

Comprehension Strategies

Introduction

The purpose of reading is comprehension, that is, to have the ability to gather meaning from the printed page. Although much of the attention and debate in reading focuses on word recognition, the problems related to reading comprehension are more difficult to solve. Comprehension skills do not automatically evolve after word recognition skills have developed. Students need to learn strategies to help them become active readers who understand the text.

Vocabulary Instruction

Vocabulary knowledge requires the student not only to recognise the word but also to apply it appropriately in context. Instruction in vocabulary leads to gains in comprehension. The methods must be appropriate for the age and ability of the reader. Vocabulary can be learned incidentally in the context of storybook reading or by listening to others. The instructional procedure of teaching vocabulary before reading a text is helpful.

As readers try to comprehend the material they read, they must bridge the gap between the information presented in the written text and the knowledge they possess. Reading comprehension thus involves thinking. The reader's background knowledge, interest and the reading situation affect comprehension of the material.

Reading comprehension depends on what the reader brings to the written material.

Reading comprehension depends on the reader's experience, knowledge of language and recognition of syntactic structure as well as on the redundancy of the printed passage. To appreciate the importance of the reader's knowledge in reading comprehension, read the following illustration.

A newspaper is better than a magazine and on a sea-shore is a better place than a street. At first it is better to run than to walk. Also you may have to try several times. It takes some skill but it's easy to learn. Even young students can enjoy it. Once successful, complications are minimal. Birds seldom get too close. One needs lots of room. Rain soaks in very fast. Too many people doing the same thing can also cause problems. If there are no complications, it can be very peaceful. A rock will serve as an anchor. If things break loose from it, however, you will not get a second chance.

As a mature reader you are able to understand every word of this paragraph, yet you did not understand the passage and cannot explain what it is about. The reason you had difficulty is that you did not have the appropriate background knowledge to bring to the printed text.

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The passage above is about kites.

Reading Comprehension is a Thinking Process.

The key to teaching from this perspective is to guide students to set up their own questions and purposes for reading. Students then read to solve problems that they have devised for themselves. Students can be encouraged first to guess what will happen next in the story and then to read to determine the accuracy of those predictions.

Reading comprehension requires active interaction with the text.

Readers must be active participants interacting with the text material. They must actively combine their existing knowledge with the new information of the printed text. There is evidence that good readers generally do not read every word of a passage, instead they sample certain words to determine the meaning and skip many others. They go back and read every word only when they encounter something unexpected.

Comprehension Activities Before, During and After Reading.

Before reading a story teachers should motivate and interest students in the reading selection, activate background knowledge and have them predict what the story will be about.

Before Reading

- Establish a purpose for reading
- Review vocabulary
- Build background knowledge
- Relate background knowledge and information to the story
- Encourage students to predict what the story is about
- Discuss the author if such knowledge helps to set up the story

During reading the teacher should direct the student's attention to the difficult or subtle dimensions of the story, anticipate difficult words and ideas and talk about problems and solutions.

During Reading

- Direct attention to difficult or subtle dimensions of the text
- Point out difficult words and ideas.
- Ask students to identify problems and solutions
- Encourage silent reading
- Encourage students to monitor their own comprehension while reading
- Insert author information in the story

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After Reading comprehension strategies can include having the readers summarise the story, talk about what they liked and what they wished had been different in the story, create graphic organisers and talk about the characters in the story.

After Reading

- Ask students to retell or summarise the story
- Create graphic organisers (webs, cause and effect charts, outlines)
- Put pictures of story events in order
- Link background information
- Generate questions for other students
- Have students write their own reactions to stories and factual material

Two Broad types of Tests

Narrative materials and Expository materials.

Narratives include stories, usually fiction with characters, a plot, and a sequence of events that happen during the story. Students need to know the features of narrative stories. Expository materials include informational materials eg. History, Geography and these are likely to replace more and more narrative texts as a student moves up through the grades. As a result a heavy emphasis is placed on reading to obtain information and is based on presumed proficiency in reading. These content books are also generally written above the grade level in which they are used. Content area teachers often assume that students have adequate reading ability and they do not teach reading skills. Teachers can help students read content books by making the reading meaningful and connecting it to other material that the students have covered. Teachers can also introduce difficult or technical words before reading the text and alert students to monitor for comprehension as they are reading.

Strategies for Developing Comprehension

- Using graded reading schemes where books increase in difficulty in vocabulary, story content and skill development.
- Developing vocabulary, word meaning and language through reading will also develop comprehension.

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The K-W-L strategy

The **K-W-L strategy** represents three questions in three steps of a lesson.

