

The Road to Better Comprehension



Growing as a reader is a journey that continues long after your child has learned to recognize letters and sound out words. He'll need strategies like the ones in this guide to understand and enjoy all kinds of reading material. Buckle up, and try these ideas for better comprehension!

Get ready for the trip



Before you travel to a new place, researching what you'll see helps you appreciate it even more. Getting ready to read a new book works

the same way! Help your youngster tap into what he knows about a topic with this idea.

In a journal, he could create an entry for each book before he reads it. He can divide the page into columns labeled "I know" and "I wonder." In column one, he could write what he already knows about the topic ("Fruits have seeds inside, and vegetables don't"). In column two, he might write, "Are tomatoes and avocados fruits or vegetables?"

As your child reads, suggest that he check off each "I wonder" item that he learns. Invite him to share his new knowledge with you.

Look at the scenery

Book illustrators use details from the text to decide what the pictures should look like. Good readers do the same thing—except they imagine the illustrations in their minds. This helps them to read more actively. Here's how to get your youngster in the habit of visualizing while she reads.

Have her read a few pages of a book aloud. Now each of you can draw what you "saw" and compare your sketches. How are they similar and different? Maybe you both drew the main character with a surprised expression, for example. Or perhaps you each pictured the setting differently.

Now finish reading the chapter or book, and draw new pictures. How did your mental images change from the first picture?



Reading critically: Find landmarks

Deciding whether information is accurate is an important comprehension skill. Help your youngster learn to spot "landmarks" in a book or an article that suggest it's reliable.



Names and numbers. Encourage your child to look for quotes attributed to real people or groups.

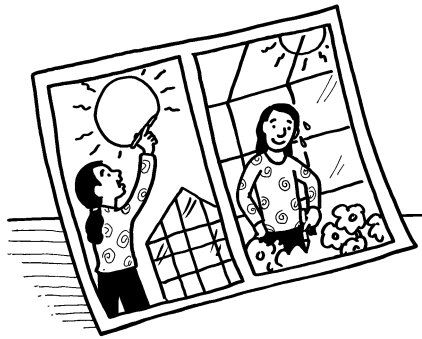
Also, a reliable source will often include numbers or percentages. On the other hand, vague statements ("Most people think that...,"

"Everyone agrees that...") are less apt to be trustworthy. *Note:* Your youngster should always check names and statistics against other sources.

Spelling and grammar. Does your child see errors? That's a tip-off that the information might not be solid. Most reliable sources have proofreaders who check for mistakes before a book or an article is published.

Tone and style. Suggest that your youngster keep an eye out for outrageous claims and the overuse of adjectives and exclamation points. *Example:* "The humongous, mysterious cloud hovered over the small town!!!" If something sounds unrealistic or exaggerated, it probably is.

Stop for cause and effect



Why are greenhouses warm? Why is the main character mean to her classmates? Suggest that your child draw comics to explore cause and effect—and gain a deeper understanding of a book.

Have her draw two frames for a comic. She can illustrate a cause in the first frame and an effect in the second. If she's reading about greenhouses, she might draw the sun shining through the glass in the "cause" frame. Then she could think, "What did the book say about the sun's effect on a greenhouse?" In the

"effect" frame, she might draw a picture showing thermal energy trapped inside a greenhouse.

Encourage her to create a new comic for each cause and effect she reads about. She can staple them together to make a booklet—and see a pattern of causes and effects.

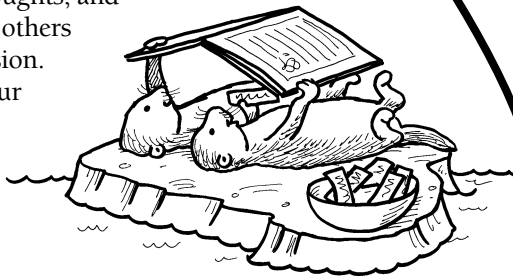
What's around the bend?

Authors don't always come right out and explain what's happening in a book. Sometimes your child will need to *infer*, or read between the lines. Practice with this guessing game.

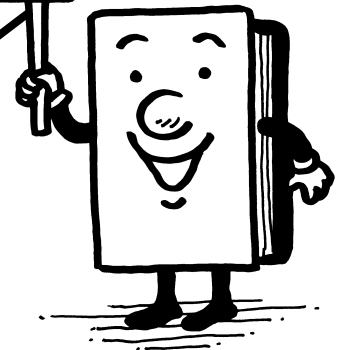
Secretly think of a situation, and give clues to help your youngster infer what's going on. *Example:* "My eyes are itchy. I keep sneezing. There's cat hair on my jacket. What's going on?" Your child might infer that you're having an allergic reaction to a cat. Next, he can give you clues about a scenario. ("I'm flying down the sidewalk. I push the pedals with my feet. What am I doing?") You could infer that he's riding his bike.

Talking about your "trip"

Sharing opinions, thoughts, and ideas about a book with others strengthens comprehension. Read the same book your child reads, or suggest that she and a friend read the same book, then try this.



On separate slips of paper, each person writes questions that can't be answered just by looking in the book. *Example:* "What would you say to the main character if you met him in real life?" Mix up the slips in a bowl, and take turns drawing a slip and discussing the question. You might have each person explain her answer and use details from the book to back it up.



Time for a tune-up

Strong readers monitor their understanding and use strategies to get back on track if something doesn't make sense. If your child gets confused while reading, he can try these ideas.

Read it aloud. Saying and hearing the words out loud may trigger an "aha" moment. If your youngster is in a situation where he can't read aloud, he could whisper or mouth the words.

Slow down. Reading too fast can make things hard to understand. Have your child go back and read a difficult part slowly, pausing at the end of each sentence to let it sink in.

Use graphics. Looking at pictures, diagrams, graphs, and fact boxes will give clues to the meaning of the text. He might even draw his own graphic to demonstrate a concept.

Make a U-turn. Encourage your youngster to skip ahead to the next part. Maybe it will include information that helps him understand the big picture. Then, he can go back and reread the part that didn't make sense before.