12 Comprehension Strategies for Young Readers

A Letter of Explanation to Parents
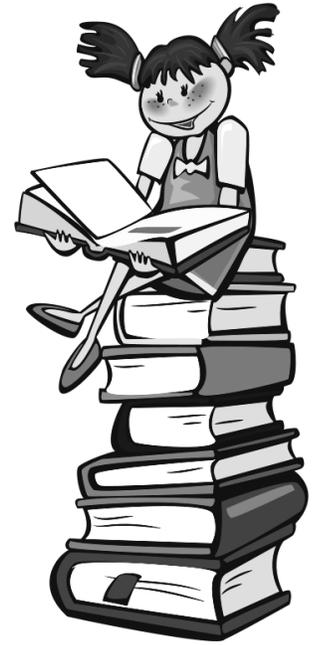
By Sheila Wheaton

Dear Parents,

Good readers can both decode (sound out) words and comprehend (understand) what they are reading. Some children become good at decoding, but have trouble understanding what they have read. Comprehension is crucial for success in education.

At school I am working on some comprehension strategies to help the students better understand what they are reading, teaching them how to think about the text. I wanted to share these twelve strategies with you so that you can get the most out of the time you spend reading together. Hopefully, this will help you know what questions to ask your child, giving him/her more opportunity to connect with stories. Here are those strategies:

USING ILLUSTRATIONS - using the pictures to help decode a word and/or understand the story better

Example: If the page has a picture of a farm, and an unknown word is b - - n, the child could use letter knowledge and the picture to decipher that the word is *barn*.

You might ask: Is there something in the picture that could help you?

MAKING PREDICTIONS - using prior information to tell what might come next

Example: Sue ate five cookies before dinner. What might her mom say to her?

You might ask: (showing the cover before reading) What could this book be about? (during reading) What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that?

STORY ELEMENTS - the characters, setting, and plot of a story

Example: In the folk story of *The Mitten,* the setting is outside on a cold, snowy day in the woods. The characters are: the mouse, the bear, and other animals.

You might ask: Where does this story take place? Who are the most important characters? What happened in the story?

SEQUENCING - telling the story in order

Example: In *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, the caterpillar hatched from an egg. Then each day it ate more and more food and was very full. At the end of the week he made a cocoon. At last, he became a beautiful butterfly.

You might ask: Tell me the first thing that happened in the story. What happened next? Then what happened?

MAIN IDEA - telling what the whole story is about in one sentence

Example: The main idea of *The Boy Who Cried, "Wolf"* is that others won't believe you if you aren't totally honest every time.

You might ask: Describe the most important thing about this story. What does the author want you to learn? What message is the author trying to tell you?

PROBLEM AND SOLUTION - finding a problem that a character faces and how that problem is resolved

Example: The problem in *Hansel and Gretel* is that the children are captured by a witch and will not be able to see their father again. They solved the problem by tricking the witch and going home.

You might ask: Is there a problem in this story? What is it? How does the character solve the problem?

SUMMARIZING - briefly telling important events of the story

Example: The most important events in *The Three Little Pigs* are: Each pig built a house. One was out of straw. One was out of sticks. One was out of bricks. The wolf blew down the houses made of straw and sticks, but couldn't blow the brick house down. The pigs got rid of the wolf and lived happily ever after.

You might ask: Can you tell the story in your own words? What are the most important things that happened?

CAUSE AND EFFECT - one event leads to another

Example: Paul got sick. He missed a day of school.

You might ask: Why did that happen? What might have happened if . . . . ?

FICTION VS. NONFICTION - distinguishing between what is real (nonfiction) and what is pretend (fiction)

Example: *The cat got up and washed the dishes and made breakfast for me* is fiction. *The cat sat in the sunshine and cleaned her fur* is nonfiction.

You might ask: Could that really happen? Is this story fiction or nonfiction?

MAKING CONNECTIONS TO ONESELF - using personal experiences to make stories more meaningful

Example: I can relate to the mouse in *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff because I tend to get distracted when I'm doing something.

You might ask: Have you ever had that happen to you? How did you feel? What did you do?

MAKING INFERENCES - using pictures, clues, personal information, and undertones in a story to make a guess

Example: Joe was invited to his friend's birthday party. He got sick on that day and could not go. How did Joe feel?

You might ask: How do you think the character feels? What makes you think that?

COMPARE AND CONTRAST - finding similarities and differences in story elements (characters, setting, plot), and also in different stories

Example: Papa Bear is big. Baby Bear is _____.

You might ask: How are the characters alike? How are they different? How are the two versions of this story different? Is this story like any other story that we've read?

I hope you find this information helpful and easy to use while reading with your child. If you have any questions about these strategies, please don't hesitate to ask!

HAPPY READING!