K-What I Know: Students think of and state all they know on a subject. A group of students can pool their knowledge. In this initial stage, students participate in **brainstorming**. The goal is to spark interest in the subject based on **prior knowledge** and **experiences**. Students may find the brainstorming process difficult at first; if so, model the process several times. The ultimate goal is to move students to independence in this task. They should be able to reflect upon prior knowledge before reading a text without the intervention of the teacher.

W-What I want to find out:

This stage builds on the first. What is it that catches the students' interest and curiosity from the brainstorming in the K stage? Each student **thinks of** and **writes** on a sheet of paper what he/she wants to or **expects to learn** from the reading. The goal should be to **turn these into questions** for individuals as well as the group. Finally, the **questions should be converted into purposes** for reading (at least the purpose should be to answer the questions). Students can then compare their answers to this question.

L-What I learned: Students **read the lesson silently** and **write** what they have learned from the reading. Answers to this question can be shared by the group.

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KWL Strategy

<i>What I know</i>	<i>What I want to find out</i>	<i>What I have learned</i>

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Visual Organisers

For global thinkers, visual organisers are a brain compatible way of improving reading comprehension. Story maps and character maps help them to get the big picture.

Story Map

The more closely a story fits an expected, familiar structure, the easier it is for readers to grasp and remember the most important ideas. Before discussing the elements of a story, chart them on a story map. Add spokes to the various shapes and invite students to contribute details about each element.

Character Maps

Character maps are another way to visually organise important information about a story. Use a separate character map for each major character. Add spokes and have students contribute the details during a class discussion. Once you have modelled the use of both charts, students might enjoy working with partners to complete charts for stories they read.

Map a Story

Drawing a map that captures events in a story is a useful way of summarising information. Some stories lend themselves to this strategy more than others. Students require several demonstrations of the process before being asked to complete the task independently.

- Map events in the story.
- Maps should show important parts of the setting and trace the movement of the main characters.
- Students can retell the story from their map.

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Mapping

When the student has found the information he has been looking for, he needs to organise it so that you can use it.

Sue's class was writing plays. Sue's group decided to set theirs in the Middle Ages. They needed background information that they could refer to easily. Using the passage below, they drew a map.

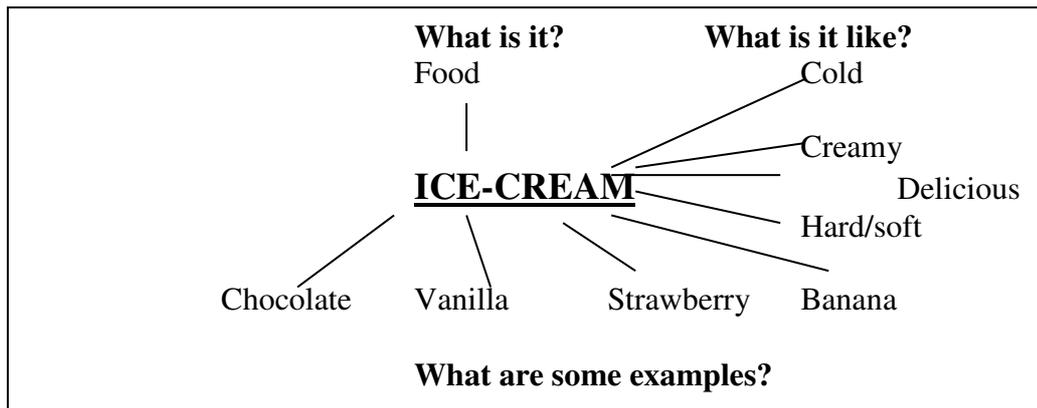
Society was very different in the Middle Ages. Most people were peasants who farmed the land. Each family would have strips of land on which to grow their crops. The land was rented from the Lord's estate. Peasant farmers used a three year cycle to plant their crops. One year a strip of land would grow wheat, the next year oats and the third year nothing so that the soil could rest.

The lords who owned the land were either powerful clergy or members of the nobility. The clergy prayed for everybody and the nobility were professional soldiers who defended everyone if there was a war. Women were important in the villages. They looked after the children, grew vegetables, kept poultry, made butter and cheese and spin wool.

Word webs

Word webs-A word web is a type of graphic organiser, a strategy for helping build vocabulary and making information easier to understand and learn. A word web for ice-cream might follow something like the following:

'What is it?' 'What is it like?' 'What are some examples?'



Comprehension Strategies

Sketching My Way Through the Text (Hoyt 2002)

Forming mental images when we are reading is vital to comprehension. Sketching supports learning by giving students another way of understanding and interpreting textual information. To ensure that students understand the role that sketching can play in promoting reading comprehension, it should be introduced through teacher modelling.

