (See BLM 12: Sketch to Stretch, page 497.) Again, children may choose to use any one (or more) of the following:

- What I learned
- What I liked
- What I felt
- The most important part

## Draw Something

In *Classrooms That Work: They Can All Read and Write*, Allington and Cunningham suggest that children draw a response to texts that they have read or heard (74). Children must visualize and draw something that has not already been illustrated or pictured in the text itself. Children may be directed to draw something specific or it may be left more open-ended. This allows for a more personal response.

Suggestions may include

- your favorite character (see BLM 14: Who Is This Character?)
- your least favorite character
- your favorite scene from the story
- how you imagine the author looks
- the character who is most like you (See BLM 13: Most Like Me.)

After reading or hearing a story, the child draws a picture of the character that he or she feels is most like him or her. A buddy is then asked to speculate as to who the character is. The child then thinks of a similar character from another book and completes this sentence: “This character is like \_\_\_\_ from the book \_\_\_\_\_.”

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**BLM 13: Most Like Me, page 498**

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**BLM 14: Who Is This Character?, page 499**

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**BLM 6: Character Interviews, in Chapter 1, page 101**

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Children also need an opportunity to share their art. Teachers might ask: “Why did you choose to draw \_\_\_\_?” Children share their response with the class.

## Look At Us

Children visualize meeting with a character, the illustrator, or the author. Then each child draws the encounter and writes about the experience.

See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Visualizing, pages 60–62.

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**BLM 10: Look At Us, page 495**

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## Can You See It?

In this activity, two children work together. One reads a story or poem while the other child

- shuts his or her eyes
- listens to the story or poem
- creates a picture in his or her head
- sketches the picture

The reader rereads the text while the buddy listens again, visualizing and listening for more detail to add to the picture.



BLM 11: Can You See It?, page 496

## 3. Using Visual Representation of Text

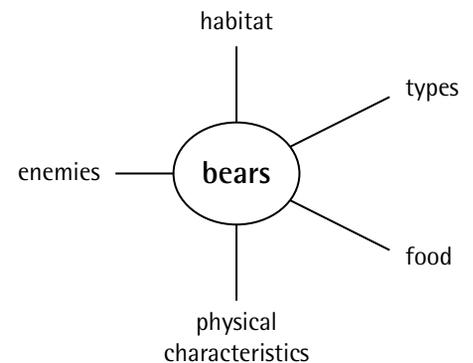
### Using Graphic Organizers

#### Graphic Organizers

There are a wide variety of graphic organizers that teachers can use to help children access, organize, and understand the knowledge they bring to readings. These include maps, webs, charts, graphics, frames, and semantic maps or webs.

Semantic maps, or webs, are graphic organizers that help children to activate and organize prior knowledge around a topic. (See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, *The Semantic Web*, pages 75–76.) The semantic map, or web, opposite is one example.

Graphic organizers help children to understand and use text structure to support both reading comprehension and writing. These graphic organizers for expository (nonfiction) writing are described under *Using Text Structure*, pages 469–470. Graphic organizers for



narrative reading and writing can be found in Chapter 1, BLM 3: Storyboard, BLM 4: Story Map 1, BLM 5: Story Map 2, pages 98–100, BLM 7: Who Wants But So, page 102, and in Chapter 5, BLM 12: Beginning, Middle, and End, BLM 13: Story Map, pages 636–637, and BLM 22: My Story-Writing Planning Chart, page 646. See also Completing a Frame later in this chapter, page 461.

## 4. Using Prior Knowledge/Predicting

Good readers know how to use their background knowledge and experiences to help them understand what they are hearing or reading. To help children think about what they know, teachers

- preview the text—look at and discuss the title and cover, note the author; introduce characters (narrative); introduce challenging vocabulary and do a picture walk (emerging and early readers) (See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Book Walks, page 56–57.)
- make predictions
- use graphic organizers (see Using Visual Representation of Text on page 457)
- create a semantic map, or web (see Using Visual Representation of Text on page 457)

In a picture walk, the teacher leads children through the text, briefly discussing the pictures to activate prior knowledge and to help set the stage for the upcoming reading. (See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, BLM 15: How to Do a Book Walk, page 110.)



**K** = What We Know

**W** = What We Want to Know

**L** = What We Learned

**M** = What More Do We Want to Learn

---

**BLM 15: Buddy Book Walk, page 500**

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### Completing a K-W-L-M Chart as a Group or Whole Class During Read-Aloud, Shared, and Guided Reading

This is a popular activity for helping children to activate prior knowledge, structure their inquiry, and summarize what is learned. It is especially effective with nonfiction text.

---

**BLM 8: K-W-L-M Chart, in Chapter 1, page 103**

---

### Completing a Look-It-Over Chart

**Purpose:** This strategy is frequently used in introducing a nonfiction text. It is meant to help children anticipate what information a text will contain.

**Procedure:** Children preview the text by examining such features as its title, subtitles, headings, boxed features, illustrations, diagrams, bolded words, and so on. Children record each feature, describing what it tells them about the text.

---

**BLM 16: Look It Over, page 501**

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### Using Let's Predict

In this activity children are given 10 to 20 “strong words”—words that elicit images—from the text about to be read during shared, guided reading or listened to during read-aloud.



- These words may be placed on
  - cards for small groups or pairs, or
  - chart paper or magnetic cards for whole-class sharing.
- Children use the words to help them orally predict the story.
- Children predict the story by sequencing the words (and may add other words).
- After children have made their prediction(s), a picture walk is undertaken. Children may then choose to change their prediction.
- The selection is read and children then check their predictions. How accurate had they been?



