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Introduction

Learning to read is a magical and mysterious journey in a child's life. Letters that one day appear as strange, unrecognizable symbols, suddenly become a code for unlocking secret messages and hidden adventures. Of course, learning to read means more than simply decoding. It means comprehending the message woven within the text.

Reading Comprehension is designed to help you guide students toward becoming better readers. This book addresses eleven strategies necessary for developing effective comprehension skills. Teach students techniques for monitoring their comprehension, and give them a variety of tools to self-correct mistakes while reading. Combine modeling of skills with direct instruction to present information in a meaningful, easy-to-understand manner.

As students begin to move beyond mere decoding to a greater understanding of text, they see that print contains a message to be remembered, elaborated on, and connected in a meaningful way with their daily life. *Reading Comprehension* provides a plan of action for moving beyond assessment to instruction through the use of skill-building activities that incorporate key comprehension strategies.

Keep *Reading Comprehension* close at hand throughout the school year. You will find a wealth of information and ideas to turn your beginning readers into proficient readers who successfully comprehend text. The better and more efficiently students read, the more successful they will be in school. More importantly, students will develop a love of reading and a desire to become lifelong learners.



What we become depends on what we read after all the professors have finished with us. The greatest university of all is a collection of books.

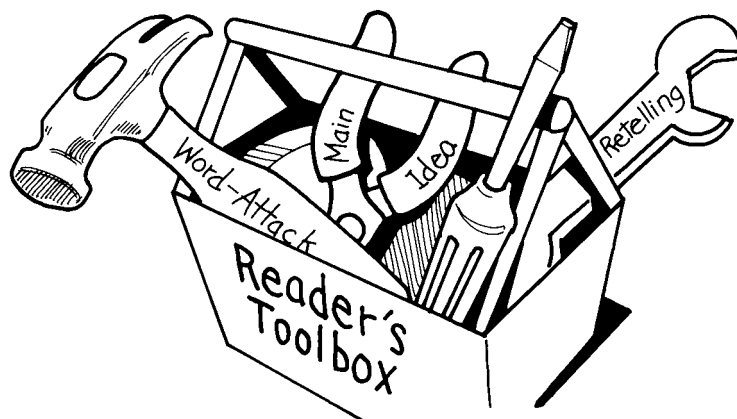
—Thomas Carlyle

Strategic Readers

Using the right tool makes a job easier. Like a master carpenter, a master reader needs to have a wealth of tools available to make the job of comprehending text more efficient. Students need to become strategic readers because reading is a core component of almost every other lesson they will learn in school and in life. Early reading success is a predictor of later academic success. With so much research pointing toward the benefits of teaching students to become successful readers, instructing them in how to read strategically is a logical plan of action.

What are the characteristics of strategic readers? For the purposes of this book, strategic readers are defined as students who

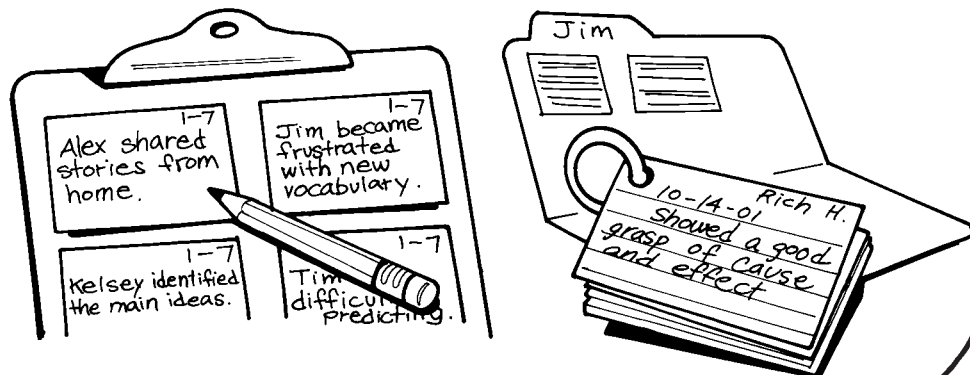
- identify difficult words in the text and know several ways to determine their meaning
- read fluently in phrases or sections so as to comprehend the meaning of the text
- see the order of events in sequence and understand how sequential elements build to tell a story
- can summarize and organize the elements of a story in a retelling
- make predictions about what will happen next in the text
- have the ability to access prior knowledge about a subject in order to focus on the text and make logical predictions
- identify the characters in a story and show an understanding of each character's role
- have the ability to categorize events and ideas from a story into groups based on how they are similar
- can identify and communicate the main idea of a piece of text
- move beyond the literal level of the text by making inferences and elaborating on known details
- connect what they read with other books, with their own lives, and with the world around them



Assessing Students' Needs

Before planning your reading instruction, take the time to assess the reading strategies of each student in your class. The following ideas will guide you in determining base-level information about each student. Use this information to individualize instruction and for formal and informal assessments to gauge student growth throughout the year.