1.	<i>When reading a passage from a text, stop frequently to 'think aloud' about the information.</i>
2.	<i>Make a quick sketch on the board showing what has been learned. Use stick figures, draw arrows and use labels.</i>
3.	<i>If the text is linear, showing the passage of time, draw arrows and have the sketches run horizontally. This works well for a historical account or a description of a life cycle.</i>
4.	<i>If the text shows a cycle such as evaporation and precipitation, then the drawings should form a circle connected by arrows.</i>
5.	<i>If the text is about an animal and has sections about habitat, eating habits and family groupings, the sketches could take the form of a graphic organiser such as a web.</i>
6.	<i>When the student becomes familiar with the strategy, invite them to share the responsibility for the sketches.</i>
7.	<i>Gradually hand over responsibility to the students for sketching their way through a text. Read short sections of the text aloud. Ask the students to form their own mental pictures and then to draw sketches. Discuss and make comparisons. Stress that there is no single correct image, but most details should overlap.</i>

Oral reading is particularly effective for reinforcing images. The teacher or a student reads a segment aloud. Others listen and then draw a sketch.

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Constructing Meaning while Reading

Story Structure

The **Three Star Map** (Hoyt 1999) provides a simple framework for introducing students to the idea of story structure (beginning, middle and end). Students may choose to draw, instead of writing, when completing the map.

Story Scaffold helps students to understand how the events in a story are linked to form a causal chain.

The **story frame** provides more detailed information about story structure (character, setting, problem, action, out-come).

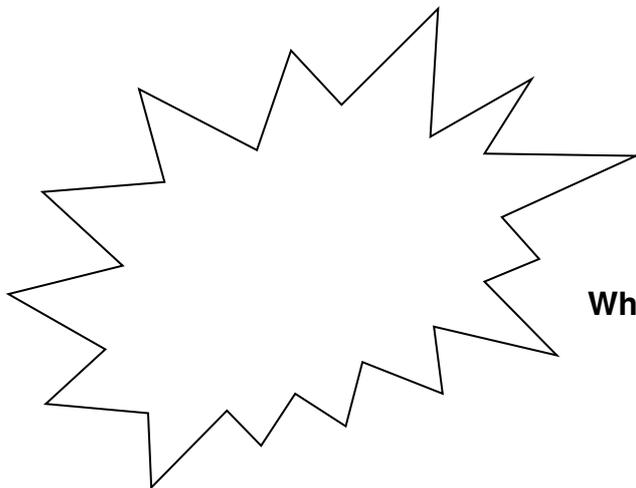
- Introduce these by having students draw pictures to represent the various elements on the frame
- Use a familiar story initially. Support students by engaging them in discussion before they begin to work independently.
- Story frames can also be used to help students as they write story reviews.

Comprehension Strategies

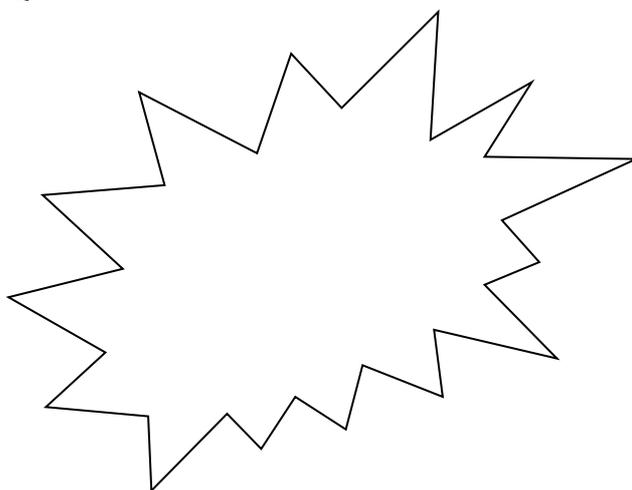
Three Star Map

Name of Student	Date	
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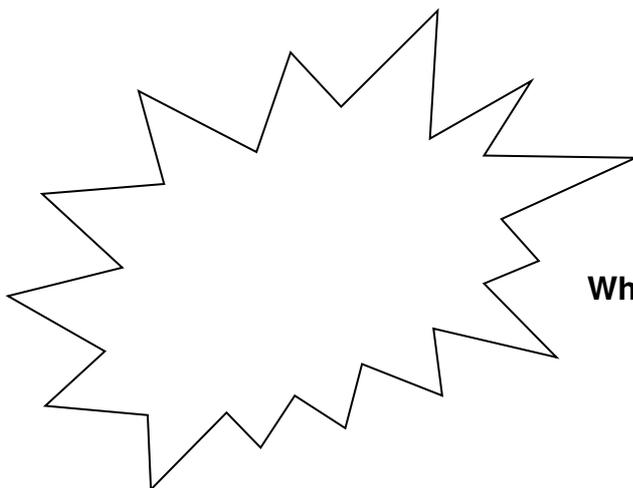
What happened first?



