



Helping Your Child With Comprehension

Connecting:

When good readers read, they think about and relate their own experiences and knowledge to the story or text that they are reading. They connect the text to their own lives.

As you read to your child...

1. Encourage him to think about how the events in the story are similar to things he has experienced in his own life.
2. Stop reading every now and then to allow your child to share with you the connections that he is making. He should say things like, "This part reminds me of _____."
3. Share your own connections, too, as you read to your child.
4. Encourage your child to think about how his own experiences help him to better understand how the characters in the story feel.
5. After reading and connecting together, ask your child to tell you how his connections have helped him to better understand and remember the story.
6. Good readers also connect what they are reading to other texts that they have previously read. Ask, "How is this story like the story we read yesterday?"

Questioning:

When good readers read, they ask themselves questions. They ask questions before they start reading, while they are reading, and even after they have read. These questions, or wonderings, help keep the reader focused on the meaning of what they are reading. Here are some ways that you can help your child learn to ask questions when he reads.

1. When you read with your child each night, ask him to tell you what he wonders about the book before he begins reading it. Be sure to share your wonderings, too. You might wonder about the title of the book, the illustration on the cover, what the book will be about, and where the story is taking place. You are modeling for your child how good readers think about the book before they read it.
2. While you are reading with your child, be sure to stop periodically to ask questions and wonder. If the book gets complicated, say, "I'm not sure that I understand this part. I want to go back and read this part again." If the plot gets interesting, say, "I wonder why (the character) did that." Or say, "I wonder what will happen next." Discuss your ideas with your child. You are modeling for your child how good readers think while reading.
3. After you have finished reading, ask your child to tell you what he is still wondering about. Share your wonderings, too. You might say, "I wonder why (the character) decided to do that." Or you might say, "I wonder what (the character) will do now." You are modeling for your child how good readers think about what they have read after they have finished reading.

Good readers sometimes find answers to their questions directly stated in the book. Other times they can infer the answers to their questions by finding clues in the book. At other times, good readers may find answers to their questions from their own knowledge, by talking with others, or by using reference materials. Sometimes, however, good readers read books that leave them wondering.

Visualizing:

When good readers read, they make pictures in their minds of what they are reading. A good reader creates mental images of the characters, setting, and actions taking place in the story. These mental images help the reader better understand and remember what he reads. Many struggling readers do not visualize what they are reading. Here are some ways that you can help your child learn to visualize what he reads:

1. When you are reading together and come across a particularly descriptive passage, describe what you see in your mind as you read. For example, read these sentences: The air was warm and fragrant with the perfume of flowers. There were roses of various colors all across the field. You might say to your child, "I am picturing some red, pink and white roses covering a huge patch of land that stretches as far as I can see." Ask your child to describe the mental images that he has as he listens to you read.
2. Have your child imagine that he is involved in a particular activity and describe it with detail. For example: playing a soccer game, flying a kite, riding a roller coaster, walking barefoot along the beach.
3. As your child reads to you, stop periodically to have him describe the pictures he is forming in his mind. (Be sure to share your mental images, too.) He might want to sketch his mental images on some sticky notes and place them by the descriptive passages in the book or article.
4. Read poetry to your child and talk about your mental images. Shel Silverstein, and Jack Prelutsky are wonderful authors of several poetry books for children. You might ask, "What do you hear, smell, see, taste and feel as you listen to this poem?"
5. Ask your child to talk about how visualizing helps him better understand, enjoy, and relate to what he reads. Share your thinking with your child, too.

Inferring:

Good readers know that we have two kinds of information: information that we read and information in our brains. We often have to use both kinds of information in order to gain meaning from what we read. This is called inferring.

Good readers take clues from the text and combine it with information from their heads to better understand what they read. As adults, we often call this "reading between the lines." Inferring is not simply guessing. Instead, it is using clues within the text to understand what we are reading. Here are some things that you can do to help your child develop this strategy.

1. Play Prove It!

To help your child better understand the concept of inferring, make up a short story like the one below. Your story should give several hints about what is happening without stating it explicitly. Read or tell the story to your child, and then have him infer what is happening. After your child infers what is happening, say, "Prove it!" See if your child can tell you at least three clues from your story that helped him infer what was happening.

