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Introduction

Reading comprehension is the mind's ability to understand the ideas in a text and the message and purpose of the author. *Reading Comprehension 4-6* provides lessons that use specific genres to teach reading comprehension strategies. In the primary grades, comprehension skills are often secondary to decoding skills instruction. As students progress into the upper elementary grades, comprehension skills are emphasized. However, if students are to become fluent readers who comprehend what they read, reading comprehension needs to be taught explicitly and consistently, starting in the early elementary grades and continuing through the upper grades.

Good readers are familiar with a variety of genres. Therefore, the comprehension skills in *Reading Comprehension 4-6* are genre-based. Good readers recognize how the indicators of specific genres, such as the captions and diagrams in nonfiction, or the setting in historical fiction, aid and assist them in deriving meaning from the text they read.

Good readers use a combination of six skills that lead to “real” comprehension:

Skill 1: Decoding—decode text fluently by integrating cueing systems: visual, meaning, and semantic.

Skill 2: Literal Comprehension—recall literal events, facts, or information that are explicitly stated in text.

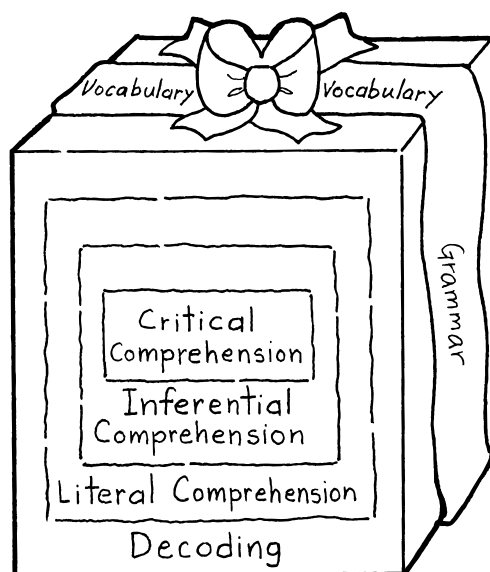
Skill 3: Inferential Comprehension—integrate knowledge of the reader's world and literal information of the text to gain a deeper understanding of its story elements.

Skill 4: Critical Comprehension—extend and develop an understanding of text through discussion, comparison, classification, alteration, or imagination, thereby creating new views and knowledge.

Skill 5: Vocabulary—determine familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary.

Skill 6: Grammar—understand and use the grammatical, mechanical, and syntactical structures of the English language.

The goal of *Reading Comprehension 4-6* is to teach students to use all three levels of comprehension independently and appropriately. Students move through the three levels of comprehension while organizing and extending text information into a graphic organizer. These graphic organizers help students find meaning in text and help them develop consistent frameworks for acquiring, integrating, and analyzing information from literature. The teacher models the skill the first time, but through the use of reciprocal teaching methods, the students can also act as the facilitator as they summarize, generate questions, clarify, and predict with their peers.





The Layers of Reading Comprehension

In order to determine the most successful way to teach comprehension, it is important to understand what reading really is. Think of reading comprehension as a package wrapped in layers. The first large outside box is **decoding**. Explicit instruction on phonics and phonemic awareness is necessary in order to unwrap this first layer. Inside the decoding box is the next layer of reading: **literal comprehension**. At this level, a reader is able to answer simple recall questions, such as *Who? What? Where? and Which?* For example, read the following passage and answer the literal comprehension questions.

Trabe Flemmens

In the yatz, the trabe flemmens were gribbing glunky libbles into a planky dint. Zazle glained into the dint and was sopped with glunky libbles. The trabe flemmens vimmed and vimmed.

1. Where were the trabe flemmens?
2. What were the trabe flemmens gribbing?
3. Who glained into the dint?

The passage may seem like nonsense, but knowledge of decoding skills enables a reader to read the passage. The ease with which the literal comprehension questions can be answered is directly related to fluency and the ability to remember information from the text. Most students develop this type of story comprehension early on in their education. Teaching this type of comprehension tends to be just a matter of focusing on certain points in the text and giving strategies to aid in the recall of information. This passage demonstrates that it is possible for a reader to demonstrate literal comprehension without any true understanding of the message in the text.

True understanding is related to the next layer of reading: **inferential comprehension**. At this level, syntax, vocabulary, grammar, and language structure play an important role. Inferential comprehension also involves the reader's ability to integrate the literal information of the text with his or her own prior knowledge. For example, answering inferential types of questions about the Trabe Flemmens passage may prove more difficult.

4. How did the trabe flemmens feel about glaining in the libbles?
5. How would you describe Zazle?
6. Why would the trabe flemmens grib the libbles?



The Layers of Reading Comprehension

Another good example of inferential comprehension is demonstrated with the following passage:

Every year, Tony takes his baby for a checkup. When he arrives, he checks in and usually has to wait to be seen. There are many others waiting and it can get very noisy. He hears screeching, banging, and the beeping of machines. When it is finally his turn to see the specialist, Tony expresses some of his concerns. Tony's baby has been sputtering and making other strange noises. The specialist examines Tony's pride and joy carefully. The specialist recommends that Tony monitor his baby's fluid levels.

