5 Teaching students to comprehend text

Chapter overview

- Key messages for teachers
- Identifying student needs
- Metacognitive comprehension instruction
- Monitoring for comprehension
- Comprehending fiction and non-fiction texts
- When readers struggle
- Extending able readers
- Developing metacognitive awareness
- Summary
- References and recommended reading

This chapter explores ways that metacognitive comprehension instruction can be integrated into classroom reading instruction in the middle years. It provides guidance for teaching that focuses on explicit instruction of comprehension strategies to promote students' comprehension and memory of what they have read. The focus is on metacognitive comprehension instruction through which comprehension strategies are taught in conjunction with other knowledge, skills and strategies related to decoding and word recognition (Chapter 2), vocabulary (Chapter 3), and fluency and accuracy (Chapter 4) in order to gain meaning and understand content. This chapter explains how teachers can take a strategic approach to developing comprehension.

Key messages for teachers

- Effective readers understand the characteristics of text and use this knowledge to strategically read, comprehend and engage with a range of fiction and non-fiction texts.

- Students read a variety of texts for a range of purposes. This includes the ability to read fiction texts for literacy purposes and non-fiction texts to organise, acquire and use information for learning.

- Effective readers learn to make use of a number of comprehension strategies as they process text. These strategies facilitate readers' memory and understanding of text.

- Strategies can be used consciously and intentionally, or they can be used without the reader's conscious attention. The key feature of a strategy is that it is controllable: metacognitively aware readers are able to control when and how they select and use strategies when they do not fully understand the content they are reading.

- Effective readers can monitor and adjust their reading comprehension and use strategies, as and when required, to assist comprehension of reading content.

- When students are actively involved in their own learning, they are more likely to develop metacognitive understandings about when, how and why to use comprehension strategies.

Comprehension strategies

A reader's use of comprehension strategies can be likened to a tool that readers control in order to assist meaning (Pressley, 2006).

Comprehension strategies are specific, learnt procedures that foster active, competent, self-regulated, and intentional reading (Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002).

See also the information about metacognition in Chapter 1.

Effective comprehenders are active and strategic as they read. They use a wide range of strategies to develop meaning from text. Strategies are not usually applied in isolation: it is through using strategies in combination that a reader is able to develop meaning. However, to enable students to become independent users of comprehension strategies, and to do so deliberately when meaning breaks down, teaching typically includes instruction of the processes both independently and in combination.

Strategy instruction is about teaching students to be cognitively active as they read, to know when they are reading with understanding, and when they are not, and to know what to do when they are not.

Identifying student needs

While comprehension strategy instruction is necessary for all students at some point, some students require more or varied instruction according to their particular needs

The selection of instructional 'mix' is based on the needs of the students and is directed towards providing students with the metacognitive knowledge that will help them not only to understand, but also to independently choose when, where and how to use the strategies (in various combinations) to assist comprehension.

Teachers can best collect data about the comprehension strengths and needs of their students through ongoing observation, questioning and discussion, as students read, write and talk about texts. The data teachers gather and analyse will also help them to determine the best way of teaching the strategies that their students need.

This section describes two aspects of comprehension strategy knowledge that teachers may need to assess in order to determine the focus for group instruction. The first aspect is general student knowledge and awareness of comprehension strategies and their use. The second aspect is the use of specific strategies.

General knowledge and awareness of comprehension strategy use

Teachers may wish to determine the extent to which students are able to articulate and demonstrate what they know about comprehension strategies and their use in general:

- Do they know that proficient readers draw on a range of comprehension strategies to assist their understanding of text?

- Do they know about some of these strategies but not others?

- What do they need to be taught?

Independent assessment tasks

The following examples are of tasks that students can complete independently to provide information about their use of comprehension strategies. In the first task, students are asked to read a passage and record the comprehension strategies that they used as they read. In the second task, students complete a survey form.

Read and record

- Select a short (up to a page) piece of text that the students will be able to read independently, but that has enough challenge to require them to apply comprehension strategies as they read. The text can be fiction or non-fiction, and the kinds of strategies used will vary with the type of text (for example, a narrative text or a poem may require more inference than a report).

- Give each student a sheet of paper on which they will record what they do to help them understand the text as they read.

- Tell the students that, as they read the text, they are to list all the things they think of to help understand the text.

If students have difficulty with this task (for example, if they write nothing, or write notes or a summary of the text), prompt them by rewording the direction, or by asking them to explain orally. Students may have difficulty with this task because they don't know what they do, or because they know but don't know how to explain, or both. Understanding these difficulties informs instruction and the teacher can and must use this information. For example, if students have difficulty articulating their thought processes, teaching will need to focus on modelling and encouraging the students to become aware of what they do 'in the head'. Metacognitive thinking can be taught, and students can develop the ability to articulate and make decisions about their thinking.

Student surveys

Read over the survey forms shown here and select the one that is most likely to be appropriate for a particular student or group of students. Each one assumes a different degree of knowledge about comprehension strategies. These are best used orally, in a discussion with the students about the strategies they use. They should *not* be used as checklists: a conversation between teacher and student will reveal far more useful information than a list that has been checked by a student who may have no real understanding of what the items actually mean. The following surveys can be found in **Teaching students to comprehend text: reproducible 5.1**.

Student survey 1

Tick the things you do in your head to help you understand what you read:

- Link what I'm reading to things I already know

- Guess what's going to come next

- Make a picture in my mind

- Read between the lines

- Ask myself questions

- Go back and re-read

- Summarise as I'm reading

- Look for the big idea or message

- Use other ways to understand, for example, by working out the sequence of events or the relationships in a story.

Now circle the things you would like to learn more about to help you understand what you read.

Student survey 2

Here is a list of some of the comprehension strategies that you can use to help you understand what you read. Circle those that you would like to learn more about.

- Link what I'm reading to things I already know (make connections)

- Guess what's going to come next (make predictions)

- Make a picture in my mind (visualise)

- Read between the lines (make inferences)

- Ask myself questions (self-questioning)

- Go back and re-read (seek clarification)

- Summarise as I'm reading (summarise)

- Look for the big idea or message (main idea)

- Use other ways to understand, for example, by working out the sequence of events or the relationships in a story (analyse and synthesise).

Student survey 3

Here is a list of some of the comprehension strategies that readers use to help them understand what they read.

- Link what I'm reading to things I already know (make connections)

- Guess what's going to come next (make predictions)

- Make a picture in my mind (visualise)

- Read between the lines (make inferences)

- Ask myself questions (self-questioning)

- Go back and re-read (seek clarification)

- Summarise as I'm reading (summarise)

- Look for the big idea or message (main idea)

- Use other ways to understand, for example, by working out the sequence of events or the relationships in a story (analyse and synthesise).

Describe how you use some or all of the strategies on this list. For each strategy you use tell me:

What the strategy does to help you _____

How you use the strategy _____

When you use the strategy _____

Please list any other strategies that you use and describe how you use them.

Which comprehension strategies are most useful to you as you read? Circle them on the list.

Student survey 4

- What do you do when you are reading something and you do not understand what you are reading?

    – Why do you do this?

    – What else might you be able to do?

- What would you most like help with in order to be able to improve your comprehension?

Knowledge, awareness and use of specific text structures

Students need to understand the purpose for writing and therefore reading both fiction and non-fiction text, and by association having deep knowledge of the text structures found within each. Knowledge of text structures will assist students to prepare for reading, to navigate their way through text, to retell, paraphrase and summarise what they have read, to reflect on the content of their reading and to reflect on their overall comprehension.

It is important to determine what students know about fiction text – the purpose, the common text types and the story elements. Similarly, for non-fiction text, students need to be able to explain what non-fiction text is, including the types of text, the text structures and language features used.

Graphic organisers developed to support knowledge of text structure can be used to identify existing levels of student understanding (see examples within this chapter), as well as questions such as:

- What is the purpose of fiction text?
- What forms of fiction text do you know?
- How do you tell if a text is fiction or not?
- When you read a fiction text what do you expect to find?
- What helps you to understand fiction texts when you read these?
- What different language features are often found in fiction text?
- What are your favourite fiction texts? Why do you like these?
- Do you have a favourite fiction author? If so, who is this and why do you like their work?
- What else can you tell me about fiction text?

Similarly questions about non-fiction text can be used to lead discussion or when working one-to-one with a student. These may include:

- What is non-fiction text?

- When is non-fiction text most commonly read?

- What do you expect to see when you read a non-fiction text?

- What do you expect to learn when you read a non-fiction text?

- What structures and visuals do non-fiction texts most often include? How do you use these to help you understand non-fiction text?

- What do you do when you do not understand non-fiction text?

- What are your favourite non-fiction texts? Why do you like these?

- Do you have a favourite non-fiction author? If so, who is it and why do you like their work?

- What else can you tell me about non-fiction?

For a list of these questions, see **Teaching students to comprehend text: reproducible 5.2.**
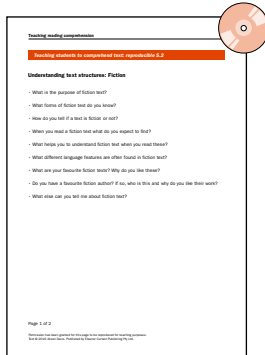
Knowledge, awareness and use of specific comprehension strategies

If you suspect that a student (or a group of students) is not using a particular strategy, or not using it effectively, you can probe the students' understanding and use of the strategy to determine if instruction is required. The two assessment procedures below probe for the use of the strategies of *prior knowledge* and *visualising*. The procedures can be replicated for other comprehension strategies, with the substitution of appropriate questions and prompts.

Informal discussions

Introduce the focus strategy to your students. In this example, the strategy is linking to prior knowledge. You could use the following questions:

- *One of the strategies that readers use is 'linking to things that they already know'. What do you think that means? (Do not prompt.)*

- *How do you think you could use this to help you understand a text as you read it?*

- *Can you tell me about a text you have read this week where you linked to things you already knew to better understand it?*

If students are unable to answer these questions, you may now prompt them by describing what linking to prior knowledge means:

Linking to things you already know means thinking about what you already know about something and using that knowledge to help you understand what you are reading.

Now repeat the three questions above. As you analyse the students' responses, think about the following.

- When you have clarified what the strategy means, to what extent do the students recognise that linking to prior knowledge is something that they already do in order to understand what they are reading?

- How well are the students able to explain their use of this strategy to help them when the text is difficult to understand?

Text-based task

You may suspect that some students are not able to use a particular strategy, for example to *visualise* (get a picture in their mind) as they read. You may suspect this because during reading instruction, they are often unable to retell a description in detail, or their retellings are brief and they do not use the text to support their ideas. To find out if your suspicion is correct and whether you will need to teach the strategy, you can set an independent task that requires the students to use the strategy.

Select a short (up to a page) piece of text that the students will be able to read independently, but that has enough challenge to require students to apply the target comprehension strategy as they read. The text can be fiction or non-fiction, but it should require the reader to use the target strategy in order to comprehend it (for example, if visualising is the target, the text should contain rich description).

Write a set of questions for the students to respond to as they read or ask the questions orally. The example below is probing for the use of visualising in a text about blue whales.

- *Based on what you've read, what can you tell me about the size of a blue whale?*

- *What words, phrases, or grammatical structures has the author used to help you form a picture in your mind of blue whales?*

- *Which are the most important clues the author gave you? Why do you think they are important?*

As you analyse students' responses, think about the following:

- To what extent do the students' responses indicate that they have a good understanding of the size and features of blue whales?

- Were the students able to identify supportive evidence from the text?

- In what ways were the students able to use the comparisons that the author made to visualise?

Metacognitive comprehension instruction

As described in Chapter 1 (see pages 4 to 5), researchers suggest that comprehension strategy instruction begins with the teacher modelling and explaining a single comprehension strategy. Once students are coping well with using this, and are beginning to use it independently, teachers add another strategy so that, over time, students develop a repertoire of

strategies that they can use. In doing so, teachers will be aware that it will take time to introduce a repertoire of strategies to students, and that, once introduced, it will take time for students to be able to use the strategies automatically. Teaching is aimed at equipping students with a repertoire of strategies that they know (knowing *what* they are), knowing *how* to draw on them, *when* to do so and how this will assist students to comprehend a range of diverse texts.

