

## Comprehension, Grades K-1

### Introduction

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Good readers do more than just read words. They understand that the words they read work together to create meaning—that is, they read with comprehension. Good readers:

- Consciously prepare for what they are about to read, make connections between new knowledge and what they already know, and think about what they read and reevaluate as they read.
- Monitor as they read, checking to make sure the text makes sense.
- Develop and intentionally apply specific reading strategies and skills that help them understand literature and informational texts.
- Learn to apply these strategies and skills as a way to get meaning from a variety of text types and extend their knowledge.

The most effective comprehension instruction is explicit and systematic. This instruction usually includes direct teacher explanation of a strategy or skill, teacher modeling ("thinking aloud"), guided practice, and opportunities for children to apply what they have been taught.

After analyzing comprehension research, the National Reading Panel noted three themes in comprehension skill instruction. First, they noted that comprehension is a complex cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear description of the role that vocabulary development and instruction play in the process. Second, it is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text. And third, the preparation of teachers to better equip children to develop and apply reading comprehension strategies to enhance understanding is intimately linked to students' achievement in this area (National Reading Panel, 2000).

In *Open Court Reading* and *SRA Imagine It!*, comprehension instruction begins in kindergarten, when children first begin to interact with texts. It progresses systematically toward independent reading, providing children with both the skills they need to read with fluency and the strategies they must have to read with comprehension.

In this teaching course, Lorelei Echeverri teaches her kindergarten students as they learn about the strategies and skills that are necessary for fluent reading, comprehension, and knowledge building. She encourages the students to apply what they are learning before, during, and after reading.

#### Teaching Example 1

Before good readers begin to read a text, they prepare. They set purposes for reading—to learn, to find answers to questions, to enjoy a good story, poem, or play. They make connections between what they are reading and what they already know. These connections may be made on several different levels at the same time. Good readers may establish a connection between, for example, the text they are reading and their familiarity with its subject, the type of writing, or knowledge of the author's other works.

In Teaching Example 1, Ms. Echeverri makes sure her students are ready to read a new selection by engaging them in several prereading activities. These activities are designed to help them activate and use the knowledge they already have about the topic, supply them with new information that they need to understand the text, and familiarize them with the text structure.

#### Prereading

In preparation for reading a *Big Book* selection, Ms. Echeverri teaches her students through specific topics of

discussion and activities designed to help them approach the text confidently. Before reading, Ms. Echeverri helps her students:

- Activate prior knowledge and build background by discussing what they already know about the topic. Note that Ms. Echeverri specifically asks the students to consider the information on the Concept/Question Board, which they have been working with throughout the unit. Students sometimes forget that the selections they have read previously are now part of their knowledge base. Eventually, this becomes second nature for them.
- Browse the selection looking at the text and at the pictures for clues that will help them understand it.
- Set a purpose for reading.

All of these activities help students become engaged readers who know before they begin to read what their purpose is for reading a selection and what they can expect to learn from it.

### Teaching Example 2

Students' reading—and scholastic—successes are linked strongly to the size of their vocabulary. A limited vocabulary contributes directly to reading comprehension failure: quite often, students who are poor readers simply do not have adequate vocabulary to get meaning from what they read.

Clearly, to become successful readers and writers, students must both recognize a large number of words and be able to deal efficiently with any unfamiliar words that they see as they read.

Teaching Example 2 demonstrates this critical step in preparing students to become independent readers and writers: vocabulary building.

### Building Vocabulary

In *Open Court Reading* and *SRA Imagine It!*, vocabulary building is an integral part of reading instruction, beginning in kindergarten. Because all Ms. Echeverri's students are English learners and need maximum support, she uses three techniques to build vocabulary:

<b>Making connections</b>	Students relate words to something they already know or have experienced.
<b>Directly teaching new words</b>	The meanings of unfamiliar or new words are taught prior to reading.
<b>Helping students visualize words</b>	Students attach the meanings of words to physical actions or objects.

### Teaching Example 3

In *Open Court Reading* and *SRA Imagine It!*, teachers are encouraged to read each **Big Book** selection to students at least twice. As part of the first reading, they introduce and model the use of target comprehension strategies.

Teaching Example 3 shows the first reading of the **Big Book** selection. As Ms. Echeverri reads, she models several strategies used by good readers to get meaning from text.

### Comprehension Strategy Instruction

Good readers use a variety of comprehension strategies to help them understand text. The comprehension strategies taught in **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!** include:

- Asking questions
- Making predictions
- Confirming predictions
- Making connections
- Monitoring and clarifying
- Monitoring and adjusting reading speed
- Summarizing
- Visualizing

In kindergarten, the focus of comprehension strategy instruction is on introducing students to simple strategies, with the teacher modeling each to show what good readers do to get meaning from what they read. These strategies include visualizing, predicting, asking questions, monitoring and clarifying, and making connections.

By modeling strategies for her students, Ms. Echeverri helps set them on the road to understanding how to make sense of text as they are reading.

### Teaching Example 4

In **Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!**, teachers introduce and model the use of target comprehension skills as part of the rereading of a selection.

In Teaching Example 4, Ms. Echeverri and her students continue their work with the selection by looking closely at the text to understand its structure. Specifically, they spend time discussing and learning how to classify or categorize the information they learned from the selection.

### Comprehension Skills Instruction

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

The goal of comprehension skills instruction is to help students become aware of the logic behind the structure of a selection. Some comprehension skills help students organize text information. Others lead them to form a deeper understanding—to "read between the lines"—as good readers do. In

**Open Court Reading** and **SRA Imagine It!**, students learn to use a variety of comprehension skills, including:

- Identifying and considering author's point of view
- Identifying and understanding author's purpose
- Identifying cause and effect
- Classifying and categorizing

- Comparing and contrasting
- Drawing conclusions
- Distinguishing fact from opinion
- Identifying main ideas and details
- Making inferences
- Sequencing
- Distinguishing reality from fantasy

The intent of comprehension skills instruction at the kindergarten level is to make students aware that text has structure as well as content, and that they can use both to get meaning from what is read.

**Please note:** Ms. Echeverri is a Kindergarten teacher and therefore, is using Level K of ***Open Court Reading***. The comprehension lessons in Units 1-6 of Level 1 are similar to the lessons demonstrated in this course. Although the content is different, the instructional methods learned in this course can be easily applied to Level 1 lessons.