What was the story mostly about?



What happened in the end?



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Story Scaffold

Name of Student	Date
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Title of story	Author
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The Story begins when

The problem is

The next thing that happens

Then

After that

In the end

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My Story Frame

<p>Name of Student Date Title of Story I think this story is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fair• Good• Excellent	<p>Characters</p>
<p>Setting</p>	<p>Problem</p>
<p>Action</p>	<p>Outcome</p>

Comprehension Strategies

Story Detectives

- Using the predictions handout, use it to **prepare a list of predictions** for the story. You will be asking students to respond to your predictions based on what they learn from the title, chapter titles, and /or pictures.
Some of your predictions should be **accurate, others highly improbable, and others somewhere in between.**
- Divide the class into **small groups**.
- Have students **read the title** of the story and based on the title, **predict what events might occur**. Or have them browse through the story and make predictions based on the chapter titles.
- **Give each student/group a copy of the predictions** you have completed. Help them to respond to each prediction by checking **YES** they think the event will happen, **NO** they don't think it will happen, or **MAYBE** they think it may possibly happen. Tell the students to be prepared to give reasons for their choices.
- Get feedback from all of the group and collate responses using an overhead transparency or wall chart.
- Keep the predictions on display as the story is read. Check regularly to see how accurate the predictions were.

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Predictions

Name:.....

For: (Story title)

Prediction	Yes	No	Maybe
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Walk Through Strategy (Mc Kenna 2002)

This **pre-reading strategy** works particularly well with informational text.

The teacher discusses the organisation of the selection page by page as the students follow in their own copies. In this way they are provided with an outline of the selection.

1.	Hold up a copy of the text as you discuss it. The students will then be able to look back and forth from your copy to theirs so that they can tell exactly what you are describing.
2.	Examine and discuss the title and make predictions .
3.	Examine and discuss the subheadings .
4.	Analyse visual aids (pictures, graphs, maps)
5.	Read and discuss the first paragraph
6.	Read and discuss the last paragraph
7.	Read and discuss post reading questions

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Word Predictions

1. Before the reading, examine the **title** and take a walk through the **pictures** of the book being read.
2. Ask the students to **generate a list of words** they think might be found in the reading to follow.
3. Have them list all the words.
4. **As the selection is being read**, stop at key points to **monitor** whether or not their **predicted words have appeared**. This encourages the students not only to verify which words have been seen but also to keep modifying and adjusting their thinking to meet the needs of a changing story line (Hoyt, 1998).

Comprehension Strategies

Word Predictions

Name of Student	Title of Story	Date
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Before reading:

Preview the text quickly by looking at the title and pictures. Close your book and work with a partner or a team to list all the words you think you will find in the reading passage. With each word tell why you think it will appear.

<i>Our Words</i>	<i>Appeared During Reading</i>

During Reading:

Watch for your words to see if they appear in the text.

After Reading:

Go back to your list of words. Put a \checkmark next to the words that actually appeared. Talk about why the others might not have appeared in the reading selection.

Comprehension Strategies

Word Sorts

- **Before reading, select words and phrases** from a story. Do not show the students the title or the illustrations.
- **Write** the words or phrases on **cards** so that they can be easily moved about.
- Ask the students to **put the words in order** and to use these to **compose a story orally**.
- Explain that they can **elaborate on the ideas** suggested by the words on the cards.
- Invite them to **think of a title** and to draw illustrations to accompany their story.
- Allow time for the **students to tell their stories**.
- **Read the author's story** aloud.
- During reading, **stop at key points**. Get the students to select the words and phrases that have been used up to that point.
- Ask them to **compare their version of the story with the original**.
- After reading, have partners scramble the words and phrases and **arrange them in an order that supports the retelling of the original story**.

Crossroads

haunted

'Help. help I've seen a ghost'

'I bet you won't go the crossroads by yourself'.

Sat on a stone

Dark night

Cross-roads

Horrible one eyed woman with a black cat

Mick

At midnight the clock struck twelve

Tom wanted to play a trick on Mick

White figure

Bag of flour al over his face and clothes

Locked all the doors and windows

Laughed so much he fell off the stone

'You fool! That was me you saw sitting on the stone'

Tom

Shot-gun

Comprehension Strategies

Text Shuffle can be used to extend student's understanding of the sequence of events in stories.

