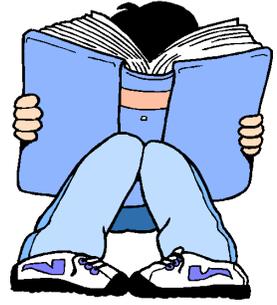


Reading Comprehension

Reading Rockets

Comprehension is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. To be able to accurately understand written material, children need to be able to (1) decode what they read; (2) make connections between what they read and what they already know; and (3) think deeply about what they have read.



Reading Aloud to Build Comprehension

The benefits of reading aloud

Reading aloud is the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success (Bredekamp, Copple, & Neuman, 2000). It provides children with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It reveals the rewards of reading, and develops the listener's interest in books and desire to be a reader (Mooney, 1990).

Listening to others read develops key understanding and skills, such as an appreciation for how a story is written and familiarity with book conventions, such as "once upon a time" and "happily ever after" (Bredekamp et al., 2000). Reading aloud demonstrates the relationship between the printed word and meaning – children understand that print tells a story or conveys information – and invites the listener into a conversation with the author.

Children can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It exposes less able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own, and entices them to become better readers. Students of any age benefit from hearing an experienced reading of a wonderful book.

Choosing good books

Children need to be exposed to a wide range of stories and books. They need to see themselves as well as other people, cultures, communities, and issues in the books we read to them. They need to see how characters in books handle the same fears, interests, and concerns that they experience (Barton & Booth, 1990). Selecting a wide range of culturally diverse books will help all children find and make connections to their own life experiences, other books they have read, and universal concepts. (Dyson & Genishi, 1994).

Children use real life to help them understand books, and books help children understand real life. Choose books that invite children to respond with enthusiasm and understanding. Look for books with rich language, meaningful plots, compelling characters, and engaging illustrations (Gambrell & Almasi, 1996).

Keep two simple questions in mind: Is it a good story? Is it worth sharing with my student? Other ideas to consider when selecting good books include:

- Is the book worthy of a reader's and listener's time?
- Does the story sound good to the ear when read aloud?
- Will it appeal to your audience?
- Will children find the book relevant to their lives and culture?
- Will the book spark conversation?
- Will the book motivate deeper topical understanding?

- Does the book inspire children to find or listen to another book on the same topic? By the same author? Written in the same genre?
- Is the story memorable?
- Will children want to hear the story again?

What kids can do to help themselves

- Use outlines, maps, and notes when reading.
- Make flash cards of key terms that are helpful to remember.
- Read stories or passages in short sections and make sure to review what happened before you continue reading.
- Ask, "Does this make sense?" If it doesn't, reread the part that didn't make sense.
- Read with a buddy. Stop every page or so and take turns summarizing what's been read.
- Preview the book with someone before reading it independently.
- While reading, try to form mental pictures or images that match the story.

What parents can do to help at home

- Hold a conversation and discuss what your child has read. Ask your child probing questions about the book and connect the events to his or her own life. For example, say "I wonder why that girl did that?" or "How do you think he felt? Why?" and "So, what lesson can we learn here?"
- Help your child make connections between what he or she reads and similar experiences he has felt, saw in a movie, or read in another book.
- Help your child monitor his or her understanding. Teach her to continually ask herself whether she understands what she's reading.
- Help your child go back to the text to support his or her answers.
- Discuss the meanings of unknown words, both those he reads and those he hears.
- Read material in short sections, making sure your child understands each step of the way.
- Discuss what your child has learned from reading informational text such as a science or social studies book.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/reading-aloud-build-comprehension>

http://www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/comprehension#do_parents