- Use the assessment questions on pages 6–7 to determine if a student needs further development in any of the eleven strategies of reading comprehension. If the answer is “yes” to one or more of the questions in a particular strategy, make a note that the student needs instruction in that skill. Plan whole-class, small-group, or individual lessons as needed for each skill.
- Take time to read one-on-one with each student. Pull students from center groups, or meet with individuals during writing or silent-reading time. Ask students to read short stories or selected passages from age-appropriate materials, or invite them to read aloud from their independent-reading book. Ask students questions before, during, and after reading to determine their understanding. Make anecdotal notes after each reading session, and include them in students' assessment portfolios (see page 8).
- Use prepared assessment instruments that correlate with your reading program. Combine information gained from these tests with the notes you gather from observations of each student.
- Record anecdotal information about individual students on sticky notes as you observe them reading independently, working in reading groups, or reading in other curricular areas. Place the sticky notes on a clipboard, and at a break or at the end of the day, transfer this data into students' assessment portfolios.
- Write each student's name on a separate index card. Hole-punch the top left corner of each card. Arrange the cards alphabetically by last name on a large notebook ring or a shower curtain ring. Hang the ring from one of your belt loops, or attach it to your plan book. Write observations of each student as you walk around the classroom, or use the index cards to record the results of informal assessments. When you fill an index card, place it in the student's assessment portfolio, and replace it with a new card.



Assessment Questions

Use the following questions to determine if your students need additional instruction in any of the reading strategies outlined in this book. Keep these questions in mind as you work with all your students, or use them to develop a formal assessment tool for those students with the most need. If a student needs additional instruction in a particular area, refer to the pages listed after each strategy to find related activities.

Word-Attack Skills (see pp. 9–15)

Does the student . . .

- stop at unfamiliar words and become frustrated?
- skip over difficult or unfamiliar words and not look back?
- ignore picture cues or surrounding words when faced with new words?

Phrasing and Fluency (see pp. 16–22)

Does the student . . .

- read each word individually?
- become focused on decoding each word and ignore punctuation marks?
- sound choppy when reading aloud?

Sequencing (see pp. 23–31)

Does the student . . .

- have difficulty with labeling and identifying simple patterns using manipulatives?
- find it confusing when asked to physically order objects in a given sequence?
- become confused by the order in which events take place in a story?

Retelling (see pp. 32–37)

Does the student . . .

- have difficulty remembering the key elements in a story?
- become frustrated when asked to tell a story in his or her own words?
- retell a story in a jumbled manner, making it difficult to follow?

Predicting (see pp. 38–44)

Does the student . . .

- repeat answers given by others when asked to make predictions?
- express apprehension either verbally or physically when asked to make predictions?
- make random guesses that are unrelated to the story?

Accessing Prior Knowledge (see pp. 45–52)

Does the student . . .

- find it difficult to relate story events to his or her own life?
- avoid contributing to discussions where students share experiences?
- have limited experiences from which to draw?

Characterization (see pp. 53–57)

Does the student . . .

- have difficulty describing characters beyond physical attributes and actions?
- find it difficult to remember the characters in the story?
- often confuse characters?

Categorization (see pp. 58–65)

Does the student . . .

- have difficulty sorting items by similar attributes?
- find it difficult to pick out specific details in a story?
- have trouble identifying story elements?

Identifying the Main Idea (see pp. 66–72)

Does the student . . .

- find it difficult to rephrase things he or she hears?
- verbally summarize what he or she reads?
- have difficulty answering the question *What was the story about?*

Making Inferences (see pp. 73–79)

Does the student . . .

- focus only on literal details?
- have trouble answering how and why questions?
- understand cause and effect?

Making Connections (see pp. 80–93)

Does the student . . .

- find it difficult relating what is read to his or her own life?
- have trouble relating people, places, and things from stories to what he or she knows?
- have difficulty seeing how two or more books are related?



