

Cook's Corner

Comprehension

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By 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. One big part of comprehension is having a sufficient vocabulary, or knowing the meanings of enough words. Readers who have strong comprehension are able to draw conclusions about what they read – what is important, what is a fact, what caused an event to happen, which characters are funny. Thus, comprehension involves combining reading with thinking and reasoning.

A kid's perspective: What this feels like to me

Children will usually express their frustration and difficulties in a general way, with statements like "I hate reading!" or "This is stupid!" But if they could, this is how kids might describe how comprehension difficulties in particular affect their reading:

- 🍂 It takes me so long to read something.
- 🍂 It's hard to follow along with everything going on.
- 🍂 I didn't really get what that book was about.
- 🍂 Why did that character do that? I just don't get it!
- 🍂 I'm not sure what the most important parts of the book were.
- 🍂 I couldn't really create an image in my head of what was going on.



What kids can do to help themselves

- 🍂 Use outlines, maps, and notes when you read.
- 🍂 Make flash cards of key terms you might want to remember.
- 🍂 Read stories or passages in short sections and make sure you know what happened before you continue reading.
- 🍂 Ask yourself, "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 you've read.
- 🍂 Ask a parent or teacher to preview a book with you before you read it on your own.
- 🍂 As you read, try to form mental pictures or images that match the story.

A parent's perspective: What I see at home

Here are some clues for parents that a child may have problems with comprehension:

- 🍂 She's not able to summarize a passage or a book.
- 🍂 He might be able to tell you what happened in a story, but can't explain why events went the way they did.
- 🍂 She can't explain what a character's thoughts or feelings might have been.
- 🍂 He doesn't link events in a book to similar events from another book or from real life.

Flights of Fantasy

Fantasy literature does more than stretch your youngster's imagination. Fantasy books also teach:

 **Science:** Artificial intelligence, lasers, and space travel are just a few of the topics covered in science fiction. Titles like Rebecca Recotr's *Tria and the Great Star Rescue* encourage your child to explore the world of science.

 **Geography:** Maps in fantasies like *A Wizard of Earthsea* by Ursula K. Le Guin help the reader trace the characters' paths. Your youngster will work on map skills as he enjoys the stories.

 **Foreign Languages:** Some fantasies, like J.R.R. Tolkein's *The Hobbit*, introduce made-up languages. Figuring out the new words can help your child develop an interest in learning another language.

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.



Use What You Know!

Reading New Words

Your child probably can't read a word like "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious." But he/she can use words they already know in order to read new words.

 Start with your youngster's name. Troy, for example, might have an easier time learning "tr" words such as "train." You can use the "tr" consonant blend at the beginning of his name to teach him other blends as well, such as "cr," "pl," and "st."

 Point out patterns in sight words your child recognizes. **Example:** If your youngster knows "they," he can learn "then," "this," and "that." "Could," "would," and "should" are three common sight words that also share a pattern.

 Break down syllables in a longer word, such as "yesterday." Cover the entire word with a small slip of paper. Then, slowly slide the paper to the right to show each syllable one at a time (yes-ter-day). This works especially well for words with several syllables, such as "supercalifragilisticexpialidocious!"

