

Comprehension Activities

I. Setting the Stage

Sometimes students struggle with comprehending what they read because they lack some of the background knowledge or experiences that are needed to understand a particular book or passage. There are a couple of ways that you can help the child **build background knowledge** and connect to unfamiliar concepts in the story.

- **Book Walk-Through:** This method was explained in the training video. As a review, the basic steps are to pre-read the book you intend to read-aloud to the child. Look for concepts and words that might be unfamiliar or confusing to the child. Collect materials that will help the child understand the confusing or unfamiliar content and share those materials with the child before beginning the book. By doing this, you are helping the child to build the background knowledge that is needed to understand the book.
- **Picture Walk:** Take a “picture walk” through the book before you begin reading. Look at the pictures on each page and talk about them with the child. Ask the child questions such as: What do you notice on this page? What do you think is happening in the story? Where is the story taking place? Who are the characters? You do not need to tell the story; just look at the pictures, make observations, ask questions, and discuss any pages that illustrate unfamiliar objects or places. After completing the picture walk, go back and read the story to the child. When finished, talk about how the words added information to the pictures and how the pictures added information to the words. A picture walk can be particularly helpful when a book has detailed illustrations that tell part of the story or when the story is set in a time or place that is unfamiliar to the child.

2. Vocabulary Development

At times a child struggles with comprehension because he does not understand some of the words he is reading. A child with good decoding skills will be able to sound out unknown words but may not pick up on the meaning of the word. Sometimes the child will recognize the word but not really understand the definition. If you see a word that may be unfamiliar to the child, stop and discuss the meaning of the word and how it fits in the context of the story.

It takes multiple exposures to a new word to fully grasp its meaning. You may want to make a list of words that you discuss when reading a story. Go back and revisit those words. Talk about examples and non-examples of the word. For example, if the word is “absurd,” talk about things that would be absurd (for example, a chicken riding a bicycle; wearing spaghetti on your head; etc.) and things that are not absurd (for example, a person riding a bicycle; wearing shoes on your feet; etc.). If limited academic vocabulary is an issue for your student, help the child make a little booklet with new words, definitions, ways the word can be used in a sentence, examples and non-examples, and illustrations of each word. The process of making the booklet and incorporating all those aspects of the words into the booklet will provide the multiple exposures to the word that the child needs in order to grasp its meaning.

3. Graphic Organizers

Another way to increase students’ comprehension is to help them to organize the information they are reading and record it in a graphic organizer. There are many graphic organizers available for free on the Internet, but here are two that may be particularly helpful when tutoring.

- **K-W-L:** This graphic organizer is very helpful when reading nonfiction books or studying a textbook. Before reading, students fill in the “K” and “W” columns. In the “K” column, they write down everything they already **know** (or think they know) about the topic. In the “W” column, they record what they **want to learn** about the topic. Once they have read the book or passage, they finish by recording what they **learned** about the topic in the “L” column. You can find a simple example of this organizer at the end of this handout.
- **Story Map:** A story map provides space for the student to record the setting and characters in a fiction story, as well as record what happened in the beginning, middle, and end. A variation of the story map shows the problem(s) in the story and the solution(s). You can find simple examples of these organizers at the end of this handout.

4. Conversation

The best way to both check for comprehension and build comprehension is to talk with children about what they are reading. Ask questions about characters, setting, plot development, unexpected twists, etc. Ask them to predict what might happen next or summarize what just happened. Look for ways you (or the children) can relate it to your life or their lives or your community. Talking about what you are reading will increase the child’s background knowledge, vocabulary—and most importantly, comprehension.

Name: _____

Title of Book: _____

Author: _____

Setting (Where and when did the story take place?):

Characters (Who is in the story?):

What happened in the story?

Beginning of the Story:



Middle of the Story:



End of the Story:

What was your favorite part of the story? _____

Name: _____

Title of Book: _____

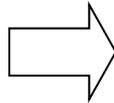
Author: _____

Setting (Where and when did the story take place?):

Characters (Who is in the story?):

What happened in the story?

Problem(s) (What problem did the characters in the story face?):



Solution(s) (What did the characters do to solve the problem?):

What was your favorite part of the story? _____