## Let's Predict

In finding the strong words of the text, the teacher lays the foundation for Let's Predict. The following list was selected from *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, by Kevin Henkes:

crying	Lilly	purse
classroom	purple	sharing
awful	shopping	furious
felt	time	note



## Using the Before-I-Read Cue Card

This independent reading activity can help children anticipate and predict the text they are about to read. Children can be instructed to complete all the steps, or a particular number of steps, depending on the situation.

See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, The Before-I-Read Cue Card, page 58, for more details on this activity.



## Using an Anticipation Guide in Shared and Guided Readings and Read-Alouds

An anticipation guide is used to motivate children to activate their prior knowledge. Children are asked to think about what they know or have experienced. Anticipation guides consist of four to six statements, to which children must respond: agree, disagree, not sure.

The purpose of the anticipation guide is to provide opportunities that will help children activate prior knowledge, identify misconceptions, set a purpose for reading, and be motivated to read the text. It prompts children to ask questions about what they know and to make connections with new information.

### Strategy

The teacher should follow the following steps:

1. Select four to six statements from a (fiction or nonfiction) text which children will hear read aloud or read themselves. Statements relating to the text, although not in the text, may also be used. (See BLM 17: An Anticipation Guide—*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes.)
2. Retain some of the statements as they appear in the text or revise some so that they are no longer true or create related statements.
3. Have children individually read each statement and decide if they agree or disagree with it, or are unsure of it, based on prior knowledge of the subject.
4. Direct children to record evidence to support their opinion (e.g., a book the child read on the topic, or first-hand experience with the subject, etc.) on the lines provided below the statements.
5. Have children bring their individual responses and join with a partner. Each child shares his or her ideas. Children may then wish to revise their responses based on new information from their partner.
6. Have children share their responses in a large group.
7. Give children an opportunity to revise their statements, if they wish, based on information shared by peers.
8. Have children read or listen to the text and discuss. They then confirm or revise their original statements based on new evidence.

The focus is on how the child can explain why he or she responded in such a way, not whether the response is right or wrong.

**Before reading:** Children are asked to select a response to the anticipation guide statements and to share their reasons for their choices during a discussion.

**After reading:** Children are asked to reconsider their initial responses in light of what they have read and heard.

---

**BLM 17: An Anticipation Guide—*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes, page 502**

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Anticipation Guides also work well with nonfiction materials. They may be used to support reading in social studies, science, and math. See BLM 19: Prior Knowledge Activation—I Like \_\_\_\_.

## Using a Modified Cloze with Nonfiction Text

A cloze is a written text from which certain words have been deleted. (See also Using a Cloze, pages 442–443, Using a Cloze After Guided Reading, and Using a Modified Cloze, pages 452–453.) The purpose of a cloze is to help children read for meaning through prediction and discussion. It is a very effective procedure when used for reading in the content areas. It helps children to determine how much they know about the content before reading and how much they learned after reading.

## Completing a Frame

Graphic organizers such as frames and maps help children to organize their thinking and think about their learning (metacognition). They provide children with a way to make their thinking visual and concrete, and to show relationships and connections. Teachers can use a number of the Blackline Masters in this chapter to introduce frames.

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**BLM 18: Activating Prior Knowledge and/or Summarizing—Using a Frame, page 503**

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**BLM 19: Prior Knowledge Activation—I Like \_\_\_\_\_, page 504**

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**BLM 20: Guided Reading Frame (1), page 505**

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**BLM 21: Guided Reading Frame (2), page 506**

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## Frames Help to Activate Prior Knowledge and/or Summarize Information

Some books naturally provide frames or patterns that support both writing and comprehension. Margaret Wise Brown’s *The Important Book* (HarperTrophy, 1990), is such a book.

This is a fine book to use for shared reading/read-aloud. It can stimulate children’s writing (each child or partner’s writing), such as “The Important Thing About ...” (see Chapter 3: Writing: The Reading-Writing Connection). It can also be used when studying animals to monitor comprehension before and after the unit. Frames also support comprehension when used before and after a read-aloud, shared or guided reading session using nonfiction. (See BLM 18: Activating Prior Knowledge and/or Summarizing—Using a Frame, and BLM 19: Prior Knowledge Activation—I Like \_\_\_\_.)

## Completing a (Shared) Class Making-Connections Chart

By using a making-connections chart with a class, the teacher helps children to understand that

- what they know before reading helps them to understand what they read

**Billy's Purple Plastic Purse**

Name Kyle Soy Date June 13

	Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
Sharing time is interesting.	X		
All students who bring something to share should be able to share in the morning.		X	
Everyone has something special to share.			X
Sitting and listening is hard work.	X		
People write letters and notes to make them feel better.	X		

Sharing time is interesting because when we bring stuff and share, we learn more about it. We also become friends with the person who is sharing.

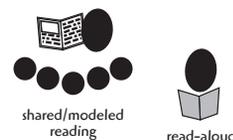
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\_\_\_\_\_

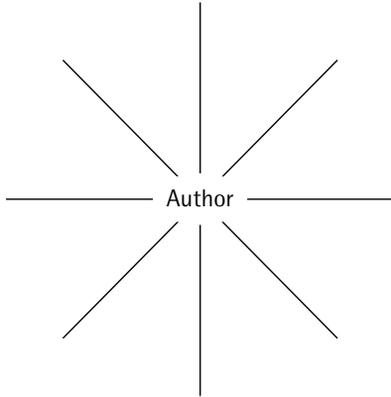
\_\_\_\_\_

If prior knowledge can be activated before reading and utilized during reading, comprehension is more complete. (Merkley 59–61)

A modified cloze (with a word bank provided) offers considerable support in content areas such as social studies and science.



Text\*



\* The word *text* is used rather than *book* as any text (e.g., a poem) may be used.

