

## Comprehension, Grade 1

### Introduction

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Children have spent a considerable amount of time practicing sound/spellings and learning how to blend in order to read fluently. Now they must work to understand, think, question, process, and learn as they read—they must learn to read with comprehension.

The first half of the grade 1 reading instruction process emphasizes foundational—making sure that children have the solid foundation and tools they need to read text. With these tools and strategies, children will now learn to move through text with grace and fluency, effortlessly and accurately translating sound/spellings into words and then linking those words with their meanings. As they begin to develop into mature readers, children will learn to:

- Strategically and consciously prepare for what they are about to read.
- Connect new knowledge to what they already know.
- Think about what the text means and increase their knowledge base as they read.
- Use their knowledge of how text works as reading comprehension tools.
- Develop and apply specific reading strategies that help them derive meaning from all kinds of texts.

In the first half of first grade, the children are introduced to reading strategies and skills through *Decodable Books* and shared-reading *Big Books*. The *Decodable Books* help them build the reading fluency they need in order to facilitate comprehension. Working with the shared-reading *Big Books* introduces children to the mechanics of the language, the structure of books, and the skills and strategies that good readers use to comprehend text.

In this course, Julie Canzone guides her first grade students as they learn to apply their decoding skills and strategies to actual texts. Halfway through grade 1, Ms. Canzone introduces her children to anthologies—collections of literature and informational text presented thematically. Although the *Anthologies'* selections are grade-appropriate in difficulty and subject matter, the text selections are not controlled phonetically; thus far, children have applied their decoding skills exclusively to controlled texts (i.e., texts specifically designed for phonics and decoding skills practice). Reading selections in *Anthologies* is a major step in the development of children's ability to read independently and fluidly, to comprehend and process a text's meaning, and to build knowledge as they read.

As the children begin their experience with the *Anthologies* and concentrated comprehension instruction, Ms. Canzone continually encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning by preparing before they read and by questioning and interacting with the text.

At this point, the emphasis of reading instruction shifts from decoding to comprehension. The decoding skills, which have been the children's primary focus, become the tools that allow them to achieve the reading instruction's ultimate goal—comprehension of written text.

### Teaching Example 1

Good readers approach a text prepared, with an idea of what they want or need to learn from the text, what to expect from it, and how it relates to what they already know. Every step of the way, good readers integrate what they learn from the text with their own prior knowledge, using that knowledge as a comprehension tool. Children often make connections on several different levels simultaneously; for example, as they read, they may be making connections with the subject of the text, the text's literary genre, knowledge of the author's other work, and even their own personal experiences.

In Teaching Example 1, Ms. Canzone ensures that her children are ready to read a new selection by actively engaging them in several prereading activities. These activities are designed to help the children activate and use the knowledge they already have, to supply them with the new information they will need, and to familiarize them with the text.

### **Preparing to Read**

To prepare her children for reading, Ms. Canzone guides them through specific discussion topics and activities designed to help them approach the text with confidence. Because these skills and strategies are still new to her students, Ms. Canzone uses modeling techniques to show them how to prepare for reading. Before reading the text, Ms. Canzone helps her students:

- Activate and discuss their prior knowledge. In this case, children discuss what they know about flying kites. This gives children the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences, and it allows Ms. Canzone to assess her children's familiarity with the text's subject matter.
- Build background knowledge through a discussion of literary genres.
- Browse the selection, looking for clues, potential problems or points of confusion, and anything else that interests them or makes them wonder.
- Chart and discuss these clues, problems, and wonderings as they browse the text. These lists will be revisited after the reading.
- Work on strategies for addressing, decoding, and understanding unfamiliar words.

All of these activities help children become alert, aware readers who know how to approach a text prepared, anticipating what they might learn from the text and how they might go about learning it. Because the children are just beginning to use these skills and strategies, Ms. Canzone models to them how to prepare for reading.

### **Teaching Example 2**

In Teaching Example 2, Ms. Canzone and her children employ strategic reading skills as they begin reading the new selection. Ms. Canzone models effective reading strategies, and prompts children to use these strategies as they begin to read on their own.

