

COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES DEFINED

What content should be taught during a comprehension strategy study?

MONITORING MEANING

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- Proficient readers monitor their comprehension during reading - they know when the text they are reading or listening to makes sense, when it does not, what does not make sense, and whether the unclear portions are critical to overall understanding of the piece.
- Proficient readers can identify when text is comprehensible and the degree to which they understand it. They can identify ways in which a text becomes gradually more understandable by reading past an unclear portion and/or by rereading parts or the whole text.
- Proficient readers are aware of what they do comprehend and know what they need to comprehend from a text.
- Proficient readers are aware of the purpose for which they read and direct selective attention to the parts of the text they most need to comprehend for that purpose.
- Proficient readers are able to assume different "stances" toward a text. For example, the child can read a book from the point of view of different characters within it or a book reviewer or a writer seeking new techniques for his/her work.
- Proficient readers identify difficulties they have in comprehending at the word, sentence, and whole text level. They are flexible in their use of tactics to solve different types of comprehension problems.
 - Proficient readers solve word and sentence level problems with surface structure strategies such as decoding strategies and/or word analysis.
 - Proficient readers solve text level problems by monitoring, evaluating, and making revisions to their evolving interpretation of the text while reading - they compare the emerging meaning to their background knowledge and make adjustments to incorporate new information into existing memory stores.
- Proficient readers can "think aloud" about their reading process. They are aware of and can articulate the surface and deep structure strategies they use to identify words, read fluently and comprehend and can manage and create solutions to reading and learning problems.
- Proficient readers can identify confusing ideas, themes, and/or surface elements (words, sentence or text structures, graphs, tables, etc.) and can suggest a variety of different means to solve the problems they have.
- Proficient readers are independent, flexible and adaptive:
 - they can use surface and deep structure strategies to solve reading problems and enhance understanding - they are independent;
 - they can use a particular strategy (i.e. determining importance) to a greater or lesser degree depending on the demands of the text - they are flexible
 - they can "turn up the volume or turn down the volume" on a particular strategy or they can use all comprehension strategies in concert - they are adaptive.
- Proficient readers use text management strategies. They pause, re-read, skim, scan, consider the meaning in text and reflect on their understanding with other readers.

USING RELEVANT PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OR SCHEMA

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- Proficient learners spontaneously and purposefully recall their relevant, prior knowledge (schema) before, during, and after they read and learn (text to self connections).
- Proficient learners use their schema to make sense of new information they read and learn and to store new information with related information in memory.
- Proficient learners assimilate information from text and other learning experiences into their relevant, prior knowledge and make changes in that schema to accommodate the new information.
- A proficient learner adapts his/her schema as he/she reads, converses with others and learns; deleting inaccurate information (naive conceptions) adding to existing schema, and connecting chunks of knowledge to other related knowledge, opinions, and ideas.
- Proficient learners can articulate how they use schema to enhance their comprehension in all forms of text and in all learning situations.
- Proficient learners connect information from text and other learning experiences to schemata in long term memory. Information is learned, remembered and reapplied because it is linked to other learned information.
- Proficient learners capitalize on five types of schema when comprehending text and learning new material:
 - * specific knowledge about the topic; general world knowledge (text to world connections);
 - * specific knowledge about text topics, themes, content, structure and organization (text to text connections),
 - * their knowledge of potential obstacles to comprehension (particularly in non-fiction text or text with completely unfamiliar content);
 - * knowledge about one's own reading tendencies, preferences and styles;
 - * specific knowledge about the author/illustrator and the tools they use to create meaning.
- Each type of schema permits students to monitor for meaning, pose questions, make predictions, draw conclusions, create mental images, synthesize, and determine importance as they read and learn.
- Teachers assist readers in activating (giving students the necessary tools to recall relevant, prior knowledge);
- Teachers help reader build (actually create background knowledge on a given topic, author, text structure, etc.) schema should they find they lack adequate schema for a particular reading situation.
- Students can articulate ways in which using schema enhances their comprehension.