Opportunities for strategy instruction most commonly occur during small group instructional lessons – in particular, through guided reading instruction and through group-based shared reading. However, opportunities also arise during sessions where teachers read aloud to their students, through whole-class shared reading, in reciprocal reading, read-along sessions, and paired reading. These approaches are discussed in Chapter 6.

Learning goals

Learning goals arise from the needs of students and provide a learning focus for each lesson. They are shared with students at the beginning of each lesson, referred to as the lesson progresses and used to support self-assessment, peer assessment, and future goal setting with a comprehension strategy focus. Learning goals help make learning behaviours, tasks and knowledge visible and accessible for students. They also provide a basis for discussion and feedback between students, and between students and teachers. As teachers and students become more comfortable with using learning goals, the students (with teacher support initially) can determine what counts as success for the learning goals they are working towards and use these as they carry out self-, peer and group feedback (see page 10 for more information about *success criteria* and *feedback*).

When sharing learning goals that are focused on individual comprehension strategies, it is important to remember that strategies are not used in isolation, but rather in varying combinations. Learning goals may reflect this depending on the focus of instruction.

Metacognitive comprehension instruction (see Chapter 1) allows for a flexible but carefully applied range of instructional practices. It will typically involve a high degree of teacher participation through modelling, questioning and explaining when a new strategy is introduced. As students become more proficient at applying the strategy (or a combination of strategies), they can be encouraged to do so in small groups, with partners and, eventually, independently.

The following section discusses ways in which teachers and students can monitor for comprehension: students can learn to do this themselves as they read.

See chapters 6 and 7 for more detailed information about instructional approaches and working with groups.

Monitoring for comprehension

Teachers and students need to have ways of checking that texts are being understood as they are read and that comprehension strategies are being used in everyday reading situations. Students do this by learning to monitor their understanding as they read. Teachers do this by ongoing observations and discussions to find out just how well students are able to understand the texts they are reading. Students who have been taught to be metacognitive are far more likely to be aware of when they are losing meaning, and to be able to call on strategies to fix up their understanding. Direct instruction and activities that allow students to practise self-monitoring can help sharpen this process.

Self-monitoring and fixing up

Self-monitoring is the process by which readers become aware of the characteristics, style and messages in the text they are reading, and become aware of whether or not they understand it. Readers also learn to determine whether they found the text easy or difficult to understand, and why. As they monitor their own reading, students learn to detect any problems that they encounter, to decide whether or not these problems are affecting their understanding, and to apply some strategies to fix the problems.

When a reader becomes confused and starts to lose meaning, they need to stop and clarify their understanding. They will need to use a repertoire of comprehension strategies to do this. Building student awareness of the importance of actively self-monitoring their reading, and their knowledge of how to fix up their understanding is an important part of metacognitive comprehension instruction that must be revisited and emphasised throughout students' reading comprehension development. As students become more proficient at knowing and using the comprehension strategies, and learn to draw on a range of these independently, their confidence and ability to fix up faulty comprehension will improve.

Fixing up faulty understanding involves knowing what to do when you don't understand what you are reading. Even expert adult readers do this and students can be taught to do the same. The activities described here can be used with students individually, in pairs, and in small groups.

Suggested learning goals

We are learning to:

- recognise when we've lost the meaning as we read
- use a range of strategies to help us fix up problems when we don't understand what we are reading.

Supporting activities

Select activities that match student needs and the kinds of texts they are reading, then write one or more learning outcomes to share with the students. Explain the activity and, if possible, work with the students to write success criteria for self-monitoring and fixing up comprehension problems.

Rereading

Deliberately encourage students to reread the parts that don't make sense and teach them how to do this by modelling (for example, during read-alouds and shared reading) and by providing opportunities for collaborative and guided practice. Students can work together in pairs to support each other try out this strategy, giving each other feedback according to shared success criteria.

Sharing strategies

Provide regular opportunities for students to share the strategies that they use as they read and encourage them to reflect on the reading strategies. These opportunities can be with the teacher and the group, as they complete a section of text or at the end of the reading, or both.

Encourage students to talk about the strategies that helped them work out meaning, when they were becoming confused or not sure about an aspect of text. It is a good idea to record these as they are shared, as one additional way of developing a student's metacognitive awareness of comprehension strategy use. Recording can also be done by small groups of students or in pairs with one student recording, for example:

- *Today when we read, we …*

- *As I read this text, I used the following strategies to help me understand …*

- *In this piece of text, I used … strategies. Over here I used the … strategy.*

- *I got a bit stuck here, but I knew I would be able to work out what the author meant by …*

Question the students on the strategies they have used and encourage opportunities to develop peer questioning, for example:

- *When you read this text, did anyone reread a section in order to understand it better?*

- *What strategy or strategies did you find most helpful? Why?*

- *How was this different to the time we read …?*

Recording strategies used by students
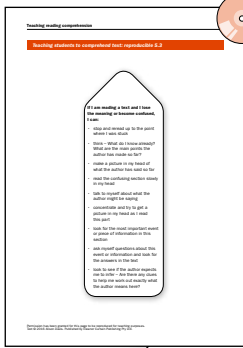
Actively involve the students in drawing up a list of the comprehension strategies that effective readers use to make meaning of text. This list should be compiled by the students to ensure that they have ownership and understanding of it, and should be added to as a result of developing comprehension strategy instruction.

At the end of most lessons, the students can refer to the list to review and identify the combination of strategies they used. Encourage the students to compare strategies used by other members in their group.

This list of comprehension strategies can also be made into a bookmark for students to use as they read. On one side, they can list the comprehension strategies that they can use to assist their understanding of text, and on the other side, they can list unknown words, or words they had difficulty working out the meaning of as they read. Likewise, word identification or vocabulary strategies may be listed on one side of the bookmark.

The example (left) is of a student bookmark. It is important to remember, however, that the content and style of these bookmarks will vary depending on each student's developing knowledge and independent use of a variety of comprehension strategies, and as a result of direct teaching focuses. See **Teaching students to comprehend text: reproducible 5.3**.

Provide lots of opportunities for students to practise comprehension strategies in small groups, encouraging them to use the think-aloud approach to explain what they are comprehending and why.

Teacher monitoring of comprehension strategy development

When teachers regularly share lesson learning goals with students, they are able to monitor directly the progress the students are making and the degree of independence and understanding they are developing. During the lesson, and at the lesson's conclusion, the teacher can make brief notes about how each student has participated and the degree of confidence they are gaining in using a specific strategy, or combination of strategies. By asking students to self-assess and to set targets for future lessons, teachers gain further insight that will assist with the instructional decisions they need to make. Teachers can regularly monitor learning goals and can involve students in this process.

If I am reading a text and I lose the meaning or become confused, I can:

- stop and reread up to the point where I was stuck

- think – What do I know already? What are the main points the author has made so far?

- make a picture in my head of what the author has said so far

- read the confusing section slowly in my head

- talk to myself about what the author might be saying

- concentrate and try to get a picture in my head as I read this part

- look for the most important event or piece of information in this section

- ask myself questions about this event or information and look for the answers in the text

- look to see if the author expects me to infer – Are there any clues to help me work out exactly what the author means here?

If teachers wish to take student involvement a step further, they can have the students work with them to develop success criteria to match the learning goals for an activity. (See page 10 for more information about success criteria.)

Example:

In this example, students are learning about the comprehension strategy of summarising. The lessons have focused on identifying the main events within the text. The learning goals and success criteria have been developed and shared with the students.

> **Strategy focus**
> Summarising information from the text
>
> **Learning goal**
> We are learning to identify the most important ideas as we read.
>
> **Success criteria**
> We will be successful when we can
> · identify the key sentence
> · highlight the key words and justify why we chose them.

At the conclusion of each lesson, the teacher and students discuss the progress made and the students use a code to monitor their progress:

☺ I managed really well with this today.

▲ I am getting better at this.

▶ Just starting to understand this.

▼ Lots more help needed.

Comprehending fiction and non-fiction texts

In order to meet the demands of the curriculum and to engage with wide and authentic reading, instruction needs to support students to learn to develop understanding of both fiction and non-fiction text. Rich instruction supports students to draw on and develop their understanding of the characteristics of both fiction and non-fiction texts, along with the specific text and language features associated with each. Students learn to use this knowledge and their knowledge of comprehension strategies (including strategies for working with words, vocabulary and fluency) to navigate and monitor their comprehension of fiction and non-fiction texts written on a range of topics and in a range of styles.

Fiction texts

Fiction is the term used to describe texts that are not factual. Fiction texts are also often referred to as literary texts. As students' progress through school, they develop their expertise in interpreting and responding to the
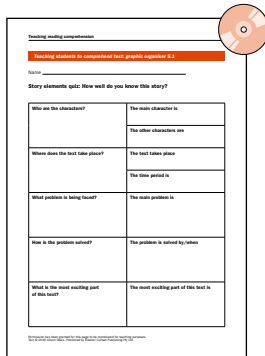
ideas, information, and experiences in these texts. Many of the literary texts they read and respond to are narrative fiction (novels, short stories, picture books, myths, legends and fairy tales), including interactive fiction, along with other forms such as poems, comics, films and plays. These texts are written in a variety of formats that include books, digital text, electronic media and magazines, and may include content based on fantasy, science fiction and fictionalised accounts of true stories (including historical fiction). Digital forms of fiction text can be accessed through media that includes resources found in digital libraries, blogs and wiki. Text features may include titles, blurbs, prologues, chapter headings, illustrations, speech bubbles and maps supported by labels or captions.

Story elements

Story elements are the way of organising ideas and content within fiction texts, and knowledge of these is an important metacognitive skill that builds comprehension of text. Story elements most frequently found in fiction texts include:

- Characters: main characters and supporting characters, including people, animals, and their characteristics. Note: The main character is also known as the protagonist and the opposing character is known as the antagonist.

- Setting: when and where the writing takes place; the geographical location – country, city, town, village; the time period – settings are usually physical, but with some texts they may also be chronological.

- Problem or challenges faced: what is being overcome.

- Climax: the turning point of the story that leads to the solution.

- Solution: how the problem is solved.

- Plot: the events that inform the action in the text. The plot describes the structure of the story; how the events and actions that take place throughout the story are arranged.

- Point of view: the point of view from which the story is told; who is telling the story, for example, the author, a character – first person or a third person.

- Theme: the key message or central idea developed throughout the writing, for example, friendship or overcoming anxiety. The theme may be stated explicitly or may be inferred.

Knowing the elements of a text helps students to organise, understand and summarise what they are reading. For students new to this understanding, or for students who struggle with comprehension, begin with text where there are clear problems and solutions and gradually increase text complexity to include more abstract ideas, variety of settings, time and place, and greater opportunities for critical thinking and analysis. Teachers can support students to understand and use the story elements within a text by:
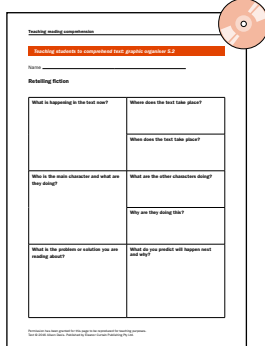
- Talking about the elements – What characters are in the text? Where is the story taking place? What is the problem? What did the problem build up to? What actions occurred to solve the problem? Who helped to solve the problem? Who caused the problem? Explain what happened in two or three sentences. What is this text about? What did you learn from reading this text? (See **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.1**.)

- Encouraging students to ask and answer questions as they read (refer to this strategy in this chapter, page 134; and Davis, 2015).

- Forming testing and revising predictions (refer to this strategy in this chapter, page 126; and Davis, 2015).

- Providing frequent opportunities for students to learn to retell, paraphrase and summarise during and after reading. (Graphic organisers to summarise, paraphrase or retell after reading and reflect on what they have read – for example: *I read*, *I liked*, *I found most interesting*, *I found most exciting* are referred to in this chapter, page 142; and Davis, 2015).

- Using a variety of text structure graphic organisers during and after reading.