Interpreting what is going on in the passage is really difficult. Many readers think that the character is taking his child to the doctor and others think that he is taking his car to a mechanic. A person's background, prior experience, vocabulary, and knowledge of syntactical structures directly impact the interpretation and message of the text. Most young students would miss the underlying themes and subtleties of the passage. This misinterpretation would impact accurate predicting and other conclusions made in further reading. This type of comprehension requires active engagement with the material, an ability to integrate and recall prior knowledge of a subject independently, as well as a strong grounding in English language structures.

To aid young readers in the inferential comprehension of text, students are taught to identify key elements in their literal understanding of the text. Then, they brainstorm concepts and ideas related to those elements, tapping into their prior knowledge of the world. Next, they are shown how to narrow down the brainstorming and apply it so that they can integrate what they have read and what they know. Finally, they are able to evaluate and analyze their conclusions and predictions based on what they know about language. This type of comprehension can be developed about midway through second grade or prior, if a reader's decoding and literal comprehension skills are strong.

The last box to unwrap is **critical comprehension**. A reader at this level can use the integrated information and the text to demonstrate a true understanding of the author's message through manipulation, evaluation, and extension of the story elements. For example, using the Trabe Flemmens passage once again, these are some examples of critical comprehension tasks or questions:

7. Imagine what Zazle may like to do in the winter. Explain and defend your ideas.
8. What might the trabe flemmens do if there were no libbles?

Keep in mind that each layer of comprehension does not need to be completely unwrapped before proceeding to the next layer. However, it is virtually impossible to skip a level of comprehension altogether.



How to Use This Book

Reading Comprehension 4–6 provides the materials and resources you need to assist your students as they develop their reading comprehension skills.

Unit Format

This resource contains seven units. Each unit features three lessons that progress through the three levels of comprehension: literal, inferential, and critical. A graphic organizer is provided to match each lesson skill. Each skill can be applied to a sample story found at the end of the unit, a literature book selected by the teacher, or through the use of a grade-level anthology that is part of the regular reading program. Each unit includes twelve literature suggestions that are appropriate for the focus skills. However, you may choose other texts within that genre.

Units 2–7 end with a project that connects the unit with its skills and strategies. The project may be done in conjunction with the entire unit or as a culminating event to an independent, shared, modeled, or guided reading. The unit project combines information students learned in the three lessons with a fun art and writing activity.

The first unit in this book is in a slightly different format. Rather than being genre-based, the skills in this unit can be used throughout the year and with any genre. It focuses on basic comprehension strategies that are prerequisites for many of the other genre-based units. Any grade-level appropriate literature book can be used with the first unit, but literature suggestions appear in the Book Box.

The lessons in each unit are intended to expose students to a genre, a reading skill, and a supporting graphic organizer. However, continue to provide students with the opportunity to use a blank graphic organizer as they read other literature selections at a listening center, in guided reading groups, in independent reading, or even to organize ideas in a writing center.

How to Use This Book

Lesson Format

Each of three lessons in a unit is structured to give students an opportunity to engage prior knowledge and introduce a new comprehension strategy through literature and a graphic organizer. Each lesson is divided into four parts: direct explanation, modeling, guided practice, and application. Before beginning each lesson, make a copy of the accompanying graphic organizer on a transparency. This transparency is used in either the modeling or guided practice portion of each lesson. Each lesson teaches students to apply the comprehension skill and graphic organizer to a story (either a sample story or a literature selection). A set of sample stories is provided at the end of Units 2–7. Choose and repeat sample stories or literature selections that best meet the needs of your students. The literature selections provided in each lesson’s Book Box are picture books, usually with a higher reading level. Even though chapter books are more prevalent as reading material in grades 4–6, picture books have been chosen for three reasons: they are easy to read during a single lesson’s time slot, they are of high interest, and the pictures often provide additional clues for the application of the reading comprehension skill. Once students have experience with the skill and graphic organizer, they can apply both to chapter books or anthology stories in future lessons.

Assessments

Comprehension is an evolving process, and assessing comprehension involves many layers of observation and reflection. Rubrics offer both the student and teacher an open, yet objective, evaluation tool for this process. Rubrics allow individual interpretation, as long as it is supported by text. As opposed to question sets and quizzes, which are commonly used to evaluate comprehension, rubrics encourage refinement and extension of knowledge. Two rubrics—one for teacher use and one for student use (pages 8–9)—are provided. Both rubrics can be used to assess learning throughout each unit. The rubrics focus on the content of the graphic organizers, written responses, and unit projects.

The image shows two rubric forms. The left form is titled "Teacher Rubric for Student Observation" and the right form is titled "Student Rubric for Self-Evaluation". Both forms include a table with four columns: "Independent", "Supported", "Dependent", and "Unable". The "Teacher Rubric" table has three rows: "Graphic Organizer", "Written Response", and "Unit Project". The "Student Rubric" table has three rows: "I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.", "I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.", and "I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story." Below the tables are three reflection questions.

