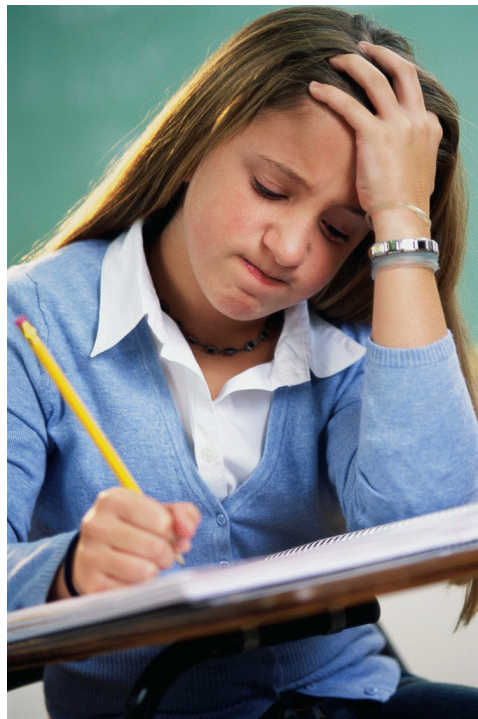


I Read It,



**But I Don't
Understand It.**



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I Read It, But I Don't Understand It

Educators often face upper elementary children who struggle with reading comprehension. Although many of these students performed well in reading through third grade, reading in the fourth grade brings new challenges as the material becomes more complex and comprehension struggles surface. As children begin reading more complex material, they are required to use more cognitive resources, which were not required in lower elementary grades, where they focused more on decoding. As teachers face these struggling students, teachers must determine the best ways to teach reading comprehension.

Problems beginning in the 4th grade:

1. Decoding is no longer the focus.
2. Material is more complex.
3. Silent reading replaces oral reading.
4. Teachers assume students comprehend.

What is Comprehension?

Comprehension is a complex, cognitive process that engages students through their interaction with the text (NRP). Students must think, relate, apply, and connect to the text they are reading.

Assessing their Comprehension

Assess the areas where your students are weak and focus on those areas, a few at a time.

1. Listen to their reading. If they struggle orally, it is often an indicator that they will have comprehension problems. (Decoding issues)
2. What do I look for? (Notice Bloom's Taxonomy)
 - a. Do they understand facts? (Recognize and recall facts, including the main idea)
 - b. Can they reorganize information? (Classify, categorize, and summarize)
 - c. Can they infer? (Interpreting and predicting)
 - d. Can they evaluate the material? (Judging—is this real or appropriate?)
 - e. Do they think critically? (Question motives of characters; identify feelings, express opinions?)
 - f. Do they know vocabulary words? (Knowledge)
 - g. Can they recall the story? (Understanding)
 - h. Can they gain the information needed to solve a problem? (Application)
 - i. Can they analyze the text and outline arguments? (Analysis)
 - j. Can they integrate the main idea across two or more passages? (Synthesis)
 - k. Can they critique the conclusions in a text and offer alternatives? (Evaluation)
 - l. Watch their affect. Are they interested?
 - m. Do they use their finger to follow along while reading silently or orally?
 - n. Does the student use context clues to recognize/attempt new words? (Venn, 2000; Miller, Linn, and Gronlund, 2009)

Reading comprehension must be taught, just like other subjects. Comprehension strategies can be categorized into two categories: teacher-directed strategies and student-directed strategies.

Teacher-Directed Strategies for Reading Comprehension

1. Students may need help in word recognition and decoding—go back to the basics.
2. Work on fluency.
 - a. Choral reading
 - b. Repeated reading
 - c. Poetry
3. Vocabulary—a weak vocabulary can prevent a student from understanding passages. Immerse your students in good vocabulary.
 - a. Display a Word wall (variation: thematic word wall)
 - b. Encourage “sightings” outside of the classroom.
 - c. Use your own challenging vocabulary.
 - d. Teach the use of context clues.
 - e. Use Brainteasers.
 - f. Use idioms, clichés, and puns (*Amelia Bedelia; The Phantom Tollbooth*)
4. Graphic organizers—display connections between ideas and concepts and help improve comprehension. Instead of using graphic organizers for writing, use them in reading for comprehension.
 - a. Concept Map
 1. Create their own
 2. Correct the map*
 3. Complete the map
 - b. Venn diagram
 - c. Problem/solution outline
 - d. KWL
 - e. Cause and Effect Chart
 - f. Sense Chart
 - g. Word Web
5. Fact and Opinion
6. Cause and Effect
7. Factual Recall
8. Summarizing—sentence strips for each paragraph in subject matter texts. Used for sequencing too.
9. Predicting
10. Inference
11. Sequencing
12. Drawing Conclusions
13. Students generate questions from text
14. Teach strategies across the curriculum.
15. Read to your students every day.

**Research suggests that this concept map strategy tends to have higher results than creating or completing a map. (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002).*

Ultimately, the goal is to transfer the strategies to the students so they use those strategies while reading on their own.

Student-Directed Strategies for Reading Comprehension

1. Self-monitoring
 - a. Self question. Do I understand what I just read?
 - b. Silently summarize.
 - c. Take notes.
 - d. Highlight important points and unfamiliar vocabulary.
 - e. Use mental imagery. (senses and emotions)
 - f. Visual imagery- Do I see what this story is about? Can I visualize the setting and events?
 - g. Make connections.
2. Apply fix-up strategies
 - a. Reread
 - b. Place a finger under difficult parts. (This is different than using it as a guide.)
 - c. Subvocalize (Use hand cupped to the ear.)
 - d. Backup-locate pages where the tricky part started or where you got lost.
 - e. Use visual cues. (pictures)

How Do I Teach It?

1. Scaffolding-teach a strategy then slowly withdraw assistance and provide guidance instead. The teacher becomes the facilitator.
 - a. Think aloud
 - b. Modeling/Demonstrating-tell them what to do—give hints along the way.
 - c. Ask them what to do next? What am I thinking?
 - d. Facilitate and monitor.
2. Increased Communication (Conversation-student to student and student to teacher)

“Hearing ideas discussed orally from another’s point of view increases understanding, memory, and monitoring of one’s own thinking” (Ketch, 2005, p. 9).

“Much of what I know, I know because I have questioned and thought about ideas with others, tried things out, modified stances, talked with colleagues. Always, conversations play a major role in my thinking, learning, teaching, and changing. So it is with all learners. I would argue that when no conversations are going on, as in whole class ‘skill and drill,’ it’s not learning that’s taking place but rather rote memorization” (Routman, 2000, p. xxxvi as cited in Ketch, 2005).

- a. Paired reading
- b. choral reading
- c. multi-level student reading
- d. think-pair-share

Websites for free downloadable graphic organizers:

www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer
This is the Houghton Mifflin website

www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lrlgrorg.htm
This is the North Central Regional Educational Library

www.readingquest.org

To make concept maps, you can download this for free.
www.cmap.ihmc.us

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