Depending on the purpose for the reading and the outcome required, graphic organisers may be used during reading (students collectively add to them, discussing and justifying what they are adding and why) or after reading (students work either independently, in pairs or in small groups to record details of what they have read). If used after reading, follow up with students who can share and compare their entries and revisit aspects of the text they were not sure about. Teachers may also use these graphic organisers to provide explicit modelling to support comprehension.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.1 provides a quiz in which students are asked to record specific features of the text they are reading in relation to fiction characteristics – for example, characters, setting, problem.
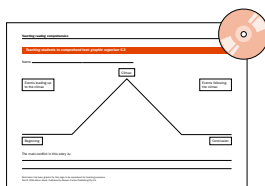
Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.2 is for retelling fiction. Students use this sheet, along with a dice, to ask and answer questions relating to what they are reading or what they have already read. In preparation for using this task, each question is given a number 1–6. Teachers may use more than one sheet, with different numbering on each sheet.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.3 provides a 'map' of the text to show the development of the plot. Students complete the map by adding to the diagram what happened at the beginning, the events leading up to the climax, the events following the climax towards conclusion or resolution and what happens at the end.
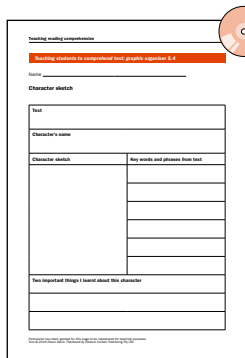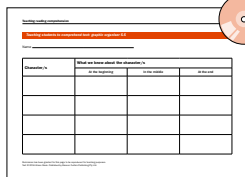
Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.4
requires students to complete a character sketch for the main (or other)
character, and locate and list key words and phrases from the text that
describe what the character looks like or tell what they do.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.5
requires students to record what they know about the character at the
various time sequences in the text – at the beginning, in the middle and
at the end. Students will draw on written and visual information from the
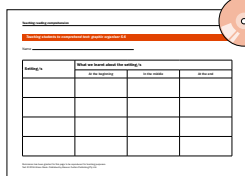text to complete this task.
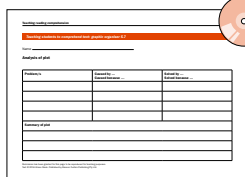
Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.6
requires students to record the shifts in setting as the text develops and to
record what they know about each setting at the beginning, in the middle
at the end.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.7
requires students to analyse the plot. They record the problem (there may
be more than one), the cause of the problem, and how the solution solved
the problem.
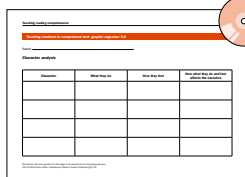
Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.8
requires students to analyse the characters. They record what the
main characters do, how they feel, and how what they do and feel affects
the narrative.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.9
requires the student to analyse the setting. Students record each
setting throughout the text (or section of text under review) and record
words, phrases and any other features from the text that build description
of the setting.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.10
requires students to explore the language choices of the author as they
developed the characters. Students list each main character and record
words, phrases and other features used by the author to build the characters.

Select also graphic organisers to use with fiction text, as meets the purpose
for reading, within this and other chapters of this text.

Non-fiction texts

Non-fiction texts are factual texts with content that is generally expected to
be true. They include reports, factual recounts, instructions, explanations,
persuasions and arguments.

Non-fiction texts contain specific information or ideas; their primary
purpose is to convey information about both our physical world (for example,
science) and our social world (for example, social studies and history) and
are usually written in the third person. Factual recounts are written about
things that have happened; they are usually written in the past tense

and, while they may include description, this is factual. Instruction texts provide guidance on how to do something, telling you what is needed, what to do (through the use of verbs) and the order in which something should be done. Explanations explain things – telling the reader what, how and why about a subject, an issue or phenomena, and are written in the present tense. Persuasive texts try to convince the reader to agree with something or someone, or to do something, and often contain a mix of fact and opinion and persuasive and emotive language. By comparison, arguments discuss an issue, considering and presenting all points of view to present a more balanced view than a persuasion. Assisting students to understand these different forms of non-fiction text, the purpose for which they are written and the text features and language commonly used in them is an important element of effective reading comprehension instruction.

Understanding text features

Text features help students develop comprehension of non-fiction texts and assist them to make sense of, and monitor, what they are reading. Text features commonly found within non-fiction texts include titles, headings, subheadings, preface, contents page, bullet points, glossary, index, guide words, graphics, illustrations, photographs, maps, text boxes, charts, labels, captions (see examples on next page). Text features help students to identify and determine what is important to understand, both before and during reading.

For example, a contents page will help students to determine what is important within the text *before* reading; a map with labels will help them to recognise, understand and clarify key information *as they read*; guide words will help them to locate specific information; text boxes will highlight or add additional information; and a glossary will clarify vocabulary used within the context of the topic.

Text structures

Text structure is the way the author organises the text to enable the reader to navigate and comprehend the material presented. There is a range of text structures found in non-fiction text and some texts contain more than one structure. Common text structures within non-fiction text include:

- Problem and solution – a problem is identified and a solution is presented. Examples include a report, an argument, a letter or even an advertisement convincing you to purchase something to fix a problem.

- Description – this is where information is presented to describe a person, event, phenomena, place or time. The author provides a description of this, and the reader works out what is most important.

- Time and order sequence – this is where information is presented in a specific order or timeline. Examples include autobiographies, biographies, programs, diary entries, recipes, directions and instructions.

heading

diagram

label

label

photographs

subheading

I wish I'd thought of that!

Popsicles

1905 – Frank Epperson invented the Popsicle by mistake. Perhaps this is how he recorded the event in his diary.

Dear Diary

This morning I discovered that I had invented a great new food! This is how it happened. Last night I was making myself a drink of cordial and while I was stirring in the powder my friend Tom asked me to play soccer with him, so I put my drink down on the porch and forgot about it. It was very cold last night and when I went to get the paper for my dad this morning there was my drink, right where I had left it, frozen solid with the stick stuck inside. When I tried to pull the stick out, the frozen drink came with it. I gave it a lick. It tasted good. I'm going to leave some more drink with sticks out tonight so I can show my friends my new invention.

Frank

Frozen drink

Stick

Thanks, Pop!

Frank Epperson took out a **patent** for Popsicles 18 years after inventing them, in 1923. He called his invention the epsical, but his children renamed it the Popsicle.

What do you call it?

Frozen treats on sticks have different names in different parts of the world. In the USA they are called Popsicles, in the United Kingdom they are lolly ices, in Australia they are icy poles and in New Zealand they are called ice blocks.

22

Glossary

altitude height above the ground

astronaut person trained to travel in a spacecraft

buggy small, light, one-horse carriage

burr rough, prickly case around the seeds of some plants

chariot an ancient horse-drawn vehicle with two wheels

current movement of water or air

dugout a boat made by hollowing out a log

modify change, alter

orbit to circle around

patent a document from the government that makes the inventor the only one who can make or sell their invention

glossary

Index

IDEA!

aeroplanes 10, 19

boats 14–15, 31

bubble gum 23, 30

engines 15, 16, 18, 19, 29

flight 18–19, 29

hot-air balloons 18

lights 10, 17, 29

paper 5, 29

paper bags 26

photography 12, 28

Popsicles 22, 30

sewing machines 9, 28

silly putty 20, 30

space shuttles 19, 30

tea bags 27

telephones 11, 29

television 13, 30

Velcro 21, 30

wheelbarrows 16

wheels 16–17, 28

windscreen wipers 5

zips 5, 21

index

That's a Good Idea!

From
That's a Good Idea!,
AlphaExplore,
Eleanor Curtain
Publishing

- Compare and contrast – in this text structure, the author tells you how things are the same and how things are different. Examples include essays, reports and discussions.

- Lists – where information is presented in a list for the reader.

Knowing the different text structures within a text provides the reader with clues about what they will be reading and what information is most important, and helps to identify the relationships between the ideas presented. Text structures also help students to connect to and remember what they have read and are useful in supporting the comprehension strategy of summarisation.

Teachers can support student comprehension of non-fiction texts by:

- asking questions and making observations about the text features before and during reading

- using the think-aloud approach to describe the way text features helped them after reading

- using the think-aloud to summarise what was read by referring to the text structure of the text

- modelling the think-aloud by asking questions and making observations about the text features

- explaining how using text features supported their comprehension and helped them to monitor and clarify information they were not sure of.

The following graphic organisers will also be useful. Depending on the purpose for the task, the graphic organisers may be used *during* reading (students collectively add to them, discussing and justifying what they are adding and why) or *after* reading (students work either independently, in pairs or in small groups to record details of what they have read). When used as an after reading activity, follow up with students who can share and compare their entries and revisit aspects of the text they were not sure about.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.11 requires students to take notes as they read. The notes they take will depend on the task they are reading for. When this is completed, students write a summary of what they have read.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.12 requires students to list the main ideas or events in the order in which they are read. Students then use this to support oral retell and group discussion.

Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.13 requires students to identify and record the main idea and the supporting information by assigned paragraphs. At the end of this task, they state what they think the author's purpose for writing this was and why they think this.
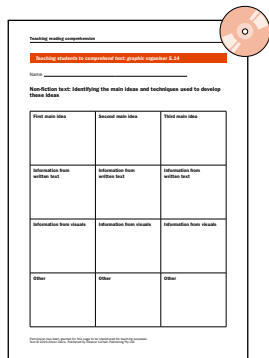
Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.14 requires students to analyse the main ideas presented in the text using written, visual and other information provided by the author.

Select also graphic organisers to use with non-fiction texts, as meets the purpose for reading, within this and other chapters of this book.

Reading critically: Non-fiction texts

Reading critically involves thinking about what the author is saying and how they are saying this, in order to identify the author's purpose. Techniques used within non-fiction texts that may lead to presentation of subjective information include:

- stating of personal preferences by the author
- stating of personal beliefs by the author
- the author appealing to the readers' values
- specific and deliberate use of persuasive /subjective language.

Critical readers learn to recognise tone and bias as they read, and consider that the text presented, while offering one perspective, may not be entirely correct. Critical thinking requires students to be able to analyse what is being read, to infer meaning, to evaluate what is read and consider other perspectives. Helping students to consider how the choices made by an author – the language the author has used, the illustrations selected and the structure of the text – affect the message the author provides the reader. Examples of non-fiction texts that may include subjective information include news articles, journal articles, personal accounts and editorials. Helping students to read, navigate and think critically about the author's message is an important component of reading comprehension instruction and reading across the curriculum.

See also analysis and evaluation strategies later in this chapter.

Teaching comprehension strategies

This section describes some of the key comprehension strategies that are used by good readers. Teachers need to use metacognitive comprehension instruction as they introduce the strategies, and as they introduce activities that provide opportunities for the strategies to be practised.

The examples below describe each strategy and provide examples of possible learning goals relevant to the strategy, as well as activities that can be used for deliberate instruction. These learning goals are not intended to be a complete or conclusive list and should also be read in conjunction with *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary years* (Davis, 2015, Eleanor Curtain Publishing).

These strategies can be developed and the activities used during reading, including cross-curricula reading.

Deliberately connecting to prior knowledge

Linking to their prior knowledge, also known as a reader's 'schema' (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), is a strategy that readers draw on to help them make sense of new information before, during and after reading. By connecting to prior knowledge, readers use and adapt their schema as they read and discuss text. They may add to their existing schema, connect new knowledge to knowledge they already had and delete inaccurate or inappropriate information, as they assimilate new information from the text with related information in their memory.

Students can draw on a number of schema to assist their comprehension, including their:

- knowledge, beliefs and understandings about the topic they are reading about

- knowledge of the type of text and text structure they are reading

- cultural knowledge, background and beliefs

- world experiences, including emotional experiences

- knowledge of and beliefs about their own reading abilities and potential barriers to comprehension

- knowledge of how authors (in general, as well as specific authors) write for different purposes and use styles to suit their purposes and points of view.

Students use all kinds of prior knowledge in order to check their understanding as they are reading, to assist them as they pose questions of the text, to help them predict what will happen next, to create visual images as they read and to support them as they synthesise, analyse and evaluate what they are reading. They can focus on a particular aspect of what they have read and did not understand (for example, a concept, an event, the author's use of a particular word) and relate this to their prior knowledge in order to build comprehension. As students become metacognitive in their learning, they learn to think about and articulate the ways in which they have deliberately linked to their prior knowledge to enhance their comprehension of text.