- as they read (or listen to) a story, what they understand about the topic often changes as they learn new things (see Text-to-Text on the following page)

## Using Author Studies

Children learn that knowing information about an author and other books the author may have written can help them to understand a new text by that author. Using the class chart opposite, with the author's name at the center and lines radiating out toward other titles, can help children to make this connection.

## More Activities to Support Prediction

Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness contains more information about supporting prediction and related activities. See Using Let's Predict and Using the Before-I-Read Cue Card, pages 458–459.

### Text-to-Me

Great readers understand a text better if they think about their own experiences while reading it. The following chart can be very useful for teachers to introduce with the whole class.

Name of Text: _____	
Author: _____	
What we knew (before reading)	What we learned (after reading)

Children can also use Text-to-Me as a response during independent reading.

**BLM 22: Text-to-Me (Independent Reading), page 507**

## Text-to-Text

It is important for children to understand that texts they have read and heard before can help them to understand new texts. Teachers can use a class chart like the one below to actively reinforce this strategy.

### BLM 23: Text-to-Text, page 508

Text: \_\_\_\_\_      Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_      Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Text: \_\_\_\_\_      Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_      Author: \_\_\_\_\_

## 5. Summarizing/Retelling to Assess and Improve Reading Comprehension

To evaluate comprehension, teachers often ask children to give an oral or written retelling about what they have read. This is an effective, viable, and engaging alternative to simply asking children follow-up questions. For the strategy to work, the setting should be informal and relaxed. In retellings, children are in charge—they choose and use their own words to express what they have understood. They are encouraged to make personal connections. Retelling is also known to help with oral language skills and to improve reading comprehension in less proficient readers (Routman 1994, 323).

Teachers must never use retellings to assess children's comprehension unless children have first been taught how to retell. This can be done through modeling and demonstration, and by giving children ample opportunity to put retelling into practice. Research indicates that retellings

- improve memory and recall
- develop language structure
- develop language fluency (Phrase sentences and use appropriate phrase, tone, pitch and rate.)
- increase sense of story structure
- require children to organize their thoughts and sequence ideas
- require children to infer and make personal interpretations of text

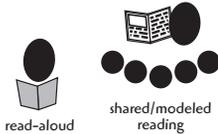
### Check It Out!

Regie Routman. *Invitations: Changing as Teachers and Learners, K–12*. Heinemann, 1994.

- increase comprehension as students actively reconstruct narrative and expository text

Adapted from Lesley Mandel Morrow, *Oral Strategies to Promote Comprehension: Fluency and Retelling*, IRA World Congress, July 2002.

When teaching narrative retelling, choose books to share that follow a story map. (Teachers can use Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, BLM 4: Story Map 1 and BLM 5: Story Map 2, pages 99–100.)



## How to Teach Children to Retell Effectively

### Direct Explanation—Step 1

With direct explanation, the teacher should

- Explain to children why they will be learning to retell: Retellings will help them to understand better what they hear and what they read.
- Help children to understand that retelling happens every day in life, for example, when we tell a joke or a story. Tell children a story about something that really happened. Children love to hear personal stories about their teachers' lives!
- Pick a story and practice retelling it alone. Read the story (read-aloud) to children or use a Big Book for a shared reading.
- Share the key elements of a narrative retelling with children, as listed below. (Teachers can also use BLM 3: Story Elements—Retelling. This BLM works well as a wall chart.)



- title and author
- setting: where and when the story takes place
- story—introduction
- main characters
- problem/main goal
- main events (in the order in which they occur)
- resolution (problem solved/goal achieved; story ends)
- connection to text (my thoughts)

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**BLM 3: Story Elements—Retelling, page 448**

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**BLM 4: Story Map 1, in Chapter 1, page 99**

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**BLM 5: Story Map 2, in Chapter 1, page 100**

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## Modeling and Collaborative Strategy Use—Steps 2 & 3

With modeling, the teacher should

- read the story, or read aloud again and have children listen for the key elements
- retell the story and ask children to analyze the retelling and share all the key elements they heard
- retell the story, this time mixing up the sequence of events—children have to analyze the retelling and explain why it doesn't work
- have children work together to improve the retelling

## Guided Practice—Step 4

In guided practice, the teacher first reads children a new story then begins the retelling starting with the story's title, author, setting, and introduction. Children then take over and, as a group, continue with the rest of the retelling. Teachers can use BLM 4: Group Retelling Cards.

### Buddy Story Retelling

In another approach to guided practice, the teacher does a shared reading or a read-aloud. Each child is then instructed to retell the story to a buddy. The buddy monitors the retelling to ensure that all story elements are in place and in the right order. Buddies then swap positions so that each has the opportunity to do a retelling and give feedback to the other. (See BLM 2: Buddy Story Retelling.)

### Small Group Retelling

Try using group retelling cards. Children take turns using different cards to share the retelling.

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**BLM 2: Buddy Story Retelling, page 487**

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**BLM 4: Group Retelling Cards, page 489**

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## Independent Practice—Step 5

In independent practice, children take turns retelling a story that they have heard or read. They retell the story to someone or record it and then listen to it. Children can then analyze their retelling by using Assessment BLM 10: Self-Assessment—My Retelling (for Written or Oral Retellings).

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**Assessment BLM 10: Self-Assessment—My Retelling (for Written or Oral Retellings), page 531**

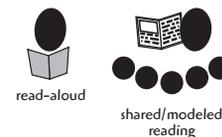
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In a collaborative use of the modeling strategy, the teacher asks children to analyze the retelling and explain what isn't working. Children can then be asked to improve the teacher's retelling. Most children love to engage with the teacher in this way.