ASKING QUESTIONS

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- Proficient readers spontaneously and purposefully generate questions before, during, and after reading depending on their purpose in reading.
- Proficient readers ask questions to:
 - * clarify meaning;
 - * speculate about text yet to be read;
 - * to show skepticism or a critical stance;
 - * determine an author's intent, style, content, or format;
 - * locate a specific answer in text, or;
 - * consider rhetorical questions inspired by the text.

The types of questions differ based on the type of text (genre) and the reader's purpose.

- Proficient readers use questions to focus their attention on ideas, events or other text elements they want to remember;
- Proficient readers understand that many of the most intriguing questions are not answered explicitly in the text but left to the reader's interpretation.
- However, when an answer is needed, proficient readers determine whether it can be answered by the text or whether they will need to infer the answer from the text, their background knowledge and/or other text or whether the answer is explicitly stated in the text.
- Proficient readers understand how the process of questioning is used in other areas of their lives, academic and personal.
- Proficient readers understand and can describe how asking questions deepens their comprehension.
- Proficient readers are aware that as they hear others' questions, new ones are inspired in their own minds - these are called generative questions - in some cases, a reader's own question causes him or her to generate more questions.

EVOKING IMAGES

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- Proficient learners spontaneously and purposefully create images while and after they read. The images emerge from all five senses and the emotions and are anchored in a reader's prior knowledge.
- Proficient readers use images to immerse themselves in rich detail as they read. The detail gives depth and dimension to the reading, engaging the reader and making the text more memorable.
- Proficient readers use images to draw conclusions, to create distinct and unique interpretations of the text, to recall details significant to the text, and to recall a text after it has been read.
- Images from reading frequently become part of the reader's writing.
- Images from a reader's personal experience frequently become part of their comprehension.
- Proficient readers adapt their images as they continue to read. Images are revised to incorporate new information revealed through the text and new interpretations as they are developed by the reader.
- Proficient readers understand and can articulate how creating images enhances their comprehension.
- Proficient readers adapt their images in response to the shared images of other readers.

INFERRING

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- Inferring is the process of creating a personal and unique meaning from text. It involves a mental process that combines what is read with relevant prior knowledge (schema). The reader's unique interpretation of text is the product of this blending.
- When proficient learners infer, they create a meaning that is not stated explicitly in the text. The process implies that they actively search for or become aware of implicit meaning.
- Inferring may cause the reader to slow his/her reading, reread sections, converse, write or draw to better understand the content -
- Inferences may be more thoroughly developed if the reader pauses to reflect and consider multiple interpretations and perspectives.
- When they infer, proficient readers:
 - * draw conclusions from text;
 - * make reasonable predictions as they read, test and revise those predictions as they read further;
 - * create dynamic interpretations of text that are adapted as they continue to read and after they read;
 - * use the combination of background knowledge and explicitly stated information from the text to answer questions they have as they read;
 - * make connections between conclusions they draw and other beliefs or knowledge --- use the inferences to extend and adapt existing knowledge;
 - * arrive at insight after struggling to understand complex concepts;
 - * make critical or analytical judgments about what they read.
- When proficient readers infer, they are more able to: remember and reapply what they have read; create new and revise existing background knowledge for themselves; discriminate and critically analyze text and authors; engage in conversation and/or other analytical or reflective responses to what they read.
- Inferences are revised based on the inferences and interpretations of other readers.
 - * A wide variety of interpretation is appropriate for fiction and poetry; a narrower range of interpretation is typical for non-fiction text. Teachers should allow great latitude for inferences, provided that the reader can defend his/her inferences with a description of relevant, prior knowledge and specific text they have read.