	Independent	Supported	Dependent	Unable
Graphic Organizer Completes a work before beginning. Uses organizer to present information to others. Qualifies evidence, observations from text, and inferences.				
Written Response Writes responses to text in a focused, organized, and accurate. Uses evidence from text and inferences. Applies ideas of quality.				
Unit Project Creative responses to text in a focused and effective. Applies thinking skills to work and performance.				

	Always	Sometimes	Never
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			
I use the graphic organizer to help me understand the story.			

Reflection

1. What have I learned as a reader?
2. What do I still want to learn as a reader?
3. Where can I improve as a reader?

Teacher Rubric for Student Observation

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Unit _____

	Independent (consistently completes task without teacher intervention)	Supported (can complete task with some teacher intervention)	Dependent (consistently requires teacher intervention to complete task)	Unable (unable to complete task even with consistent teacher intervention)
<p>Graphic Organizer</p> <p>Completes a neat, legible organizer.</p> <p>Uses organizer to present information to others.</p> <p>Identifies accurate information from text within organizer.</p>				
<p>Written Response</p> <p>Written response to text is focused, organized, and accurate.</p> <p>Uses correct grammar and punctuation.</p> <p>Applies rules of spelling.</p>				
<p>Unit Project</p> <p>Creative response to text is accurate and attractive.</p> <p>Applies learning skills to create written response.</p>				

Student Rubric for Self-Evaluation

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Unit _____

	Always	Sometimes	Never
I can complete my graphic organizer.			
I can use my organizer to present information to others.			
I can record examples from the story on my organizer.			
My creative response to the story is accurate.			
I can use my organizer to write about the story.			
My writing is clear, correct, and organized.			
I used correct rules of grammar and spelling.			
My project is creative and based on my story.			

Reflection

1. What have I learned as a reader?

2. What do I still want to learn as a reader?

3. Where can I improve as a reader?

BookBox

Basket Moon by Mary Lyn Ray
(Little, Brown & Company)

Meanwhile Back at the Ranch
by Trinka Hakes Noble (Penguin)

Mirette on the High Wire
by Emily Arnold McCully
(Putnam Publishing)

Mrs. Katz and Tush
by Patricia Polacco
(Bantam Doubleday Dell)

Questioning

OBJECTIVES

Students will

- generate questions about character, plot, and setting.
- identify answers to questions as they read a text.
- reread or skim text to locate missing information.



- Question the Text graphic organizer (page 12)
- 2 literature selections (see Book Box)
- chart paper
- black and red markers
- overhead projector/transparency

Direct Explanation

Explain to students that good readers ask questions about the text as they read. By asking questions, students establish a purpose for reading. Questions, and their subsequent answers, also guide students' comprehension. Answers to questions will be found as they read and new questions will arise. Explain to students that the questions about a text can be divided into categories: questions about characters, setting, or plot. Make a three-column, three-row chart on chart paper. Label the middle and last columns *Questions* and *Answers*. Label the left side of the chart *Characters*, *Setting*, and *Plot*. Display the cover of a literature selection, and read the title. Have students predict what they think the book will be about and the genre of the book. Ask students to brainstorm about the text questions related to each category. Use a black marker to write their responses on the chart in the appropriate box.

Modeled Instruction

Model for students how to identify answers in the text and form new questions. Read the first page of the story, and identify any answers to questions on the chart. For example, say *The farmer decides to take a trip into town. This answers the question "What does the man do in the story?"* Use a red marker to write the answer next to the question on the chart. Then, say *Now I know what the farmer does, but I wonder why does he make the trip?* Write this new question on the chart in the appropriate box.

Guided Practice

Display a transparency of the Question the Text graphic organizer. Point out that this graphic organizer follows the same format as the chart. Continue to read the story. Pause as students identify new answers as they are found. Invite students to write new questions they have on the overhead transparency. Once you have finished the story, identify the unanswered questions that remain. Explain that by rereading or skimming the story, more answers may be found. Point out that some questions will not be answered directly by the text, but students can discuss what the answer might be based on what they know about the characters, setting, or plot.

Application

Give each student a copy of the graphic organizer and a new literature selection. Have students read the literature selection independently. Have students look at the cover and title page and write questions about the text on their graphic organizer. Remind them that as they read, they should pause occasionally to identify answers they have found and write new questions they might have about the text. Ask students to identify unanswered questions after they have read the whole story. Have them reread or skim the story again to double-check that they did not miss an answer.

For those students who have difficulty forming questions, ask them to focus on one element of the story at a time. For example, have students form a question about the main character to start. Then, after reading a few pages, ask them to identify any answer they have found so far and form a new question related to setting.

To extend the lesson, have students work in small groups to infer answers to their unanswered questions. Have them discuss why they think an answer is likely, based on the evidence in the story.



Name _____

Date _____

Question the Text

Title of Story _____

Directions: Write questions you have about the story elements on the chart below. As you read, write the answers you find next to the questions in the corresponding column.

	Questions	Answers
Characters		
Setting		
Plot		