Suggested learning goals

Depending on the identified needs of the students, the activities that follow could use one or more of these learning goals, or they can be used as models for writing more specific learning goals:

- We are learning how to connect to our prior knowledge.

- Connecting to prior knowledge is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We will be successful, when we can:

- find ideas (or words, information, events) in the text that we already know about and use these to help us understand new ideas in the text

- make connections with what we already know to help us to understand the new information we gain as we read

- identify what we already know about a topic, idea, event, problem, or phenomena before we read and compare what we already know to what we learn during and after reading – consider what was similar, what was different, what was new

- make connections between this text and others we've read on this topic (or by this author, in this style etc.).

Supporting activities

Write learning goals that match student needs, and then select one or more activities to share with the students. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently.

Brainstorm before reading

Students brainstorm and record what they already know about the topic, events or ideas in a text before they read. After reading each section of text (for example, two or three paragraphs), stop and ask the students if they can make links between what they already knew and what they have read. Ask:

How did what you already knew help you to understand what you've read?

What more do you understand now about _____ ?

Circle what that students already knew that before they read the text.

Use a different-coloured pen to add the new knowledge they find in the text.

You may also ask students to write concluding statements, for example:

- What I knew before I read this text

- How this helped me to understand the text

- What I know now (This requires students to synthesise the new information and is an example of using more than one strategy to comprehend a text.)

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.15** to support this activity.
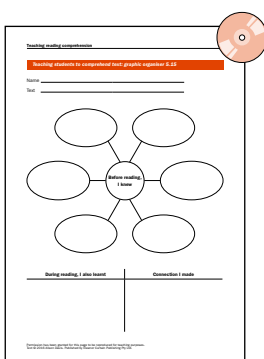
Skimming

Begin by asking students to skim a section of text, for example, they look at titles, subheadings, illustrations and the first and/or last sentence in the section. Ask students to discuss their responses to these parts of the text.

Do these parts remind you of things you already know? What are they?

Based on the connections you've made, what might you expect to find in this text? (This requires students to make predictions and is an example of using more than one strategy to comprehend a text.)

They can jot down the ideas, events, words or topics in this text that are already familiar to them.

Alternatively, you may read aloud an unfamiliar section of text while students listen and record those ideas, events, words or topics that are already familiar to them.

On a second reading, encourage students to make connections between what they already knew and the new ideas presented in the text.

Reporting back

Provide lots of opportunities for students to report back on the new ideas they learn as they read and to discuss these in relation to what they knew before reading. Encourage them to identify how their prior knowledge helps them to make sense of the new ideas or information they are gaining. This activity is particularly useful when you are introducing a topic that is unfamiliar to most students. You may like to give the students supports that they can use to assist this discussion or to use as prompts as they learn to make links to their prior knowledge, for example, index cards with headings such as:

- Today I read about …
- This is a little like … that I already knew.
- My knowledge of … helped me to understand …
- Now I also know…

Connecting key ideas

When students are reading several texts or chapters on a topic or theme, you can encourage them to make connections between the texts by asking the students to examine the key ideas that the texts share. They can then list the connections, giving examples from each text.

Starting from the known

The KWL approach, originally developed by Donna Ogle (1986), can be effectively used in its original form as a way of activating and linking to prior knowledge. It provides a structure for deliberately accessing and building prior knowledge and guiding students through what they know, what they want to find out and what they have learnt.

This approach can also be modified to include a focus on vocabulary as follows:

KWVL: Given your knowledge of the topic and structure of the text	
K – What do you already know?	
WV – What vocabulary do you expect to find?	
L – What have you learnt – about both content and vocabulary use?	
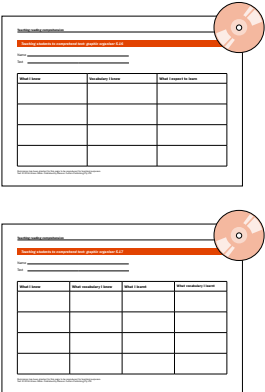
Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organisers 5.16** and **5.17** for examples to support this activity.

For additional information and teaching activities, refer to Chapter 3 of *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary years* (Davis, 2015, Eleanor Curtain Publishing).

Predicting and re-predicting

Prediction is the comprehension strategy through which the reader tries to determine future ideas and events before they appear in the text. It is also sometimes referred to as forming and testing hypotheses. Good readers anticipate and predict to make calculated guesses about what will be in the text. They draw on their prior knowledge to do so (knowledge gained from life experiences, social and cultural experiences; knowledge of the topic, the text structure and the author), making and confirming predictions as they form connections between their prior knowledge and the new information gained from within the text.

Students can be taught to use clues from the text, both before and during reading, to make, verify and revise predictions. The clues include the text cover, text title, the subheadings, the illustrations, the glossary and the cover blurb. Information from these sources can all be used to help form predictions about what will be in the text. As students read, they test their predictions, monitoring and asking questions as they do so. This will often mean revising their predictions (based on what they have learnt from the text so far and from their prior knowledge) to form new predictions. Thus prediction and re-prediction is cyclical or recursive in nature.

Metacognitively active students have learnt how to make informed predictions about what they read. They know how to read to confirm their predictions, to use their predictions to monitor their ongoing understanding of the text and to revise or make new predictions based on what they have learnt. They are able to demonstrate how their use of the prediction and re-prediction comprehension strategy assists them to make meaning of a range of text, and they can describe the learning benefits they gain from utilising this strategy to assist their learning.

Possible learning goals

We are learning to make predictions, test predictions and alter predictions to help us understand what we read.

Prediction is … (provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students)

We will be successful, when we can:

- think about the vocabulary the author uses and predict what might happen next based on these vocabulary choices

- predict and read on to check our predictions

- make a prediction and give evidence from our own experience to justify our predictions.

- make a prediction and give evidence from within the text to justify our predictions

- predict, give a range of reasons to justify our predictions and read on to check and reflect on our predictions.

Supporting activities

Write learning goals that match students' needs, and then select one or more activities to share with students. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently. Provide lots of opportunities for students to practise using this strategy in small groups using the think-aloud approach to explain

what they are doing as they use the strategy, and how this is helping them to comprehend what they read. You may need to model this at first, giving feedback to guide and support the students as they engage in the activities themselves.

Key words

Provide one or more key words from each section of the text to be read. Students use these words to predict what each section will be about and what they expect to find out. They check and re-predict as the section is read. Similarly, phrases taken from the text can also be used as a basis for prediction.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.18** to support this activity.

Read, predict, record

As they read, ask the students to pause after each section of text. The students share and record their prediction about what they think will happen next, giving evidence to support their predictions. This evidence may come from their prior knowledge of a concept, an idea or event, or from the vocabulary used. It may also come directly from clues in the text or from a combination of these sources.

You can model responses that students could use, for example:

- *This phrase supports my prediction because …*

- *There are three words that support my prediction. They are … and they all relate to …*

- *I know that when people do …, it usually means …*

Clues within text also include the author's use of punctuation (for example, to indicate an emotion), the way sentence structure varies (for example, changing to short sentences to build up anticipation) and the use of graphics and illustrations.

Prediction cards

Develop a series of prediction cards on which predictions and evidence can be recorded as the teacher and students make their way through text. These can be composed in different ways to record the evidence or the results of checking the predictions.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organisers 5.19** and **5.20** for examples of prediction cards.

Critical points

As students are reading, ask them to stop at critical points to identify and share their predictions. You could model starters such as:

- *The main thing that is happening now is …*
- *My prediction for the next section is …*
- *A question I am asking myself is …*
- *The prediction I am making is …*

Sharing predictions

Encourage students to share their predictions and ask for peer feedback.

Peer feedback could come in response to questions such as:

- *Do you think I might be correct? Why or why not?*
- *What important aspect have I missed?*
- *What am I overlooking with my prediction?*
- *What else do I need to think about?*

For additional information and teaching activities, refer to Chapter 4 of *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary years* (Davis, 2015, Eleanor Curtain Publishing).

Visualising

Visualising is a comprehension strategy used by readers to create a visual image in their mind based on what they have read. The images can emerge from all five senses, as well as from the feelings and emotions portrayed by the author. Visualising helps readers to relate to the characters in a story because they can imagine how they feel and what they are like. Through visualising, students learn to use their senses and their imaginations to help make the text alive and vibrant.

The image created by the reader also helps them to understand and remember what they are reading. The image is influenced by the style of the author's writing, the words, phrases and techniques used to 'paint a picture' for the reader. As readers visualise, they are linking what they already know about words, descriptive language and ideas (their prior knowledge) to the messages and main ideas in the text. They can identify and discuss words and phrases that are descriptive or have led them to forming an image of a character, a process, an event, a place or a time. The use of this strategy is often likened to 'creating a movie in your head' because it leads the reader to create a mental image as they read. Visualisation is also very closely related to the inference strategy because visualisation strengthens the reader's ability to infer.

Students can practise using this strategy in small groups using the think-aloud approach to explain what they are visualising. They can identify the clues from their senses and the language used by the author to draw them into the text and support their visualisations. They can explain how this strategy (and others used in combination) is helping them to comprehend the text.

Possible learning goals

We are learning how to visual to help us understand what we read.

Visualisation is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We will be successful, when we can:

- create pictures in our minds as we read and think about what we 'see' as we read

- make connections between what we know and the author's message to create an image as we read

- identify key words and phrases used by the author that help us create a picture in our mind

- identify structures used by the author to build a picture in our mind

- think about the image created by text to help build our understanding of what we are reading.

Supporting activities

Select activities that match student needs, then write one or more learning outcomes to share with the students. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently.

Vivid descriptions

Model this activity using texts that have vivid descriptions. As the students read, prompt them to complete sentences such as:

- *The picture I get is … because …*

- *When I read this, I saw … because …*

Sketching

Ask the students to read a section of text (for example, an extract from a fictional story, a non-fiction text, or a poem) and then complete a simple sketch of what they have read. Alternatively, ask the students to read a section of text, complete a simple sketch or diagram of what they have read and then label it using words (evidence) from the text. The students discuss their sketches, explaining how the words in the text guided their drawings.

Charting images

Show the students how to use a chart to record their visual images and the words or phrases that helped them to form the images as they read.

What do I 'see' as I read?	Why I see this? (words, phrases, structure)

Brainstorming images

Before starting a topic study, develop a group or class brainstorm about a central image, idea, or concept related to the topic. Write the image in the centre and ask the students to suggest supporting ideas around it.

For example, 'When I visualise a storm brewing, I see rain, wind, darkness, cold.'

As the topic study progresses, have the students find examples of the images they have described in the texts they have read.

Flow charts and mind maps

Show the students how to develop a flow chart that shows a visual image developing in sequence. This can be particularly helpful for showing students how to visualise a recount of an event, or an explanation of a process.
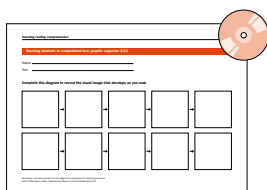
Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.21** to support this task.

Alternatively, you could use a free-form mind map to show how a process, explanation, recount or description can be visualised. Students can uses sketches, words or phrases to record the images that form in their minds as they read. Remember that visualising can include senses other than sight – reading a story set in the Arctic in winter can make the reader shiver!

For additional information and teaching activities, refer to Chapter 5 of *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary years* (Davis, 2015, Eleanor Curtain Publishing).

Inferring

Through inferring, students learn to build meaning by using what they already know and the implicit information the author provides. It is based on implied information: information that the author has not stated explicitly.

Inference is based on the reader's prior knowledge, the information they are gaining from the text as they read, their word and vocabulary knowledge, and their ability to draw on sources of information. It involves the reader in making a considered guess about what the author actually meant and it is very similar to making predictions. Inferring is often referred to as the act of 'reading between the lines', where the reader works with the clues the author has provided to gain deeper meaning.

Students using this strategy to learn to recognise that meaning may not always be explicit. They learn to search for clues to confirm deeper meaning and to support 'hunches' (inferences) they gain as they read. These hunches are implicit ideas based on clues provided by the author and develop as students read and search for understanding. Students will draw on their ability to predict what they think the author is stating and then continue to read on as they look for new evidence and clues that will confirm their inference. Inferences will be confirmed, altered or disregarded as readers reflect on their validity and draw conclusions about what an author is saying.