When learning how to retell, children may need to be prompted. Some examples of generic prompts the teacher may ask follow:

- What else can you tell me?
- Who else was in the story besides the characters you mentioned?
- What else happened in the story?
- What happened after such and such?
- Where did the story take place?
- When did the story happen?
- Then what happened?

Routman, *Conversations: Strategies for Teaching, Learning and Evaluating* 2000, 204b





The story is retold by reading the pictures.

### **Creative Ways to Retell: Great Center Activities**

Teachers use a number of activities to engage children creatively in retelling: They instruct children in how to

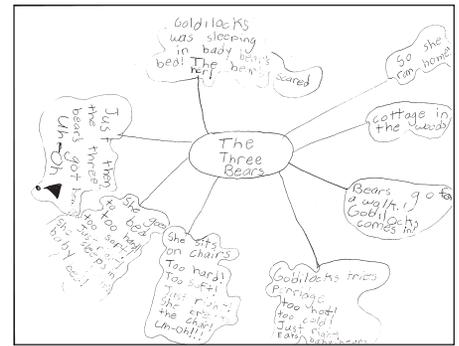
- write a Readers' Theater based on the story and perform the script
- use simple puppets or props to retell the story
- use picture mapping, in which the story is retold entirely in pictures (picture mapping can be an individual, pair, or small group activity)
- use story mapping (BLM 5: Story Map, or BLM 4: Story Map 1 and BLM 5: Story Map 2, both in Chapter 1)
- use a story pyramid (BLM 6: Story Pyramid)
  - Line 1: Main Character (one word)
  - Line 2: Describe the main character (two words)
  - Line 3: Setting (three words)
  - Line 4: Problem (four words)
  - Line 5: Event (five words)



- Line 6: Event 2 (six words)
- Line 7: Event 3 (seven words)
- Line 8: Problem—The End (eight words)

Adapted from Vicki Benson and Carrice Cummins, *The Power of Retelling: Developmental Steps for Building Comprehension*. The Wright Group, 2000, 75.

Also see Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Retellings, pages 65–68.



- BLM 5: Story Map, page 490
- BLM 6: Story Pyramid, page 491
- BLM 4: Story Map 1, in Chapter 1, page 99
- BLM 5: Story Map 2, in Chapter 1, page 100

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BLM 6

## Story Pyramid

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

- Main Character (one word)
- Describe the main character (two words)
- Setting (three words)
- Problem (four words)
- Event (five words)
- Event 2 (six words)
- Event 3 (seven words)
- Problem – The End (eight words)

Adapted from Vicki Benson and Carrice Cummins, *The Power of Retelling: Developmental Steps for Building Comprehension*. The Wright Group, 2000.

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## Child-Led Discussions: Let's Talk

If children lead a discussion, they are far more likely to become engaged than during a simple retelling. Teachers model this process by having four to six children sit in a circle while the rest of the class observes:

- Children who have all read/heard the same book form the group (4-6 students)

Child-led discussions work well after read-aloud, shared, or guided reading.

The discussion should last 15 to 20 minutes.

- Children prepare for the discussion by
  - completing at least one discussion starter to share with the group
  - writing at least one question for the group (See BLM 8: Let's Talk—Beginning the Discussion.)



### Discussion Starters

Teachers ask questions such as the following to initiate the discussion:

- What was the most exciting part?
- What part was the most puzzling or confusing?
- I liked when ... because
- I didn't like when ... because
- It was interesting when ... because
- I found out that ...
- This reminds me of when ...

When it is time to close the discussion, each child may choose to select one of the following “discussion enders” to share or may come up with one of their own:

- one new thing I learned in the discussion
- the most important idea I heard
- one question I still have
- something shared that surprised me

Teachers use BLM 9: Let's Talk—Ending the Discussion—Our Group Thinks.

Adapted from Claudia E. Cornett, “Beyond Retelling the Plot: Student-Led Discussions,” in *Teaching Comprehension and Exploring Multiple Literacies*, T. Rasinski et al. (eds.). International Reading Association, 2000, 56-58.

## Summarizing Activities and Strategies

### Using RAP (Read Ask Put)

RAP is a technique that can be used to help children summarize both fiction and nonfiction texts. It is used to summarize one paragraph at a time.

### Using Who Wants But So (Fiction)

This activity is used to help children quickly summarize the conflict and resolution of a fictional story. See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Who Wants But So, pages 69–70 for more details, and see also BLM 7: Who Wants But So for a useful chart.

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BLM 7: Who Wants But So, in Chapter 1, page 102

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### Summarizing Nonfiction

When summarizing nonfiction, children need help to understand how to find the main—or most important—ideas. By pointing out unimportant details repeatedly, the teacher can actually help children come to understand what is clearly more important. (See BLM 24: Main Idea (1), BLM 25: Main Idea (2), and Assessment BLM 11: Self-Assessment—Retelling (Nonfiction), in this chapter for further details and suggestions.)

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BLM 24: Main Idea (1), page 509

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BLM 25: Main Idea (2), page 510

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Assessment BLM 11: Self Assessment—Retelling (Nonfiction),  
page 532

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## 6. Using Text Structure—Story and Informational Text

Gail Tompkins observes that there are five expository text structures: description, sequence, comparison, cause-and-effect, and problem-and-solution (Tompkins 252–253). Teaching these structures helps children to develop an understanding that will help them in writing and reading and, of course, in summarizing.



**R**ead the paragraph  
**A**sk yourself what you read  
**P**ut it in your own words  
**RAP!**

### Check It Out!

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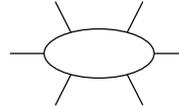
Gail E. Tompkins. *Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product*. 3rd ed. Prentice-Hall Inc., 2000.

