

## Raising Readers: Tips for Parents



## Comprehension: Fiction Texts

Elish-Piper, L. (2010). Understanding reading comprehension: Information and ideas for parents about reading comprehension. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 38(3), 49-52.

Comprehension, or understanding, is the goal of all reading. Parents may wonder what they can do to help their children understand stories, textbooks and other texts they read in and out of school. This column describes key aspects of comprehension for fiction texts such as stories. The column concludes with practical suggestions for parents to use at home to foster their children's reading comprehension.

When reading fiction texts, readers use the key elements of stories to make sense of what they read. These elements are characters, setting, problem, events and solution. While reading fiction, students look for these key elements and anticipate that the story will follow the common patterns of all stories. Students also use their background knowledge to fill in gaps in what they read.

In addition, they make connections by relating what they read to their own experiences and ideas as well as to other texts they have read. For example, if students are reading a fairy tale, they are more likely to comprehend the text if they have a good understanding of the structure and elements of a fairy tale. In addition, if they have read fairy tales before, students are able to use their prior knowledge about fairy tales to make sense of the new text they are reading.



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# What can parents do to foster reading comprehension of fiction texts?

Here are 10 easy yet effective activities parents can do to help their children build their reading comprehension of fiction texts.

1. Read to and with your child on a daily basis. Encourage children to read a wide variety of texts. Set aside 15 minutes daily for reading. You can read aloud to your child; you can partner read where each of you reads a sentence, paragraph or page; or your child can read independently. Daily reading time promotes reading development in all areas—including comprehension.
2. When reading a story with your child, talk about it afterward. Discuss what happened at the beginning, middle and end of the story. If your child is uncertain, go back and reread to determine what happened in that part of the story.
3. Help your child learn to identify the main character in a story. While reading a story with your child, ask, “Who is the story about?” “How do you know?” If your child is uncertain, go back and reread to identify the main character in the story.
4. Help your child learn to identify the setting in stories. While reading with your child, ask, “Where and when does this story take place?” “How do you know?” If your child is not able to identify the setting, go back and reread the story to point out and discuss the setting.
5. Help your child understand the plot of stories by using the “Somebody, wanted, but, so...” strategy. This strategy focuses on the main character, the character’s goal, the problem in the story and the solution to the problem. After reading a story, ask your child to respond to these prompts orally:
  - Who is the important SOMEBODY in the story?
  - They WANTED...what?
  - BUT, what problem did they have?
  - SO, what happened in the end?
6. Children can improve their comprehension by responding to the stories they read. Ask your child response questions such as:
  - What would you do if you were the character in the story? Why?
  - How would you feel if that happened to you?
  - Does the story remind you of anything that has happened to you? What?
  - Does the story remind you of another story or movie? Tell me about it.
7. Good readers make predictions about what will happen in the text as they are reading. You can help your child make predictions when reading together by stopping near the middle of a story and asking, “What do you think will happen next and why?” Read to the end of the story together to see if the prediction was correct. The goal with predictions is not to always be correct but to think while reading.
8. Good readers get ready for reading before beginning to read a story. Before reading with your child, have them look at title and cover illustration. Ask your child, “What do you think the story will be about and why?”
9. Use open-ended questions to encourage your child to think about the story you have read together.
  - What was your favorite part of the story? Why?
  - Which character did you like the most? The least? Why?
  - Did you like the ending of the story? Why or why not? If you didn’t like the ending, what would be a better ending?
  - Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?
10. Ask your child to rate the book on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Have him or her provide reasons for the rating. Discuss the types of books your child enjoys reading so you can select good books for at-home reading in the future.

**We’re here to help**

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