It is important to involve the students in explaining and demonstrating what they did in order to infer from text. Have students describe what they did and the thinking behind this (by using the think-aloud approach), while encouraging students to talk with each other about their own developing awareness of comprehension and their use of comprehension strategies.

Possible learning goals

We are learning how to infer to help us understand what we read.

Inference is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We will be successful, when we can:

- understand the difference between something stated explicitly and something stated implicitly

- read between the lines to understand what's happening in the story, even though the author doesn't tell us directly

- form predictions based on implied (unstated) meaning in the text

- search for clues the author gives us to add meaning to text and share these clues with others

- use these clues to get a clearer picture of what the author is actually telling us

- make inferences, and then change them as needed, as we read on.

Supporting activities

Students need explicit instruction that teaches them what inferring means and how they can do it. The following activities give two ways of providing this instruction.

1. Teaching how to infer

Using the principles described in Chapter 1 (see page 6), you can start to teach students how to infer by recording a sentence from which the reader can make an inference. After reading the sentence aloud, discuss with the students the information that the author provides indirectly by looking for clues in the sentence and by using prior knowledge. Different-coloured pens can be used to highlight the author's clues. Demonstrate to the students how the author conveyed the information and how they know this.

Example

- *The letter was written on thin, yellowing paper and rustled when she unfolded it.*

- *I know the letter must be old because the author says the paper is 'yellowing'.*

- *I worked this out because I know that some kinds of paper go yellow when they're very old.*

- *The author says the paper rustled. That's something else that tells me it's probably old. I know that thin paper becomes brittle when it's old so it would make a rustling noise when you open it.*

This process can then be extended to several sentences or a paragraph of text.

Rich questions, aimed to develop conversation about inferences, include:

- *What do you think the author is really trying to tell us here?*

- *What do you think the author means by this?*

- *How did you work this out?*

- *What other strategies (for example, prior knowledge, making connections, visualisation) assisted you? How did they assist you?*

- *What personal viewpoints may be influencing the way you view this text? How is this so*?

2. Literal and inferred meanings

Teaching students to know what inference is and how to infer also involves focusing their attention on the difference between literal and inferential messages in text. After reading a section of text, teachers can use charts to identify from within each section those messages actually stated in the text (*what I know*) and those inferred based on clues provided within the text (*what I infer*). **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.22** can be used to support this activity.
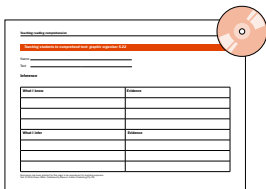
Inferences may change as students read on and more information is divulged. In these cases, student learn to reflect on, and modify, their inferences as they read and gain meaning.

Students need opportunities to practise this strategy with the teacher supporting, modelling and explaining how they are inferring, as well as practising with their peers in small groups. Students can use the think-aloud approach to explain what they are inferring and how they are inferring, and what other strategies they are using to help them do so.

For additional information and teaching activities, refer to Chapter 7 of *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary year*s (Davis, 2015, Eleanor Curtain Publishing).

Self-questioning: Asking and answering questions

Self-questioning (sometimes simply referred to as 'questioning') is a comprehension strategy through which the readers ask questions 'in the head' to check that they are understanding what they read. Readers instinctively and purposefully ask questions before, during and after they read and they attempt to answer the questions as they interact with the text.

Self-questioning supports students as they engage with the ideas presented in the text. This strategy also assists students to monitor their own reading – to recognise when they do not understand what they are reading and to know what to do when this occurs. The questions that readers ask themselves may be:

- directed at particular features of text
- directed at a particular answer or piece of information within the text
- focused on unusual or new content ideas
- focused on meaning
- to clarify an unknown aspect of text – word, phrase, sentence
- focused on structure
- aimed at setting a purpose for a reading a particular piece of text
- to assist with forming predictions as they speculate on text they have not yet read
- aimed at uncovering the author's intent, purpose or position within the writing (critical awareness)
- focused on drawing attention to their metacognitive strategy use: 'What other strategies can I use to help me?', 'What can I do to understand this section of text better?'.

Students who learn to ask questions as they read understand how asking questions will deepen their understanding of text. They learn to determine whether the questions they ask are likely to be answered directly within the text, or whether they will need to draw on their prior knowledge to infer the answer from the text. They learn to focus their questions towards the most important information within the text. Sometimes questions are evaluative, helping the reader to make considered and evidenced-based judgments. Asking questions can help the students to evaluate the effectiveness of the questions they ask, and to identify the learning benefits from asking and answering questions as part of active reading.

Encouraging students to discuss their questions, to share why these are important to their overall understanding of text, and to share the learning gains made as a result of asking questions are all effective ways of supporting the students to become metacognitively active comprehenders.

Possible learning goals

We are learning how to ask questions to help us understand what we read.

Asking questions is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students).

We will be successful, when we can ask and answer questions:

- about particular features of the text
- about new or unusual ideas we do not fully understand
- to help us work out a challenge we meet in the text
- to help us better understand the text and the author's message
- to help us find specific information in the text
- to extend our understanding beyond the ideas in the text.

Supporting activities

Select activities that match student needs and the kinds of texts they are reading, then write one or more learning outcomes to share with the students. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently.

Bookmarking or charting

This activity requires bookmarks or other digital/paper medium for individual use or group use. Explain the learning goal, modelling if necessary. You may wish to add support by providing starters such as:

• *A question I have is …*

• *I'm wondering … because …*

Ask the students to record the learning goal. They note the questions they have as they read. The students can also note the page number alongside each question. After reading, they can share their questions, discussing whether or not these were answered in the text as they read on. These records can be used during reading in any part of the school curriculum, encouraging students to use the strategy across content areas.

Using specific questions

Teachers can further support students with this strategy by teaching them to ask a range of different, specific questions, for different purposes. Initially teachers and students may use the 'W' questions –*what, why, when, who, where* – that probe understanding. However, it is also important for students to learn the difference between other kinds of questions:

• Literal – these are questions that require students to recall facts directly from the text. When asking these questions, students are learning how to locate the required information from text. *(When did Jose leave home? How many times did the spider try to throw the web across?)*

• Inferential – these are questions requiring students to think from given clues. Students take the literal information and combine it with other information (elsewhere in the text and using their prior knowledge and experience). These questions introduce the students to other ways of thinking about the text. *(Why did Joshua say he would come home with a surprise? What's the significance of an idea being proven by experiments?)*

• Investigative – these are questions that require students to draw conclusions from given clues. Students apply the information they gain as they read to make generalisations, to hypothesise, or to discuss different points of view. *(I don't agree with the author that kids are getting lazier. I wonder how you could prove that kids do as much homework now as they did in the 1970s?)*

- Evaluative – these questions require students to make judgments based on the text content, the author's style and the author's purpose. *(This story about the 1918 influenza epidemic was scary, but it left me wondering what the author's purpose was in writing it. Did she want to scare us into preparing for another epidemic?)*

As students learn to question as they read, they learn to connect with the ideas in the text, to explore an idea or aspect of text that they find confusing and to probe further to comprehend the author's intent and meaning.

Have students practise the self-questioning strategy in small groups, using the think-aloud approach to explain what they are asking themselves as they read, the behaviours they employ to answer their questions as they read, and how asking and answering questions is helping them to gain better understanding of the text.

For additional information and teaching activities, refer to Chapter 6 of *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary years* (Davis, 2015, Eleanor Curtain Publishing).

Seeking clarification

Seeking clarification is the comprehension strategy through which readers seek assistance when they are not sure about something or when they become confused. It will involve students in rereading a section of text, deliberately linking what they have read to their prior knowledge and asking questions in order to clear up their confusion. It may also involve asking another student for assistance, consulting a second source of information (for example, a dictionary, a thesaurus, a website) or seeking assistance from the teacher.

Readers may use this strategy to seek clarification:

- of words they do not know

- of words with multiple meaning

- of phrases that have unfamiliar content or structure, form or layout

- when concepts are unfamiliar to the reader

- when sentence and text structures are difficult to follow

- of information in tables, charts, diagrams and illustrations

- as they self-monitor their reading when reading does not make sense.

In each case, readers who are able to pause and seek clarification before reading further are learning how to monitor their own comprehension, knowing when they are understanding what they are reading and when they are not, and taking an active role in developing their own understanding of text.

As readers seek to clarify text, they also learn to explain what they did and demonstrate it to others. Students can use the think-aloud approach to describe what they did and why they made these choices when clarifying.

Possible learning goals:

We are learning how to clarify to help us understand what we read.

Clarification is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We will be successful, when we can:

- identify the part of the text we are not sure about
- state what it is that makes us confused
- engage in discussion to seek explanation and clarification
- use reference material to help us understand a part of text that we do not understand (materials can include websites, dictionaries, subject guides).

Supporting activities

Students can be taught to be aware when they have lost the meaning as they read and to take steps to clarify their confusion.

Write learning goals that match students' needs, then select one or more activities to share with them. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on it independently.

Backtrack and jot

Teach students that, when they are confused, they can refer to the text, jotting down the key points up to the stage where they became confused. The notes form the basis for discussion with the teacher and/or members of the group in order to clarify unknown material.

Asking questions for clarification

Assisting students to ask clarifying questions is an important way to help them to use and internalise the clarification strategy. Questions that are useful for promoting clarification include:

- *What part of the text is unclear?*
- *Why am I confused?*
- *What could this mean? (jot down ideas)*
- *Which is most probable and why?*
- *How can I seek assistance?*

Develop a prompt chart

Work with a group of students to develop a group chart of their ideas about what they do when they need clarification. Discuss the ideas as they are shared, and write them on the chart for reference. The chart can be copied for pasting into the students' notebooks, displayed for others to refer to, or used as the basis for group members to teach others.

When I need to clarify something as I am reading, I can:

- reread the part of text I need to clarify
- read on to see if I can work it out
- make connections between this part and the parts that I have already read
- use one or several comprehension strategies
- check a dictionary
- check a thesaurus
- check an encyclopedia source
- ask an expert.

Develop prompt cards

Provide prompt cards for students to use as they read, both during instructional reading and when reading with a partner. Discuss the ideas on the cards and teach students how to use the cards as strategy reminders. As the students become more confident with the clarifying strategy, they can develop prompt cards for others. Examples could include:

- A word I need to clarify here is …
- An idea I need to clarify is …
- I need help with this because …

Group practice

Provide time and opportunities for students to practise using the clarification strategy in small groups. They can use the think-aloud approach to show where they needed clarification, to explain the information in the text, and to show how they drew on their prior knowledge (from experiences and from other texts) to seek clarification.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.23** to support group instruction on this strategy.

Teachers and/or students record the aspects of reading that they wish to clarify. They discuss the problem and what they could do to solve this and record the actions they took to clarify.
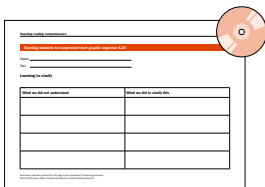
Summarising

Summarising is the comprehension strategy where students determine what information is important and combine the key points into succinct statements about what they have read. As students learn to summarise, they learn to construct a brief retell of an entire text. They learn to differentiate between the most important pieces of information and the supporting details. This includes their ability to determine key words, facts, main ideas and main events. As they do this, students learn to make decisions about which information to include in their summary and which information to discard.

Often readers will draw on their knowledge of text structure of text to help them summarise. Fiction and non-fiction texts are structured differently, and there are a range of text structures within each of them. For example, a play is structured differently from a poem, an explanation is structured differently from an argument or a report. In order to summarise a text, students learn to draw on:

- their knowledge of text structure and organisational features (which may include chapters, headings and subheadings)

- their ability to identify and interpret the key idea in each paragraph (often, but not always, found in the first sentence)

- their ability to interpret visual supports within text (for example, graphs, tables and diagrams)

- their knowledge of the type of language used within specific text structures (for example, connectives, verbs, proper nouns).

In creating summaries, readers state (either verbally, visually or in writing) the most important information in their own words. They use language that is clear and precise. They link the main information together in an organised way that is easy, accessible and logical.