DETERMINING IMPORTANCE IN TEXT

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- Proficient learners make purposeful and spontaneous decisions about what is important in text at the:

word level words that carry the meaning are contentives -- words that connect are functors -- contentives tend to be more important to the overall meaning of passage than functors;

sentence level there are usually key sentences that carry the weight of meaning for a paragraph, passage or section -- often, especially in non-fiction, they may contain bold print, begin or end the passage, or refer to a table or graph;

text level there are key ideas, concepts, themes in the text -- our opinions about which ideas are most important change as we read the passage -- final conclusions about the most important themes are typically made after reading the passage, perhaps several times and/or after conversing or writing about the passage - clues, such as repetition for emphasis, illustrations or diagrams, symbolism, foreshadowing, character and setting prominence and conflict all point to importance at the text level.

- Decisions about importance in text are made based on:
 - * the reader's purpose;
 - * the reader's schema for the text content -- ideas most closely connected to the reader's prior knowledge will be considered most important;
 - * the reader's sense of the aesthetic, what he or she values, considers worthy or beautiful;
 - * language that surprises or otherwise captures the reader's sustained focus;
 - * the reader's beliefs, opinions, and experiences related to the text;
 - * the reader's schema for text format -- text that stands out visually and/or ideas that are repeated are often considered most important;
 - * the reader's understanding of text structures - for example, in a cause and effect text structure, the reader should direct his/her attention to those elements;
 - * concepts another reader mentions prior to, during or after reading.
- Frequently, pointing out non-examples (what is unimportant) helps students to distinguish importance more clearly.
- Interesting discussion emanates from dispute about what is most important -- children need to work toward defending their positions, but there is rarely a true set of most important ideas.
- Students should be able to articulate how they make decisions about what is important in a given context and how those decisions enhance their overall comprehension of the piece.

SYNTHESIZING

SOME KEY IDEAS:

- The process of synthesizing occurs during reading:
 - * Proficient readers are aware of changes in their ideas and conclusions about text as they read further into the text;
 - * Proficient readers understand and can articulate how their thinking about a given text evolves and/or as the text itself changes;
 - * Proficient readers maintain a cognitive synthesis as they read. They monitor the overall meaning and themes in the text as they read and are aware of the ways text elements "fit together" to create that overall meaning and theme;
 - * Proficient readers are aware of text structures in fiction and non-fiction and understand that text elements provide clues to help them predict and synthesize so that they can understand the overall meanings or themes;
 - * As they read, proficient readers attend more directly to character, setting, conflict, sequence of events, resolution, and theme in fiction and to text structures such as chronological, cause and effect, compare and contrast, descriptive, enumerative and problem/solution in non-fiction. They use their knowledge of these text structures to make decisions about the overall meaning of a passage, chapter, or book;
 - * Proficient readers actively revise their cognitive synthesis as they read. New information is assimilated into the reader's evolving ideas about the text rendering some earlier decisions about the text obsolete.

- The process of synthesizing occurs after reading:
 - * Proficient readers are able to express, through a variety means (written, oral, artistic or dramatic), a synthesis of what they have read. The synthesis includes ideas and themes relevant to the overall meaning from the text and is cogently and succinctly presented;
 - * A synthesis is the sum of information from the text, other relevant texts and the reader's background knowledge, ideas, and opinions produced in an original way;
 - * Proficient readers use syntheses to share, recommend, and critically review books they have read;
 - * Proficient readers can articulate how using synthesis helps them better understand what they have read.

Teaching Tactics: Day to Day Instruction in Comprehension

What are the most effective instructional strategies for teaching deep structure systems?

Thinking Aloud

How do readers and writers think?

Teachers read aloud, pausing to make their thinking explicit;

Teachers are clear about how the strategy they're using helps them comprehend more than they would have comprehended without the strategy;

Teachers work to ensure precision in their think alouds, focusing on the most far-reaching use of the strategy, resisting the urge to think aloud about the most obvious content or new vocabulary in the text;

Teachers are clear in describing how students can apply the strategy independently.