## Teach Five Expository Text Structures to Help Children in Both Reading and Writing

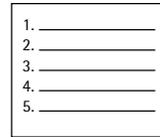
Help children to:

Graphic Organizers

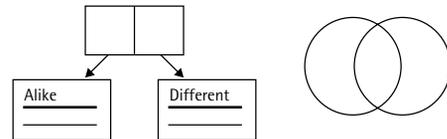
- Describe



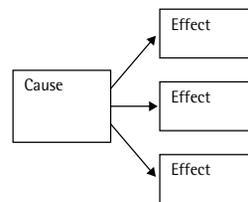
- Sequence



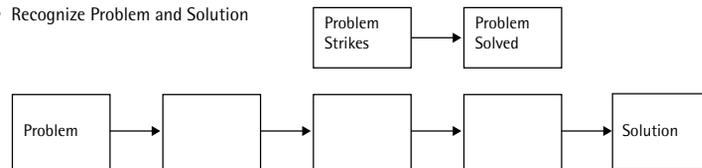
- Compare/Contrast



- Note Cause and Effect



- Recognize Problem and Solution



Adapted from Gail E. Tompkins, *Teaching Writing: Balancing Process and Product*, 3rd ed. Prentice-Hall, 2000, 252-53.

## 7. and 8. Generating and Answering Questions

Reading comprehension is supported as children respond to and ask questions.

### Asking Questions

In asking children questions, teachers model a variety of questions and techniques that will allow children to understand the process of questioning. When asking questions, teachers:

If teachers ask simple questions, simple thinking is often the outcome.

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

- include open-ended questions
- focus on the thinking process, not on specific answers. Children's responses need only be defensible. Teachers ask children further questions, such as "What makes you think so?", "How do you know?"
- allow a wait time of at least eight seconds. This may seem lengthy, but it is important. Children need time to reflect on the question and to contemplate a meaningful response. Teachers who leave insufficient wait time and ask one question right after another are actually bombarding children and will often experience

- the same children responding
- superficial answers—simply what comes into children's heads—with little or no reflection.
- repeat or rephrase questions for the child who is struggling. If he or she continues to struggle, the teacher provides the response and has the child repeat or paraphrase it:
  - Do not respond with “good.” Children who do not hear the response “good” may then feel their responses are wrong or inferior.
  - Ask the child to explain his or her thinking. Ask: “How do you know that?” This encourages the child to think aloud (make his or her thought processes public). All children in the classroom learn as peers explain how they reach an answer.
  - Teach children the strategies good readers use to answer questions. Think-alouds, by both children and teachers, will demonstrate these most effectively.

See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Questions and Comments that Extend Children’s Thinking, pages 58–59, for more about how to move beyond simple “yes” and “no” questions.

## Teacher Questions and Prompts to Help Children Think About Thinking (Metacognition)

### Sample Questions and Prompts

#### Activating Background Knowledge/Making Connections

These points help children to think aloud. Teachers might ask, “When you read this, did it remind you of anything you know about? What? Why did it remind you of this?”

#### Visualizing

This technique helps children to think aloud. Teachers might raise such questions and prompts as, “When you were reading this story (text) did you make any pictures or images in your head? Tell me all about them.”

#### Summarizing

To help children summarize, teachers might use these prompts and ask questions: “If you were to tell another person about the story (text) you just read and you could use only a few sentences, what would you tell them? When you are reading, how do you decide what the most important idea to remember is?”

Ask fewer questions, and give children time to contemplate a meaningful response.

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

*“Once students realize that the teacher is going to work with them until they succeed (and not give up) they become engaged in a different way and they do respond successfully.”*

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## Comprehension Monitoring and Using Fix-Up Strategies

Teachers might use the following questions and prompts: "How do you know when you don't understand something in reading? What can you do about it? Did you have any problems while you were reading this story (text)? Did you get stuck on a word? Did anything confuse you? What can you do to solve these problems?"

Adapted from Keene and Zimmermann, 228-230.

## Teaching Children How to Analyze Questions

The first steps in responding to a question are to make sense of it and then determine how to formulate a credible response. Understanding question-answer relationships helps in this process. When children understand these relationships, they will more easily be able to develop their reading comprehension, from low-level text (i.e., literal, the answer is clearly stated) to high level (i.e., inferential, the answer is not specifically stated).

## Question-Answer Relationships (QAR)

According to Taffy Raphael, who developed QAR, children in Grades 1 and 2 can benefit from being introduced to a modified form of Question-Answer Relationships. QAR breaks down all question-answer relationships into two kinds, based on where answers can be found:

- In the book: the answer is found in the text: *on the page*.
- In my head: the answer is not so obvious: *off the page*. In this category, the child comes up with the answer based on what he or she already knows.

The two basic QAR divisions can be subdivided as in the following chart:

IN THE BOOK (ON THE PAGE)	IN MY HEAD (OFF THE PAGE)
<b>Right There:</b> The answer is in the text and stated clearly. The words used to form the question and the words to answer it are "right there" in the book.	<b>On My Own:</b> The answer is not in the text. The child comes up with the answer based on what he or she already knows.
• "The answer is right there and 'easy to find.'"	• The answer can only be found "in my head."
<b>Think and Search: Hidden</b>	<b>Author and Me</b>
The answer is implied in the text, but it is not directly stated. It is "hidden."	The answer is not in the text. The reader must think what he or she knows and what the author says and then fit them together.
• The answer is in the text but it's not easy to find.	• There is no answer unless the reader's knowledge and the author's information connect.

For children in Grade 1 and Grade 2, Raphael suggests that teachers should focus mainly on the two primary categories:

- in the book—on the page
- in my head—off the page

Adapted from T. Raphael, "Teaching Children Question-Answer Relationships, Revisited." *The Reading Teacher* 39: 516–522.