Possible learning goals

We are learning how to summarise to help us understand what we read.

Summarisation is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We will be successful, when we can:

- identify the structural features of the text

- determine the important ideas (from those less important) in the text

- combine these ideas

- condense these ideas

- state these ideas in our own words

- order the key ideas to develop a succinct statement, or series of succinct statements, that captures the essence of the text.

Supporting activities

Write learning goals that match the students' needs, then select one or more activities to share with them. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently.

Highlighting

For this activity, students will need copies of texts that they can write on. The students begin by reading the section or paragraph of text they will be summarising. On the second reading, they use highlighter pens to locate what they think are the most important ideas within the text. They discuss, justify and sometimes alter their decisions with their peers.

Next, the students return to the text and record key words that relate to the parts of text that they have highlighted. Once again they share their ideas and give reasons for the words they have selected. When the section is completed, the students use their key words to develop a statement that summarises the text. (Note: this task can also be completed digitally.)

Finding the key sentence in a paragraph

To assist students to focus on a key sentence in a given piece of text, provide a template on which they write what they believe to be the key sentence along with the reasons for their choice. This activity can be done as a group, in pairs or independently. Through discussion with others, students share their reasoning, give and seek feedback from others, and decide on the effectiveness of their decisions.

Key sentence selected from paragraph	Reasons for selecting this sentence

Sequence of main ideas or events

This activity is suitable for texts that convey information in a sequence. Texts can include those with a clear and obvious sequence (for example, a procedure or a short biography) through to narratives where a story is told with flashbacks or other devices that obscure the sequence.

Each idea is listed in sequence 1 to 4 as illustrated below and students record the main idea in order as they make their way through text. This sequence is later referred to by both the teacher and students as the students develop a succinct summary of the text.

1.	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**

Justifying importance

In this activity, students are asked to identify supporting evidence to justify their choice of important ideas. This requires them to decide which ideas are *important* rather than just *interesting*.

First, the students practise the summarising strategy in small groups, using the think-aloud approach to explain what they are doing as they summarise, how this is helping them to comprehend text, and what other strategies they are also using to help them gain meaning from text. Next, they justify their choices by finding evidence in the text that supports the ideas.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organisers 5.24** and **5.25** to support this task.

For additional information and teaching activities, refer to Chapter 9 of *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary years* (Davis, 2015, Eleanor Curtain Publishing).

Synthesising

Synthesising is a strategy closely related to summarisation. This strategy takes summarising one step further – students are not merely re-stating what they have read but are combining ideas with what they already know and are considering them as a whole. As a result, students may create new insights and perspectives about what they are reading. Students identify main ideas, put these into their own words, think about what they already know, think about what they are thinking, and the connections they are making, as they read on.

Scaffolds for synthesising include:

• At first I knew

• While I was reading I

• Now I

• After reading I

Readers' thinking changes as they read new information. When readers synthesise, they put pieces of the text together with what they know and think about to make their own conclusions. This process is called synthesis.

What I am reading	What I am thinking

Identifying the main concept

This comprehension strategy involves the reader in determining the important idea in the text. This is called the main concept and can also be referred to as the one big idea (for example, in a report), the theme (for example, in a narrative text) or the key message (for example, in an argument). Sometimes the main concept is explicit and is revisited and reinforced throughout the text. At other times, it is implicit and the reader has to infer, analyse, synthesise and evaluate what they have read in order to determine the main idea. The main concept is usually closely related to the author's purpose for writing the text. Some texts may contain more than one main idea, with some ideas having a greater importance than others.

Students need to learn to differentiate between the topic or content of a text and the main concept. For example, a text may be about a bicycle race, but the main concept might be about perseverance; a letter might be a letter of complaint, but the main concept might be outrage at injustice.

In order to be able to identify the main concept, students need to learn to:

- interpret what they believe to be the author's purpose

- link to their prior knowledge

- make predictions about what the main idea might be

- search for evidence to support their predictions

- infer from implicit information

- synthesise the information presented in the text

- consider all evidence and make thoughtful decisions

- explain and demonstrate to others how they arrived at the main idea.

Possible learning goals

We are learning how to identify the main concept as we read.

The main concept is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We will be successful, when we can:

- find clues and evidence given by the author to help determine the main concept

- combine the clues and evidence provided by the author, and link to our prior knowledge, to determine the main concept

- think about and discuss the main concept (or message or theme) that the writer wants us to understand from reading this text.

Supporting activities

Write learning goals that match student needs and the kinds of texts they are reading, then select one or more activities to share with the students. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently.

Events in a narrative

When reading a narrative text (for example, reading a novel aloud to the class over several days or weeks), the students can list the main ideas in the chapter or part of the text. For example, for each major event in the story, ask them to identify a possible main theme or themes.

As the story develops, work with the students to integrate the themes they have listed, and to determine one main concept.

Events occurring in order	Underlying theme

Main concept
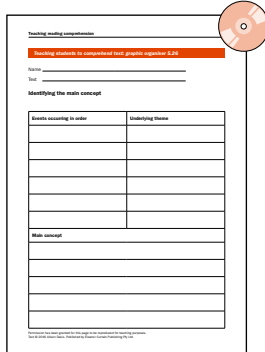
Once this strategy has been modelled and the students have had guided practice in using it (for example, during read-aloud sessions), they can work in pairs or groups to chart the events and ideas in a novel/chapter book/sophisticated picture book they are reading, finally arriving at the main concept that they believe the author wanted to convey.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.26**, which can be adapted for class, group and independent instruction.

Considering evidence
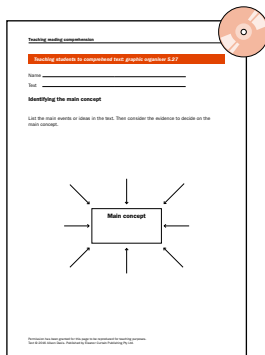
This activity can be used for fiction and non-fiction texts. As with the previous activity, the students list the main events (fiction) or ideas (non-fiction) that occur in the text. They then consider all the evidence presented in the text and decide on the author's main concept. Students can justify their decision, providing the reasons for their decisions to others in the group. The group members provide feedback on each other's reasoning and decisions.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.27**, which can be adapted for class, group and independent instruction.

Step by step

This activity requires the students to record their step-by-step process to work out the main concept in a text. It can be done independently or in pairs and the result is shared with the teacher and other group members.

Text title:
1st step: First I …
2nd step: Then I …
3rd step: Next I …
4th step: After that I …
I concluded that the main concept was:
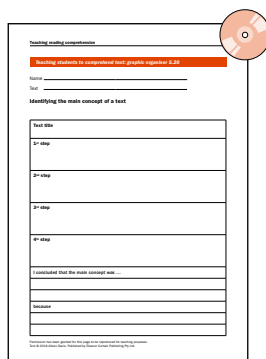
Students practise this strategy in small groups, using the think-aloud approach to explain to others what they are doing as they use the strategy, how this is assisting them to comprehend the text, what other strategies they are using and why they are drawing on other comprehension strategies to assist them.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.28**, which can be adapted for class, group and independent instruction.

Analysing and synthesising

Analysing

Analysing is considering what you think of the text as a whole. It is about exploring the text and considering what it means. As readers learn to analyse, they:

- identify ideas and information from within text
- link ideas and information to their prior knowledge and experiences
- compare and contrast different ideas and information to create new knowledge
- examine and question components of text – that is, character, plot, language features used
- examine and question the ideas and information presented by the author
- form summaries and conclusions
- learn to view text critically

- learn to explain and demonstrate to others how they analysed the ideas and information in a text to assist their comprehension of the text

- consider how one piece of information is related to another

- look for evidence to support an idea, a feeling, an emotion developed during and/or as a result of reading

- look for relationships between ideas

- seek ideas that justify a particular point of view or idea

- draw and justify conclusions.

Synthesising

Synthesising is a strategy closely related to summarisation, analysing and evaluation. This strategy is often thought of as taking summarising one step further – students are not merely re-stating what they have read, but are combining ideas with what they already know and are considering them as a whole. As a result, students may create new insights and perspectives about what they are reading. Students identify main ideas, put these into their own words, think about what they already know and think about what they are thinking and the connections they are making as they read.

As readers learn to synthesise, they:

- use a range of strategies to understand text

- identify ideas and information from within text

- combine ideas and information with their prior knowledge and experiences

- compare and contrast different ideas and information to create new knowledge, insights and perspectives

- form summaries and conclusions by putting the various 'pieces of text' together

- think about the changes that occur as they learn new information.

Scaffolds for synthesising include:

- At first I knew

- While I was reading I

- Now I

- After reading I

- Readers' thinking changes, as they read new information. When readers synthesise, they put pieces of the text together with what they know, and think about, to make their own conclusions. This process is called synthesis.

What I am reading	What I am thinking

Combining analysing and synthesising strategies

Analysing and synthesising usually occur together and are part of the process of a reader 'making the text their own'. Both strategies are linked to students being able to identify main ideas and summarise. Analysing involves students in learning to examine, question and probe from their own viewpoint the ideas presented in text. Synthesising is about combining new ideas together with existing information to form conclusions and interpret the text's meaning.

As students read a text, they also learn to stop regularly and think about what they are reading. As they do this, they consider, think critically about and add new information to their current understanding. They become aware of the changes that are occurring to their understanding, and of the conclusions they are drawing about what they read.

Combining information and being aware of the changes to their thinking as they read will also help students monitoring their own understanding of a text during reading. Students continue to revise their thinking as they read on, assimilating new information into their evolving ideas about the text and the topic. They examine and probe the new information, synthesising this with what they already know in the process of making decisions about a character, a setting, or the overall meaning of a section of text.

Possible learning goals

We are learning to analyse what we read to help us understand.

Analysis is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We are learning to synthesise what we read to help us understand.

Synthesis is … (Provide a student-friendly definition of this strategy for your students.)

We will be successful, when we can:

- compare and connect ideas within a text
- compare and connect ideas between two or more texts
- examine the sequence of events and why they occur in the order they do
- question information from the text and form our own conclusions
- read, stop, think, question and add new information to what we already know
- synthesise to understand more clearly what we have read.

Example

Emil and his students had read many different texts about the opening up of the American West. He had chosen texts by writers who had different perspectives, including some first-hand accounts. The students had been practising analysing the texts by comparing and contrasting them. Next, he encouraged them to synthesise the information to bring a critical perspective to their reading:

- *We've read and compared several books and articles about the movement of settlers across America to the West.*

- *What do you think were some of the purposes the different writers had for writing? What makes you think that? How might this affect the way you read historical texts in the future?*

Provide lots of opportunities for students to practise the strategy in small groups, using the think-aloud approach to explain what they are analysing and synthesising and why, and what other strategies they are using to help them do this.

Supporting activities

Select activities that match student needs and the kinds of texts they are reading, then write one or more learning outcomes to share with the students. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently.

Why is it …?

Select texts for discussion that might allow for more than one interpretation, or that leave the reader to reach their own conclusions. Reports and arguments may provide good examples, in particular those where the author presents conflicting information. Work through some examples with the group before they try to use the strategy independently or with partners.

Using a suitable text, ask the students to make notes under the headings as shown in the example below.

Text title:		
The author states:	**Why this could be so**	**Questions I have are …**

Identifying cause-and-effect relationships

One way of analysing a text is to look for relationships between events or actions. This can be done with fiction and non-fiction texts. The students can use a graphic organiser to record the cause-and-effect relationships they notice. When they share their findings with a partner or group, ask them to identify any words or phrases the author has used to indicate the nature of the relationship.

Comparing versions

Students can compare two or more versions of a story, or two texts on the same topic, to identify the elements that are the same or different. Tell them to make notes of details they want to remember as they read, so they can refer to them later when they discuss their findings. Once students have examined and discussed these versions, they can take the analysis further by discussing the effects of the differences and how they might change the overall message of the story.

Chart information as you read – *Analysis*

Connect this list of ideas.

What did you notice?

Were there differences? Did the differences matter?   } *Synthesis*

Discuss how the texts compare.