### **Strategic Reading**

Good readers read strategically, using specific tools and strategies to help them understand text. The comprehension strategies taught in *Open Court Reading* and SRA Imagine It! include:

- Asking and answering questions.
- Making and confirming predictions.
- Making connections.
- Monitoring and clarifying.
- Monitoring and adjusting reading speed.
- Summarizing.
- Visualizing.

In this lesson, Ms. Canzone and her class concentrate on two of these strategies; making predictions and summarizing. By helping the children use these strategies, Ms. Canzone empowers them to progress as independent readers and learners.

### **Teaching Example 3**

In Teaching Example 3, children continue reading the selection they started the day before. Ms. Canzone introduces reviewing and summarizing strategies to help her children remember what they have already read and begin to integrate it with what they are about to read.

#### **Strategic Reading (continued)**

Young readers often have difficulty maintaining the levels of attention and focus necessary for effective reading and comprehension. Up to this point, children have been exposed primarily to brief readings that can be completed in one sitting. As they progress in school, children must build up their attention spans and reading endurance with longer and more complex text selections that must be read in increments, over time.

Ms. Canzone facilitates her children's reading comprehension by reviewing what has been read thus far. This refreshes the children's memories and assures Ms. Canzone that her children are prepared to continue. In addition, Ms. Canzone and the class review the clues, problems, and wonderings they identified before they began reading. This helps prepare the children and reminds them to address these concerns as they continue reading the text. When they have finished the selection, Ms. Canzone will return again to the clues, problems, and wonderings to ensure that her children's questions have been answered, their problems addressed, and their wonderings explored.

### **Teaching Example 4**

In Teaching Example 4, Ms. Canzone follows up the reading with a discussion. This allows her to informally assess her children's understanding, while giving them the opportunity to ask and answer questions and to express their impressions, thoughts, and feelings about what they read. It is often helpful for those children who have had trouble understanding the selection to engage in collaborative conversations with their peers.

#### **Discussing the Selection**

Discussion is a vital part of the reading comprehension process, a time for children to share their understanding and thoughts about the reading selection and to ask any questions they have about the text. In addition, Ms. Canzone takes the opportunities offered during discussion to model the process of identifying pertinent information while disregarding information that does not contribute to a reader's understanding of the selection.

As children engage in discussion, they connect what they have read to experiences they have had. (In Ms. Canzone's classroom, children were discussing their thoughts on learning to do something that is hard.) The ability to connect information from various sources to personal knowledge and experience and the ability to synthesize the two into a coherent, expanded body of knowledge are essential steps in knowledge building and reading comprehension.

Ms. Canzone also introduces her children to a discussion technique called "handing-off." When handing-off the discussion, Ms. Canzone becomes a member of the group rather than its leader. The process of handing-off enables children to take responsibility for guiding their own learning and empowers them to initiate, focus, and direct their own discussions.

### **Teaching Example 5**

In Teaching Example 5, Ms. Canzone and her class reread the selection to solidify their understanding of it. As they reread, their focus will move beyond basic understanding. They will look closely at the text and find text evidence to understand how the author organizes and presents the story by discussing and learning about the relationship between cause and effect.

#### **Comprehension Skill Instruction**

Revisiting or rereading a selection allows children to apply skills that give them a more complete and complicated understanding of the text. Some follow-up comprehension skills help children organize information, while others lead to deeper understanding and "reading between the lines" — identifying things in the text that are not explicitly stated.

Over the course of the school year, children will focus on a broad range of comprehension skills, including:

- Author's point of view.
- Author's purpose.
- Identifying cause and effect.
- Classifying and categorizing.
- Comparing and contrasting.
- Drawing conclusions.
- Discriminating fact from opinion.
- Identifying main ideas and details.
- Making inferences.
- Sequencing.
- Distinguishing reality from fantasy.

Comprehension skills and strategies work hand in hand to help children become strong, independent, and thoughtful readers.