The focus in using QAR is to help children understand how to find answers. Children share with one another specifically where and how they found the answers: in their head or in the book. Question-answer relationships help children to understand that

- comprehension depends upon both text (what is on the page) and reader (what is in our heads)
- there can be more than one right answer
- not all questions are answered in the text alone
- there will be some questions with no answers

**Using QAR During Shared Reading:** Model "In the Book" and "In My Head" questions and complete a class chart with children using BLM 27: In the Book ... In My Head ....

**Using QAR During Guided Reading:** After all children have read the text, have children work in pairs taking turns to create and answer "In the Book" and "In My Head" questions. Again, BLM 27: In the Book ... In My Head ... will be useful.

See also Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Teaching Bubble Thinking, page 63.

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**BLM 27: In the Book ... In My Head ..., page 512**

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## Questioning the Author (QtA)

Teachers can help children to improve their reading comprehension and achievement by implementing a procedure known as "Questioning the Author." In QtA, the teacher asks questions to guide the text discussion section by section. This results in

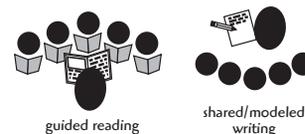
- more children talk (and less teacher talk)
- improved listening comprehension during shared reading and read-aloud
- improved reading comprehension during shared, guided and independent reading

See Questioning the Author on the next page.

## Children Generating Questions

Children who create questions as they read are connecting with the text. Children ask questions of themselves and others in order to

- clarify meaning
- speculate about what might happen in the text
- locate a specific answer in the text
- connect to other texts and ideas



*"Students become more successful at higher order comprehension and monitoring their comprehension as a result of participating in Questioning the Author."*

DUKE AND PEARSON 2002, 231

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## Check It Out!

I. L. Beck et al. *Questioning the Author: An Approach for Enhancing Student Engagement with Text*. International Reading Association, 1997.

*"Proficient readers understand that many of the most intriguing questions are not answered explicitly in the text—they must be interpreted or inferred by the reader."*

KEENE AND ZIMMERMANN 119

Comprehension is not something done only after reading. It is done during reading!

## Questioning the Author

Teachers can use these questions to guide discussion:

Goal	Questions
To get the discussion going	What is the author trying to say here? What is the author's message? What is the author talking about?
To focus children on author's message	This is what the author says, but what does it mean?
To help children link information	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?
To help children realize when they have made an inference.	Did the author tell us that? How do you know that if the author didn't tell us?

Adapted from Nell K. Duke and David Pearson, "Effective Practices from Developing Reading Comprehension," in *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*. International Reading Association, 2002, 230.

Children who are struggling with comprehension often will not ask questions before, during, or after reading. They simply do not connect with the text, so they don't question what the author is saying or why it is being said. Often these children are not even aware that they don't understand.

Teachers often ask far too many questions—before, during, and after the reading. It is important for children to have many opportunities to come up with questions on their own.

### Children's Questioning During Shared Reading/ Read-Aloud

**Before Reading:** Based on title, author, cover, and so on, children generate questions they may have about the text. Questions are recorded on chart paper. The teacher might inquire: Why are we asking these questions?

**During Reading:** The teacher stops several times and, using think-alouds, shares questions such as these with the class: "I wonder why the boy—." "I wonder what the author means by—?" A sticky note with a question mark is placed on the text wherever questions are raised.

**After Reading:** Teacher and children discuss their questions and wonderings. Do some of these connect with one another? Do some of the ideas connect to another text that children have read or heard?



shared/modeled  
reading



read-aloud

As children hear peers ask questions, new ones are created in their own minds.

**During Guided Reading:** Children use sticky notes to mark their wonderings. After reading, they turn to a partner and discuss at least one of the marked questions.



## Using Double-Entry Journals After Guided Reading and Independent Reading

Working in pairs, children find a line or word in the text that causes them to “wonder.” They write this on the left side of the sheet and their wonderings on the right. They then discuss their wonderings with another pair, to improve their understandings. (See BLM 28: Wonderings.) Learning to ask questions during readings will also help children with writing.

As early as kindergarten, children can keep a writer’s notebook. As they read, they jot down ideas (wonderings) from their readings. Later, these can act to stimulate writing. For example, after reading or hearing Kevin Henkes’s *Chrysanthemum*, a child might write, “I wonder where my name came from?” “I wonder why \_\_\_\_\_ was so mean?” “I wonder why Chrysanthemum’s parents gave her that name?” “I wonder if kids like their names?” Reading and questioning and wondering can lead quite naturally to conducting a survey.

See also Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Character Interviews, pages 68–69, for more about developing question-and-answer skills.



### Check It Out!

Ralph Fletcher. *A Writer’s Notebook*. Avon Books, 1996.  
This is a valuable guide to keeping a writer’s notebook.

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**BLM 28: Wonderings, page 513**

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This list of questions would make a useful classroom wall chart.

## Children Generate Questions That Support Comprehension

### Questions I Can Ask Myself As I Read

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#### To get the gist:

- What is the story about?
- What is the problem?
- What is the solution?
- What makes me think so?

#### To predict–verify–decide:

- What's going to happen next?
- Is my prediction still true?
- Do I need to change my prediction?
- What makes me think so?

#### To visualize–verify–decide:

- What does this (person, place, thing) look like?
- Is the picture in my mind still good?
- Do I need to change my prediction?
- What makes me think so?

#### To summarize:

- What's happened so far?
- What makes me think so?

#### To think aloud:

- What am I thinking?
- Why?