Identifying assumptions, points of view and bias

This activity can be used with persuasive (argument) texts as well as reports, explanations, and narratives. Ask the students to:

- identify assumptions within a text (for example, that all logging of forests is wrong; that girls are more interested in appearances than boys are; or that everyone has a computer at home)

- analyse the development and sequence of ideas (for example, when and how did the author first introduce this idea? How did it develop?)

- analyse the information given and the conclusions reached in the text

- draw together (synthesise) the results of analysis to form a conclusion of their own.

The students can use the headings below to record ideas as they read:

The author said that …

I think that …

What I read   What I am thinking   What I learnt

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organisers 5.29** and **5.30** for examples to support this instruction.

Comparing characters

This activity will be familiar to most students, but it can be developed to encourage deeper analysis of characters and to lead to a synthesis of ideas, for example, about the stereotypes portrayed in some kinds of literature. Students can use Venn diagrams or matrix charts to illustrate relationships between texts and between two or more characters.

Using a story map

Students can use a story map to show how all the elements of a narrative come together to create overall meaning. This strategy is used in tandem with that of identifying the main idea. As a partner activity, students can use their story map to retell a story and synthesise what has been read.

Analysing key messages

Use rich texts that have enough substance to generate good discussion of the key messages. Students can:

- list something new they have learnt from their reading and list facts about this idea

- analyse the parts of the text for key messages – the introduction, the body, the conclusion

- explain what they understand as the key messages

- identify the evidence (or data, or techniques) the author used to convey these messages

- identify evidence to support (or contradict) a point of view

- explain the relationship between two ideas or pieces of information

- explain how what they have read relates to what they already know, or to other texts they have read

- explain how they can combine their new learning with their prior knowledge of a topic or idea.

Many of these activities draw on other comprehension strategies. as well as on analysing and synthesising: point this out to the students as you encourage them to think metacognitively about what they are doing as they read and analyse a text.

For further information on analysis and synthesis, refer also to the fiction and non-fiction texts discussion on pages 115 to 122 of this chapter.

Evaluating

Students make judgments based on their understanding of the text and their own knowledge and values. They learn to evaluate what they have read to see whether or not it is relevant. They also learn to evaluate based

on what they believe to be the author's purpose and the author's position on particular issues. As they learn to evaluate text, students learn that not everything they read is factual or true and that authors may bring their own personal experiences and perspectives to their writing in order to influence others.

Students learning to evaluate texts will:

- draw on their prior knowledge to ask and answer questions that will help them think about what they have read

- analyse and synthesise ideas

- recognise inconsistencies within messages or information

- recognise when an author is trying to influence their thinking with a particular point of view

- respond to the text in a personal, yet informed, way

- make judgments about what an author is saying

- describe and demonstrate to others how they arrived at their opinions of texts.

Allow students to practise this strategy in small groups, using the think-aloud approach to explain what opinions or evaluations they are forming and why, and what strategies they are using to help them do so.

Possible learning goals

We are learning to:

- express opinions about a text as we evaluate it

- challenge the ideas presented by the author based on our own experiences

- look for bias within a text (a preconceived idea, an example of favouritism or prejudice)

- decide whether we think the author was effective in meeting their purpose, and give reasons to support our decision.

Supporting activities

Select activities that match student needs and the kinds of texts they are reading, then write one or more learning goals to share with the students. Explain the activity, adjusting the support to enable the students to eventually work on the activity independently. Many of the examples given below can be adjusted to allow for different degrees of support, for example, by assigning the 'What do you think?' tasks carefully.

What do you think?

Students read or listen to part or all of a text. They then begin the process of learning to evaluate text by selecting one or more of the following tasks. These can be written onto individual cards for random distribution and used in pairs or small groups for discussion. Examples are given, but the range of responses will be much wider than these.

- Express an opinion (*I think that …*)

- Ask an evaluating question (*Why do you think that … ?)*

- Challenge the text or the author (*I don't believe … is right. In my opinion …)*

- Look for bias (*The author seems to be expressing a personal opinion rather than facts. I think this because …)*

- Say how effectively the text was developed in view of the purpose and the audience (*The author intended to … but in my opinion, s/he didn't convince me because …)*

Challenge and justify

In this activity, students can work in pairs or groups to challenge each others' evaluations of all or part of a text that they have read. Select texts that will stimulate good discussion on topics of interest to the students. These can be of almost any text type – even a shopping list could provide a challenge! The students can challenge or justify:

- the inclusion of a particular aspect or piece of information within the text

- their own or their partner's evaluation of the text

- a recommendation of the text for other audiences

- an opinion on the content of the text, for example, the effectiveness of the author's style

- priorities of aspects of the text, for example, from most important to least important information; or most interesting to least interesting character

- the overall effectiveness of the text

- whether or not the author met the purpose for which the text was written.

After a discussion based on one of these challenges, the students can reflect on how the activity has helped them to evaluate the text.

Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organisers 5.31** and **5.32** for examples to support this instruction.

When readers struggle

When students struggle with comprehension, their problems are often linked to poor decoding skills, lack of vocabulary knowledge and poor fluency, but this is not always the case. For many students, helping them to focus on becoming a better comprehender is important too. Other students, despite being good decoders, may struggle to comprehend and learn from text. Some readers may be confused about the purpose and use of comprehension strategies, while other students may not have the strategies or the background knowledge to support their learning. For these students, comprehension instruction needs to be very explicit and structured to provide long-term, step-by-step support.

Through carefully planned and monitored metacognitive comprehension instruction, teachers can make the necessary skills and strategies accessible and explicit, supported by daily opportunities for guided, paired and independent practice. When students who are struggling receive either intermittent or irregular instruction, or instruction that is not targeted to meet their needs, they are less likely to retain new learning from one lesson to the next. Regular, carefully planned instruction that is based on the principles described in Chapter 1 is critical for this group.

Students who struggle to comprehend text often have not developed the metacognitive awareness that will let them know when they understand, when they are not, and what to do when they are not. Developing a highly metacognitive approach to teaching and learning, including the sharing of specific learning goals and development of student-friendly definitions of each strategy (what it is, when to use it and how to use it) is an essential component of assisting these students to become strategic readers.

This section should be read in conjunction with Chapter 1, the early parts of this chapter and Chapter 6 (Teaching approaches), each of which explain the particular comprehension strategies and approaches that students need to become effective readers. Struggling readers benefit from significant and sustained amounts of metacognitive comprehension instruction. The critical link is ensuring that the teacher has accurately identified each student's particular mix of instructional learning needs (which will likely include decoding, vocabulary and fluency needs) and has the knowledge to draw these together through targeted instruction.

It is important to keep groups small for instruction – a maximum of four to five students – to ensure that there are many of opportunities for active participation during lessons, and that the teacher is able to carefully observe and monitor the progress and difficulties encountered by each student. See chapters 6 and 7 for information about approaches to use and grouping arrangements.

While there are many approaches to working with students who struggle to comprehend written texts, this section examines some components of comprehension instruction that are particularly important:

- making specific links to the student's prior knowledge

- teaching students to monitor their own comprehension

- focusing on quality questioning and discussion

- teaching students how to ask questions of the text

- increasing the time spent reading high-quality texts.

Making specific links to the student's prior knowledge

Making connections to prior knowledge involves building bridges between the student and the text. This includes making connections to the student's previous life experiences (cultural and social connections), making connections to a student's knowledge of the content of the text, and making connections to the student's knowledge of the structure used in the text. Teachers need to know their students well and to use this knowledge to provide materials that can be used to deliberately link to the lives of the students. Often, involving students in selecting a text is a useful way of making connections between a text and the students' prior knowledge, and it also motivates students to read.

For students who struggle, it is important that teachers carefully plan to develop links to prior knowledge before reading, during reading, and after the reading. This may involve beginning with a mini-lesson to prepare students for reading (for example, pre-teaching a content or vocabulary-related concept). The mini-lesson can be connected (through the learning goals) to content and skills encountered in previous lessons. As reading progresses, the teacher checks on the links students are making between their prior knowledge and new information gained from text, and these can be discussed after reading to reinforce the ways in which making links can aid comprehension.

For every lesson and activity, teachers can give strong support by being very specific about the learning goals, and by spending time helping the students to reflect on and assess their learning throughout, and at the conclusion of, the lesson. Building knowledge of skills and strategies used by 'good' readers is an essential element of this instruction. Students can participate in discussions about their learning, and can help the teacher to set the learning goals for the next day's session. As a final prompt, students can finish the lesson with a group log entry to record what they have learnt today and what they need to focus on next.

In addition to the activities suggested earlier in this chapter, three further ways of linking to student prior knowledge are described below.

1. Linking to prior knowledge through analogy

The teacher will share an analogy that deliberately links the content of the new text to experiences that the students have had or can relate to. Analogies are useful for helping students remember what they are reading about, in particular when it is something that is very new to them. For example, if the text includes a discussion of famine, the teacher could develop an analogy:

It's a little like this: you wake up in the morning and you are really hungry and you go to the kitchen and there is nothing for breakfast … and then there is nothing for lunch … and then there is nothing for dinner … and this happens day after day after day … no food in the house, no food at the supermarket, nothing to eat …

2. Linking to prior knowledge through previewing

In this approach, the teacher prepares and writes a preview of the text that is presented to the students before reading. Usually the preview includes a statement or rhetorical question that generates interest in the text, a brief overview of what the text is about and one or two key questions, statements or opinions that will surface during reading. Discussion is an integral factor of previewing, as this provides additional knowledge to support new learning. Teachers will have determined key areas for support and, where necessary, teachers may also provide other resources – a thesaurus, maps, other texts – to build prior knowledge. These questions are in addition to questions that are used to guide each section of text – see information about guided, shared and reciprocal reading in Chapter 6.

3. Linking to prior knowledge by using textual and visual supports in the text

This approach involves walking students through the text prior to reading. The teacher works through the text with the students, not reading the words but noticing and discussing the textual and visual supports. These include headings and subheadings, illustrations, diagrams, maps, charts and tables. While this may take a little time, it should be viewed as valuable instruction time because it provides a strong base on which students can build and link their new learning. It also gives the students a strategy that they can use themselves when they encounter a difficult text.

4. Teaching students to monitor their own comprehension

Students who struggle to comprehend rarely self-monitor and do not know to call on strategies that will help them overcome difficulties as they read. Self-monitoring is a practice that needs to be regularly and routinely reinforced in every lesson. Students will benefit from deliberate instruction on how to monitor what they are reading and how to recognise when they are not understanding what they are reading. This can be done through regular demonstrations in which teachers and students show and explain what

they are doing and why. It can also be done through repeated opportunities for students to practice 'fix-up' strategies that they will, over time, learn to use independently. Strategies and supports that assist students to fix up faulty comprehension include:

- making notes of difficult words and ideas for discussion during and after reading, using index cards, sticky notes or digital tools

- summarising the main points of the text they are reading, paragraph by paragraph (see example below)

- identifying parts of text that are problematic and will need clarifying as they read, using sticky notes

- using supports such as cue cards for visualisation (see example below)

- using supports to make inferences (see example below).

Teachers can provide supports such as graphic organisers that students can add to as they read. Graphic organisers are also useful in helping students to self-monitor and learn to take control over their own developing comprehension, but should never be used as worksheets that students are left to complete without purpose or discussion.

Summarising

Using a template, teachers and students can identify the important ideas in a text and record these as they read and discuss the text, section by section. Model how to write a summary statement and support the students to write one short summary statement for each of the important ideas.

Section	Main ideas	Summary statement
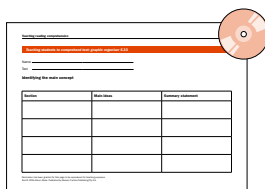
Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.33** to support this instruction.

Making inferences

Teachers provide explicit models of the use of a graphic organiser and work through one or two examples with the students before they continue to use the graphic organiser independently or in pairs. They may also record – what we did and what we thought about – as they infer. Students are then provided with scaffolded practice.
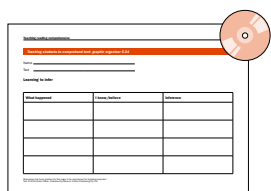
Refer to **Teaching students to comprehend text: graphic organiser 5.34** to support this instruction.