Managing Information

Keeping track of your assessment data can be cumbersome and confusing unless you develop a clear organizational plan. The following suggestions provide ideas for keeping your assessment data conveniently at hand:

- Write each student's name on a separate file folder. Place assessment data and anecdotal information into the folder for easy access, and store the folders in a plastic storage crate. Place in the folder the sticky notes and index cards you accumulate as you informally assess student performance.
- Write each student's name on a separate index card. Record the skills that each student needs to work on, and refer to the cards when you plan small-group or one-on-one lessons. As a student masters each of the skills on the card, highlight the skill, and write the date. Refer to the cards when preparing for parent/teacher conferences or when completing report cards.
- Maintain oral records of each student's reading ability by tape-recording read-aloud sessions. Label a tape for each student, and store the tapes in student assessment portfolios. Periodically ask each student to read a selected passage, and conduct an informal question-and-answer session to assess comprehension. By the end of the year, you will have individual progress records to share with students and parents.

Designing Instruction

Use the information from your formal and informal assessments to plan your reading instruction. Here are a few ways to organize instruction using this data:

- Pull assessment information for an individual student, and work one-on-one with that student to teach a specific strategy.
- Teach mini-lessons to small groups of students who need reinforcement on a particular skill. Change groups regularly based on developmental needs. Pull students for mini-lessons during center time, silent-reading time, or independent-writing time.
- Build whole-class lessons around a particular reading strategy. Use an overhead projector and transparencies to present examples of text, and model each skill. Devote a lesson each week to a particular skill, and regularly review previously taught skills.

Use parent volunteers and classroom assistants to work with small groups or individual students. Provide materials and simple training to volunteers, and assign specific blocks of time for them to work with students. Use this time as an opportunity to work with other students or complete follow-up assessment to determine student growth.

Word-Attack Skills

What Is the Skill?

Unfamiliar words are a roadblock to understanding the meaning of text. The first step in becoming a strategic reader is figuring out ways to decode and define new words.

Why Do Students Need to Know It?

In order for students to comprehend what they read, they must first have the ability to decode unfamiliar words and determine their meaning. Students must monitor their reading to make sure that the words make sense, sound right, and look right. The key is for students to have a variety of strategies at their fingertips that they can internalize and use independently when they encounter new or difficult words.

Teaching Tips

Be sure that students are reading material at their instructional level. When students encounter a great number of difficult words, they tend to become frustrated. Give them material that is challenging, but not overwhelming. Create many opportunities to model “word-attack skills” for students. These examples will make the skills more concrete and easier for students to understand. In this section, you will find resources to help students identify unfamiliar words and monitor their own reading.

Word-Attack Bookmark

Materials

- Word-Attack Bookmark (page 11)
- chart paper
- scissors
- crayons or markers

In advance, make a class set of the Word-Attack Bookmark, and copy each word-attack tool from the bookmark onto a piece of chart paper. Cut out the bookmarks. Give each student a bookmark to decorate. Then, use the information at the bottom of this page to introduce each word-attack tool and explain how the tool is used during reading. Provide examples to help students understand each strategy. After reviewing the tools on the list, ask students to share any additional strategies they use to figure out unfamiliar words. If a student repeats a strategy already on the list, acknowledge his or her response by rephrasing it to match the list. For example, say *Yes, John, using the letters in the word to figure out how it sounds would be like sound out the word.* If a new strategy is given, add it to the chart paper, and have students write it on their bookmark. Invite students to use the bookmark in their independent reading. Remind them to refer to the word-attack strategies when they come across new or unfamiliar words.

Reread the sentence.

Remind students to reread the sentence more than once and think about what word might make sense.

Sound out the word.

Show students how to blend the sounds of the word together and try to pronounce it.

Use picture clues.

Encourage students to review the pictures on the page and see if they provide any clues to help them figure out the unfamiliar word.

Look for chunks in the word.

Have students look for letter chunks in the word that might be familiar. Invite students to read each chunk separately and then blend the chunks together to sound out the entire word (e.g., unknown word: *fantastic*, chunks: *fan- tas- tic*).

Connect to a word you know.

Tell students to think of a word that looks like the unknown word. Have them compare the two words and use the known word to figure out the meaning of the unfamiliar word (e.g., unknown word: *judgement*, known word: *judge*).

Read on to look for clues.

Tell students that when they reach an unfamiliar word they should read on a bit and try to think about what might make sense. Then, have students go back and reread the sentence with the word they think makes the most sense.

Word-Attack Bookmark

Reread the sentence.

Sound out the word.

Use picture clues.

Look for chunks in the word.

Connect to a word you know.

Read on to look for clues.

Name _____



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