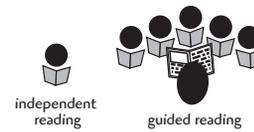
#### To solve problems or help when I don't understand:

- Shall I
  - use my best guess?
  - ignore and read on?
  - reread or look back?
  - reread out loud to myself? (whisper read)
  - slow down?
  - ask for help?
- Why?

Adapted from Janet L. Bergman, "SAIL—A Way to Success and Independence for Low-Achieving Readers." *The Reading Teacher*. Vol. 45, No. 8, International Reading Association, April 1992: 598–602.

## Classroom Talk

Much of the time teachers ask questions to assess learning rather than discuss learning (Walker 287). By asking questions at a variety of levels, teachers can stimulate comprehension in a variety of ways. However, conversations and discussions encourage personal connections with the text, which is what comprehension is about.



## Book Clubs: A Natural Forum for Fostering Children's Questioning

Children's book clubs are just like those for adults. In both cases, readers get together in small groups to talk about books they have read or are reading. Book clubs integrate the experiences of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Children read books during independent reading or during guided reading. Small groups all read the same text, which should be engaging. Although each group reads a different text, there may be common themes. This structure also allows for whole-class discussion in which the approaches of the different authors can be compared and contrasted.

Book clubs help children to realize that making personal connections is what gives reading meaning and life.



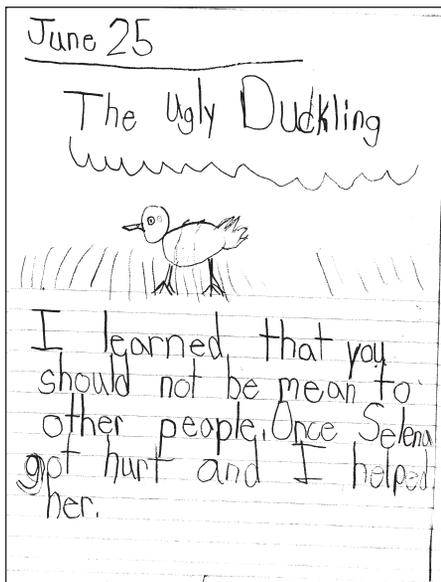
## Reading Logs

Reading logs can be very spontaneous and personal. As children read, they jot down their responses, recording ideas, feelings, and questions about what they are reading. Children write, draw, diagram, and so on. Teachers may at times give more direction by asking children to

- complete a graphic organizer or semantic map, or web (See BLM 5: Story Map and BLM 7: Story Retelling Frame later in this chapter, and BLM 4: Story Map 1 and BLM 5: Story Map 2 in Chapter 1.)
- compare and contrast the text being read with another text they have read
- sketch their favorite part of the text and write about it



The most important part of a reading log is the blank page where the child chooses to write, draw, or diagram a personal response to the text.



Children can use reading logs to support their book club conversations.

Using social studies, science, or health texts for book club selections helps to integrate the curriculum.



- list five “million-dollar” words from the text
- retell the story including a personal comment
- complete a text-to-me chart (See BLM 22: Text-to-Me.)
- write down three wonderings to share with the group
- jot down personal reflections after meeting with the book club

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**BLM 5: Story Map, page 490, or BLM 4: Story Map 1 and BLM 5: Story Map 2, in Chapter 1, pages 99–100**

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**BLM 7: Story Retelling Frame, page 492**

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**BLM 22: Text-to-Me (Independent Reading), page 507**

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## Why Use Reading Logs?

The writing in children’s reading logs can provide

- the child with a rich source of information for small-group discussions during book club time or discussion with the whole class
- the teacher with a record of the child’s personal connection with the text and their reflections after book club meetings

**Child-Led Book Clubs:** In small groups of four or five, children use their reading logs to initiate discussions. As children become more comfortable with book talk, the discussions will become more



natural.

## Community Share

Larger groups, or the whole class, may get together to share thoughts from their discussions and reading logs. This works especially well if all books read by the different book clubs have a common topic or theme. Using books related to social studies, science, or health themes or concepts, links the curriculum and the groups.

## Why Using Book Clubs Makes Sense

The understanding of a text is enhanced when readers interact with other readers. Book clubs may be more involved and lively for children’s discussions precisely because they are directed by children.

These conversations may have another level of meaning altogether as children discuss and share ideas and vocabulary with one another.

Book club activities can also help the curriculum to flow more smoothly by linking reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Content-area reading may also be integrated.

When children utilize reading logs, their writing provides scaffolding (support) for book club conversations. Children make choices about how they will respond in their logs, using words, drawings, and diagrams.

## Book Talks: Blessing Books

Book talks allow children to enthusiastically share their comprehension of books they have read. When children and teachers share books they have enjoyed, it is like “blessing a book.” When “blessing books,” children should:

- pick a book that they “loved” reading
- share the author, title (and, sometimes, genre)
- think of a great lead statement—something to “grab” the audience
- tell a bit about the book without giving away all the secrets
- explain why the book was chosen to be shared (personal reaction)

Not all books read turn out to be personal winners. Children might also like to persuade others to not read the book. See Chapter 3: Writing: the Reading-Writing Connection, Teaching Persuasive Writing, pages 369–370.

See Chapter 1: Oral Language: Speaking, Listening, and Phonological Awareness, Book Talks, page 65, and, in this chapter, BLM 26: Planning My Book Talk.

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BLM 26: Planning My Book Talk, page 511

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## Reciprocal Teaching—An Effective Comprehension Routine

Through reciprocal teaching, children working together learn how to read for meaning and self-monitor reading comprehension (Palincsar and Brown 117–175). This half-hour procedure involves children in

- predicting
- questioning
- monitoring comprehension (seeking clarification when confused)
- summarizing

Reciprocal teaching works best if children have been taught and have practiced the following during shared reading, guided reading, and read-alouds:

- predicting
- questioning
- comprehension monitoring
- summarizing

The teacher models “blessing a book.”