Focusing on quality questioning and discussion

For all students, and in particular those who find comprehension challenging, the quality and nature of the questioning and discussion they experience is critical to determining what students are actually retaining and understanding as they read. Questioning led by the teacher needs to discover:

- what the students understand
- where misunderstandings are occurring
- what students are doing when they do not understand
- the extent to which students are able to demonstrate and explain their own processing of text
- how students are progressing towards achieving the learning goals of the lesson
- what students know about their own understanding of the text.

It is equally important for teachers to deliberately move interactions away from straight question-and-answer routines and towards actual discussion about text and the strategies that students use to assist understanding during reading. As teachers focus closely on the effectiveness of their questions and the discussions that they generate, they can be wary of questioning where:

- not enough 'wait time' is provided to enable students to respond (research shows that increasing the pause from one to three seconds makes a marked difference to the quality of responses)
- questions are not clear, leading to confusion for students
- several questions are asked in quick succession without giving students time to respond to the first, leading to confusion for students
- teachers answer their own questions
- teachers' responses are evaluative ('Good', 'Right!', 'Yes') without providing support for students to take the next steps to build their understanding.

Teaching students how to ask questions of the text

This comprehension strategy is discussed in depth earlier in this chapter. When students are struggling to comprehend, asking questions of the text is difficult. If they do not monitor or understand fully what they are reading, they are not able to ask questions. The following activity can be used in a variety of ways to support student questioning of the texts they read.

Questioning the text

Divide the text into small sections and involve all students in asking questions at the conclusion of each section. You may find it necessary to include question and cause-and-effect prompts to help students to phrase their questions and to encourage them to ask a range of questions. Examples of prompts include:

- What, why, how, who, where, when?
- If … , then …
- Do you know …?
- I wonder …
- How could this happen?
- What would be a reason for this?
- What impact will this have?
- Why did the character think this?
- Why has the author told us this?

Increasing the time spent reading high-quality texts

For students who struggle, a great deal of time spent reading high-quality texts is essential. The match to reading level is very important. In addition to instructional lessons and daily partner reading (see also chapters 6 and 7), being read to, by an adult, twice daily provides increased opportunities for exposure to a wide range of texts, including high-quality picture books written for older students, as well as different kinds of factual texts and novels through which students can encounter new ideas, confront different points of view, see a narrative progressing, and develop empathy with characters, events, settings and plots. The more exposure to texts, the better.

Extending able readers

Students who are able to comprehend a wide range of texts will be able to integrate a range of comprehension strategies, according to the type of text they are reading and the level of text complexity. These students will likely be able to explain what they are doing as they comprehend and what they do when they realise that they do not comprehend. Effective programs for this group of learners will also seek to promote active and challenging engagement with text. There are a number of ways that this can be achieved. This section explores six of these. They are:

- supporting strategy use within increasingly complex texts
- deliberately integrating a range of comprehension strategies and reporting back on what was used, how and why

- student-generated previewing of texts

- student-development of graphic organisers

- challenging students with wide and diverse reading

- focusing on connections.

Supporting strategy use within increasingly complex texts

As this group of students reads increasingly widely and encounters increasingly complex texts, teaching will need to be responsive to assist the students to extend their self-monitoring strategies. Students may not be able to articulate the 'fix-up' strategies they need or use to comprehend difficult texts. Instruction tailored to the needs of these students will include:

- identifying the types of texts they find most difficult to read – this can be done by asking students themselves, and by monitoring their comprehension as they read a range of texts

- providing direct and deliberately planned instruction about strategies that would support their comprehension of specific texts

- peer teaching of strategies used in specific text

- ensuring that this instruction can be applied across the curriculum

- giving students responsibility for instructional reading by choosing texts themselves and holding discussions using a literature circle approach (see Chapter 6)

- involving students in setting their own learning goals and success criteria, self-assessing, monitoring and discussing their learning regularly both with their teachers and as part of peer learning and support.

Deliberately integrating a range of strategies and reporting back

Skilled readers draw on more than one strategy to make meaning from text. The number and combination of strategies they use will depend on the nature of the challenge they are facing as they read, the complexity of the text, the prior knowledge of the reader and the task or purpose for which they are reading. Encouraging students to describe the problem they are having as they read, and discuss the strategies they will use to improve their understanding, is an important way of supporting self-regulated learning. Through learning to integrate comprehension strategies students learn that they can use a range of strategies, in different combination, to help them become strong comprehenders.

Students learn to consider:

- What is the problem?

- What comprehension strategies could I use to help me?

- Why will I choose to use these?

- In what order will I use these?

- How will I know if these strategies are helping me to understand?

Student-generated previewing of texts

Students can work in pairs to take responsibility for providing a preview for the instructional lesson. The teacher will initially provide instruction on how to preview. However, as students take more responsibility for this, they can develop their own preview overview specific to the text type and purpose for which they are reading the text. For example, a group is reading historical fiction with a view to linking the events in the text to information resources on life in the seventeenth century. The preview designed and presented by the students contained key vocabulary, events and ideas to support links that they could make to information previously learnt.

Students develop graphic organisers and other reading responses

When students have previously completed teacher-generated graphic organisers and other reading responses in the course of comprehension instruction, they can be shown how to design their own tasks appropriate for the purpose of their reading. This allows the students to extend involvement and responsibility in their own learning as they work with the teacher to identify what will be most appropriate both to the purpose of the lesson, and for retrieving or organising the required information.

The form should reflect learning goals and can be used by the students to interpret text as they read, as well as at the conclusion of their reading. As students read to explore relationships within and between texts, they can develop a range of graphic organisers/reading responses to represent and record their learning.

Graphic organisers can also be developed to assist students in exploring the literal and figurative meanings of words and sentences, and to show relationships between characters and settings, between texts written by the same author and between content presented on the same topic through a variety of sources.

Challenging students with wide and diverse reading

Able readers need many opportunities to read widely, developing their understanding of texts written by a variety of authors, for a variety of purposes and in a variety of styles. As part of this program, developing a

book club for students is useful in encouraging students to read texts that they might not normally select. A book club regularly meets (perhaps every two weeks) to share and discuss a text that a group of students has read. The students share excerpts from the text, discuss the content and style in which the text was written and evaluate and share their responses to the text with others. Often the texts are selected based on an author study (students may each read a different text by the same author) or theme (students each read a different text on a similar theme). Texts can be interchanged among the members of the group. Several established teaching approaches such as questioning the author (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, & Kucan, 1997), author's chair (Graves, 1994), and literacy circles (Daniels, 1994; Roser & Martinez, 1995) can be incorporated or adapted within a book club approach as a way of challenging students towards wider and more diverse reading. See Chapter 7 for more information on these approaches.

Focusing on connections

Able readers can be encouraged to look for connections within a text – sentence to sentence connections, paragraph to paragraph connections, paragraph to illustration connections. If students are exposed to a variety of texts, including sophisticated picture books, they can explore examples of points of view, irony, symbolism and setting and discuss how these have been developed in text. From focusing on connections, students can see how major ideas, topics and themes can relate not only to their reading, but also to their writing.

Developing metacognitive awareness

All of the activities described above encourage students to develop a metacognitive awareness of the strategies that they can use to increase their reading comprehension. By modelling the use of comprehension strategies and by using metacognitive comprehension instruction (see Chapter 1), teachers can take every opportunity to develop students' awareness of what they are learning about how they comprehend texts. This happens most readily through high-quality dialogue between teacher and students, and between students.

When students take over the responsibility for monitoring their comprehension (see page 156), they are able to develop metacognitive awareness of their own understandings about comprehension, and they can provide support in the form of feedback and advice to each other.

Summary

Comprehension improves when teachers design and implement activities that support the understanding of texts that students will read in their class. Such instruction needs to occur regularly and is best conducted with small groups.

This chapter has focused on deliberately teaching students to use a range of comprehension strategies. These strategies may be used prior to reading, as reading is undertaken and at the conclusion of reading, depending on the purpose of the lesson and the type of text being read. On all occasions, teachers are encouraged to ensure that their students are actively involved in talking about the strategies they are drawing on to assist comprehension, explaining how they used a specific strategy as they read a section of text, modelling their use of the strategy, questioning others on their strategy use, using the think-aloud approach, asking for feedback on their strategy use, and providing pair feedback on observed or shared strategy use.

Comprehension instruction provides an opportunity to increase teacher awareness of the importance of the prompts they provide and the questions they ask to assist students to internalise what they are doing. Examples of prompts and questions include:

- *What strategies are you choosing to use here?*

- *How are you using them?*

- *When there is a difficult section of text, you may choose to use the … strategy.*

- *I suggest you …*

- *Have you thought of … ?*

- *Have you tried … ?*

- *What strategy do you think will assist you in this part of the text?*

- *How will you know if you are understanding as you read this part of the text?*

- *Look ahead to see what might help you with this next section.*

- *How are you going towards achieving your reading goal so far? How do you know?*

It is important to remember that the aim is independent, flexible and coordinated use of comprehension strategies. The degree of support required by individual students will vary. Not all students will need to be taught all of these strategies; some will need extended practice with one, others with another. Teachers provide this through deliberately planned metacognitive comprehension instruction based on the identified needs of their students and the feedback they receive as a result of instruction. The ultimate goal must be towards students knowing to use the strategies unassisted and automatically.

References and recommended reading

Anderson, R.C. & Pearson, P.D. (1984). 'A schema-theoretic view of basic processes in reading'. In P.D. Pearson (Ed.). *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 255–291). New York, NY: Longman.

Beck, I.L., McKeown, M.G., Hamilton, R.L., & Kucan, L. (1997). *Questioning the author: An approach for enhancing student engagement with text.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Collins-Block, C. (2004). *Teaching comprehension: The comprehension process approach.* Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc.

Collins-Block, C. & Pressley, M. (2002). *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Cornett, C. (2010). *Comprehension first: Inquiry into big ideas.* Scotsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway Publishers.

Cummins, S. (2013). *Close reading of informational texts: Assessment driven instruction in grades 3–8.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Daniels, H. (1994). *Literature circles: Voice and choice in the student-centered classroom.* York, ME: Stenhouse.

Davis, A.J. (2015). *Building comprehension strategies: For the primary years.* Melbourne, Vic: Eleanor Curtain Publishing

Davis, A.J. (2013). *Explorations Strategies for comprehension for informative texts.* Modules 1–5 and teacher notes. Melbourne, Vic: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.

Dowhower, S.L. (1999). Supporting a strategic stance in the classroom: A comprehension framework for helping teachers help students to be strategic. *The Reading Teacher, 52*(7), 672–688.

Duffy, G.G. (2003). *Explaining reading: A resource for teaching concepts, skills and strategies.* New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Duke, N.K. & Pearson, P.D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension. In A.E. Farstrup & S.J. Samuels (Eds). *What research has to say about reading instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 205–242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Farstrup. A.E. & Samuels, S.J. (Eds). (2011). *What research has to say about reading instruction* (4th ed.). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Lapp, D. (2011). What research says about intentional instruction. In A.E. Farstrup. & S.J. Samuels. (Eds). *What research has to say about reading instruction* (4th ed., pp. 359–378). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Graves, D. (1994). *A fresh look at writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hall, L.A., Burns, L.D., & Edwards, E.C. (2011). *Empowering struggling readers: Practices for the middle grades*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Ministry of Education. (2004). *Effective literacy practice years 1–4.* Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.

Ministry of Education (2006). *Effective literacy practice years 5-8*. Wellington, NZ: Learning Media.

O'Connor, R.E. & Vadasy, P.E. (Eds). (2011). *Handbook of reading interventions*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Ogle, D. (1986). K-W-L: A teaching model that develops action reading of expository text. *Reading Teacher, 40,* 564–570.

Pressley, M. (2006). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Pressley, M., Allington, R.L., Wharton-McDonald, R., Collins-Block, C., & Morrow, L. (2001). *Learning to read: Lessons from exemplary first grade classrooms*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Roser, N. & Martinez, M. (Eds). (1995). *Book talk and beyond: Children and teachers respond to literature*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Trabasso, T. & Bouchard, E. (2002). Teaching readers how to comprehend text strategically. In C. Block & M. Pressley (Eds). *Comprehension instruction: Research-based best practices* (pp. 176–200). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.