A. The little girl stopmed into her bedroom, slammed the door, and screamed as loudly as she could.

B. He swung the bat as hard as he could and watched the ball soar toward the stands. He quickly ran around the bases and slid into home plate as the crowd stood and cheered.

C. She put on two pairs of socks, buttoned up her heavy coat, slipped on her mittens, and covered her ears with her hat.

D. His lip started to quiver, and his nose started to drip. Slowly, he reached up to wipe the tears away from his eyes. Oh, what a day it had been!

E. Soon the doorbell rang, and each child eagerly ran in holding a special present for Jamie. They played games with balloons, ate cake and ice cream, and watched Jamie unwrap her gifts.

Remember to have your child tell you the clues that helped hin figure out what was happening. Tell your child that good readers often have to infer how a character is feeling or what is happening in a story because authors don't always state things directly.

2. Go to the library and check out riddle books to read with your child. As you solve each riddle together, go back into the text of the riddle and see what clues helped to point you to the right answer.

Determining Importance:

As we help our children learn about the strategy of determining importance, we focus primarily on non-fiction texts. We begin by helping our children learn about the differences between fiction and nonfiction texts. We also help them learn about the many types of non-fiction conventions that are used in non-fiction texts to signal importance to the reader.

These non-fiction conventions include photographs with captions, diagrams with labels, subheadings, types of print (italics, bold), maps, graphs, indexes, tables of contents, glossaries, etc. Here are some ways that you can support your child in learning how to determine importance.

1. Choose two books to read to your child, one fiction, and one non-fiction. For example, you may want to read the fictional book *Stellaluna*, and then read a portion of a non-fiction book about bats. After reading both books, discuss with your child the differences between the two types of books. Point out these things when discussing the fiction book: You read it from beginning to end, it tells a story, the story has a beginning, middle and ending to it, the bat in the story talks, so it isn't a true story, it has drawings instead of photographs, etc.

Point out these things when discussing the non-fiction book: You don't have to start reading at the beginning of the book, it has a table of contents and index to help you locate specific information that you are wanting to learn, it has true information in it, it has subtitles and subheadings, it has photographs with captions instead of drawings, it has pictures with labels, it has bolded words, etc.

2. Go on a non-fiction Conventions Hunt with your child. Use either your child's collection on non-fiction books and magazines or go to the non-fiction section of your public library.

See how quickly both of you can find the following conventions in a book or magazine: table of contents, photograph with caption, picture or diagram with labels, a subheading, a bolded word, a glossary, an index, a comparison, and a map. As you find each of these things, discuss with your child how they help you when you read non-fiction.

3. When helping your child learn about determining importance with fiction books, talk with him about themes. As you read fiction books to and with your child, say, "What do you think the author wanted us to learn from this book? Why do you think the author wrote this story? What is the theme of this book?"

Be sure to share your ideas with your child, too. For example, if you read the *Rainbow Fish*, you might say, "I think the author wanted us to learn about sharing. Sharing is a major theme in this story."

Synthesize Information:

As a good reader reads, his thinking grows and changes with each little bit that he reads. In his mind, the meaning of the story grows bigger and bigger.

Synthesizing is like doing a Jigsaw puzzle. The reader puts many pieces of information together to form a new whole picture. Here is an activity that you can do to help your child learn to synthesize as he reads.

1. Choose a book to share with your child. Books that can be read in one sitting and have a moral or teach a clear lesson might work best as you begin synthesizing.
2. Before reading the book, read the title and look at the cover with your child. Say, "I am thinking that this book will be about _____."
(Your prediction may end up not being correct. That is absolutely fine! We want your child to know that our thinking often changes with each piece of new information we read.)
3. Read a few pages, and when your thinking has grown a bit, stop and say, "Now I am thinking that the book is mostly about _____."
4. Read a few more pages, and when your thinking has grown a bit more, stop and say, "Now I am thinking that the book is really about _____."
5. Continue reading and sharing your thinking after every few pages until you have finished the book. Then say, "Now I am thinking that the whole book was really about _____." You might fill in the blank with the moral of the story, the major theme of the story, or what the author wanted you to learn from the book. After demonstrating this process for your child several times over a period of several evenings, you can begin to invite your child to synthesize with you each time you stop your reading. Eventually, you can encourage your child to use this process as he reads to you.