Keep the book talk short.

For more information on book clubs, visit [www.planetbookclub.com](http://www.planetbookclub.com).

*“Cooperative learning instruction has been used successfully to teach comprehension strategies in content-area subjects. Students work together helping each other learn and apply comprehension strategies.”*

PUT READING FIRST 54

Children socially construct knowledge as they discuss text.

### Check It Out!

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A.S. Palincsar and A.L. Brown. “Reciprocal Teaching of Comprehension-Fostering and Comprehension-Monitoring Activities,” *Cognition and Instruction* 1: 117–175.



*“Reciprocal teaching is effective at improving comprehension.”*

DUKE AND PEARSON 2002, 227

## **Reciprocal Teaching Step-By-Step**

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1. Predict—Children use background knowledge, title, and pictures to discuss and predict what the text will be about and what will happen next. The teacher reminds children why predicting is important.
2. Read—Children read a paragraph or section of the text either silently or aloud.
3. Clarify—The teacher poses questions such as: “Are there any words that you are wondering about?” “Are there any ideas that are confusing?”
4. Discuss/Question—Children talk about the text that has been read thus far. Were their predictions correct? At least one question is asked about what has been read. The questions may be answered according to the categories: In the Book; In My Head.
5. Summarize—In a sentence or two, the teacher/children summarize what has been read so far.
6. The procedure continues, repeating step 1 through step 5, until all the text is read. Teachers may find BLM 29: Let’s Take Turns and BLM 30: Using Reciprocal Teaching Cards to be very helpful during reciprocal teaching.

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**BLM 29: Let’s Take Turns, page 514**

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**BLM 30: Using Reciprocal Teaching Cards, page 515**

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In reciprocal teaching, children take turns leading dialogues. Children, not just teachers, teach their peers how to engage in these dialogues. Reciprocal teaching, like most effective procedures, begins with a great deal of teacher modeling. As children catch on, they take turns stepping into the role of the teacher. The steps in a reciprocal teaching lesson reflect the processes used by successful readers.

# Assessing Comprehension Instruction in Your Classroom

This chart provides an excellent summary of the strategies used by effective readers—the goal for all children.

Nell Duke and David Pearson suggest that when teachers examine their own classrooms they should consider whether children are being taught the full range of effective reading comprehension strategies. The following questions will help teachers to develop an overview of their classrooms.

Are children being taught to

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

Does instruction about strategies include

- explicit description of the strategy and when it should be introduced?
- modeling of the strategy in action?
- collaborative use of the strategy in action?
- guided practice using the strategy, with gradual release of responsibility to the child?
- independent practice using the strategy?

Teachers might also ask themselves the following questions:

- Are children 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 children being taught?
- Is there an active concern with children's motivation to engage in literacy activities and apply newly learned strategies?
- Are the comprehension skills of children being assessed on an ongoing basis?

Adapted from N.K. Duke and P. David Pearson, "Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension," in *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*. International Reading Association, 2002, 235.

# Closing Thoughts

The goal for all children in reading comprehension must be to learn and apply the thinking strategies that are used by proficient readers. In order to read with passion and purpose, readers must be able to recognize what they do and do not understand. They must learn how to use appropriate “fix-up strategies”—how to make sense of and repair confusions. Strategy instruction must be balanced with ample time and opportunity for both reading and high quality talk about text.

In the next chapter, *In the Classroom: Making It Work*, balanced comprehension instruction will be evident in balanced literacy classrooms. Without comprehension (meaning), children will not

- choose to read
- stay engaged as they read
- read critically
- share books
- lose themselves in books

Comprehension: When it comes to reading, nothing else matters!



The teaching of comprehension strategies is about more than simply teaching techniques—it is about teaching children to use these strategies in their reading both inside and outside the classroom.

*“If we know that thinking about our own thinking and using the strategies that form this metacognitive foundation are associated with the tendency to read more deeply, critically, analytically and independently, shouldn’t comprehension strategy instruction be a major focus of our work with children who are learning to read and reading to learn?”*

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# Chapter 4



## **BLACKLINE MASTERS**

- BLM 1: Reading to a Buddy
- BLM 2: Buddy Story Retelling
- BLM 3: Story Elements—Retelling
- BLM 4: Group Retelling Cards
- BLM 5: Story Map
- BLM 6: Story Pyramid
- BLM 7: Story Retelling Frame
- BLM 8: Let's Talk—Beginning the Discussion
- BLM 9: Let's Talk—Ending the Discussion—Our Group Thinks
- BLM 10: Look At Us
- BLM 11: Can You See It?
- BLM 12: Sketch to Stretch
- BLM 13: Most Like Me
- BLM 14: Who Is This Character?
- BLM 15: Buddy Book Walk
- BLM 16: Look It Over
- BLM 17: An Anticipation Guide—*Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes
- BLM 18: Activating Prior Knowledge and/or Summarizing—Using a Frame
- BLM 19: Prior Knowledge Activation—I Like \_\_\_\_\_.
- BLM 20: Guided Reading Frame (1)
- BLM 21: Guided Reading Frame (2)
- BLM 22: Text-to-Me (Independent Reading)
- BLM 23: Text-to-Text
- BLM 24: Main Idea (1)
- BLM 25: Main Idea (2)
- BLM 26: Planning My Book Talk
- BLM 27: In the Book ... In My Head ...
- BLM 28: Wonderings
- BLM 29: Let's Take Turns
- BLM 30: Using Reciprocal Teaching Cards