Basic think aloud	Higher level think aloud
<p><i>After reading to page 2 where Nikolai first poses his three big questions</i> I'm inferring that Nikolai is a serious kind of boy interested in important questions in the world.</p>	<p><i>After reading to page 2</i> When I first start to read about Nikolai, I realize that he has certain qualities that I wish I had. When I read about how serious and pensive he is, how focused on trying to understand the most important questions in life at such an early age, I realize that there is something in his serious manner that we might all learn from as we try to understand the world.</p>
<p><i>After reading to page 7 where Nikolai's three friends generate answers to his questions based on what is happening to them in the here and now</i> I'm inferring that Nikolai and his friends Gogol, Pushkin and Sonya have been friends for a long time and trust each other.</p>	<p><i>After reading to page 7</i> When I read about Nikolai's friends' hasty responses to his important questions, I conclude that, even though we have good friends whom we trust, that sometimes the answers to the most important questions in our lives come from ourselves. I infer that the reason Nikolai is dissatisfied with their responses, is that he knows that the answers to questions as important as these should come from himself and his experiences rather than from his friends, no matter how much they mean to him.</p>
<p><i>After reading to page 13 just before</i></p>	<p><i>After reading to page 17 after the panda</i></p>

Nikolai rescues the panda

I'm predicting (a type of inference) that Nikolai will be the one to save the panda and her baby and that he will begin to think about the answers to his questions when he does.

and her baby are reunited in Leo's home

I'm predicting that because Nikolai played such an important role in the rescue of the panda and her baby that he will begin to realize that his questions may be unanswerable or that, if there are answers, they will have to come from him thinking about his own actions and how those actions helped him to understand *When is the best time to do things, Who is the most important one and What is the right thing to do?*

I also infer that, though our questions may be different than Nikolai's, that this author and Leo Tolstoy, the author of the story that inspired this book are trying to tell us that it is very important that we have big questions about how the world works and that it is one of our jobs in life to consider the elusive answers to those questions. I think that when we ask those questions and seek the answers, we may be more able to help others, just in the way that Nikolai did.

Modeling

How do readers and writers behave?

Teachers describe their lives as readers and writers - where and when they like to read, how they choose books, what they prefer in relation to author's style, content and genre;

Teachers help students develop and describe their own preferences;

Teachers create a classroom environment conducive to in-depth learning - there are spaces conducive to group work, independent work and small group discussion, books are accessible and records of children's thinking and group ideas line the walls;

Teachers ensure that learning experiences are authentic—that what they ask students to do in class is actually something readers might choose to do outside of school.

Demonstration

How do readers and writers interact?

Teachers demonstrate or assist in student demonstrations designed to show how readers deepen comprehension via oral, written, artistic or dramatic means;

Teachers set up “walk through” demonstrations in which students actually enact the processes of obtaining resources and materials (i.e. book selection) in the classroom or transition from one activity to another;

Teachers walk students through demonstrations showing how book clubs, think-pair-share, turn and talk and other interactive sequences work in the classroom;

Teachers show through “fish bowl” types of demonstrations how students can build on other students' thoughts in discussion, how they can use “open forum” in which the whole group converses about a book or an idea.

Conferring

How do readers and writers reach beyond their current work?

Teachers ensure ample time every day to confer with students during composing (independent work) time;

Teachers make decisions about which children need shorter, more frequent conferences and which will benefit from less frequent, more in-depth conferences;

Teachers ask each student to reflect on their growth as a reader in each conference;

Teachers build on each child's strengths and progress and go the next step to make clear, well-documented decisions about what to teach next in the context of the conference;

Teachers are explicit about how the strategy or skill discussed in a conference can be generalized beyond the current context.

Teachers invite students to share new insights during reflecting sessions.

Managing Sharing Opportunities

How do readers and writers teach others?

Teachers encourage students to not only share, but to teach others what they have attempted in their reading - these sessions can be in pairs, trios, small or large groups and are often called reflection sessions;

Students who wish to share actually prepare a lesson and consider ways to teach in a way that all learners needs will be met;

Students reflect on their own learning and set new goals in the context of reflection sessions;

Students use a wide variety of learning strategies to share and focus not on retelling or summarizing a text, but on making their thinking about that text public;

Students may use written, oral, artistic, or dramatic means to share their thinking.