- As the name suggests, a story is separated into parts and jumbled.
- Students then read the parts and put them in the correct order.
- When the exercise is completed invite students to justify their choices.

Questions I Can Ask As I Read Stories

Skilled Readers are active readers. When they are reading a story that they need to remember, they stop every so often to ask themselves questions. They do this to make sure that they have understood the story really well.

Examine the list of questions below:

The next time you are reading a story, use it as a guide to help you to become a more active reader.

1. To make predictions

- What is this story going to be about?
- What is going to happen next? ***What makes me think so?***
- Is my prediction still good?

2. To pick out the important information

- Who are the important characters in the story?
- Where does the story take place?
- What is the problem in the story? ***What makes me think so?***
- What actions are taken to sort out the problem?
- What happened in the end?

3. To solve problems when I don't understand

- Read on?
- Look back or reread? ***Why?***
- Ask for help?

Comprehension Strategies

PALS: Partner Assisted Learning

Pals offers opportunity for students to support each other's learning while developing reading competence.

Students work in pairs.

- One student reads aloud for about five minutes while the other listens.
- The partner identifies and corrects errors-*Stop you missed that word. Can you figure it out? Good, read the sentence again* (If after a few seconds the reader is unable to pronounce the word, the partner supplies it)
- The partner then formulates and asks questions beginning with *who, what, why, where, how* for a further 5 minutes.
- If the reader is unable to answer the question, the partner gives the answer.
- Students switch roles and repeat the activities.
- Students are reminded how to formulate questions by supplying them with a bookmark.

PALS

Asking Questions

Who?

What?

When?

Where?

Why?

How?

Comprehension Strategies

Monitoring Comprehension

Struggling readers benefit when attention is explicitly drawn to the importance of **Monitoring and Regulating Comprehension** through exercises such as **Read-Cover-Remember-Retell**.

Read-Cover-Remember-Retell

This strategy slows down the reading process and reminds students to focus on remembering the content of the passage.

- Students work in pairs
- They agree to read a portion of the text-an amount that can be covered by one of their hands
- They stop reading, cover the text and try to remember what has been read
- They then tell each other what has been remembered.
- If they have difficulty remembering they are allowed to glance back at the text
- In this way they engage in comprehension monitoring

Comprehension Strategies

Identifying Important Ideas

The **Key Word Strategy** helps students to **select important ideas** to **write a summary** of a text. The task is quite demanding. When this strategy is first introduced, the teacher will need to guide student learning by engaging them in interactive dialogue. The responsibility for completing the task should be shared by teacher and students. Then as students gradually become more competent, they should be encouraged to take over most of the responsibility for the work.

Key Word Strategy

- Read a story with the students
- Reread it, pausing at key junctures, and ask the students to select a few words that seem especially important to the story
- Remind them to be selective. You want ***the most important words***.
- Make a list of the words
- Ask the students to arrange these in a way that supports the retelling of the story in their heads.
- Then have the students use the words on the list to write their summaries.

Comprehension Strategies

Key Word Strategy

Name of Student
Title of Book/Topic
Author
Date

Key Words List

My Summary

Comprehension Strategies

To identify the Main Idea

Teaching Sequence

1. Identify purpose (eg. To find the main idea of a text)

Q. *What am I trying to do?*

A. Oh yes, find the important information or main idea

2. Apply background knowledge

Q. How do we usually find the main idea?

3. Plan a strategy

Plan: Read text
Underline and list key words with a partner
Discuss differences
Discuss what we think is the main idea

4. Rehearse the Plan

Talk with a partner what you plan to do

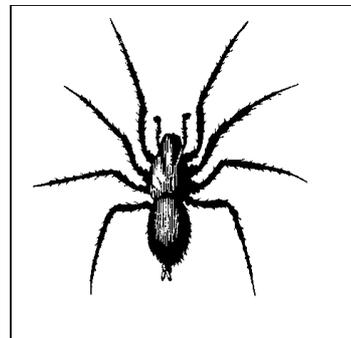
5. Try the strategy

Text: Spiders

There are many varieties of spiders in Australia. Spiders belong to the group called arthropods. They have two body parts (a cephalo thorax and abdomen). They also have eight legs which end in claws. The legs are attached to the cephalo thorax. Spiders have fangs which are used to seize prey. Some spiders are poisonous.

List of key words:

Many
Spiders
Australia
Two body parts
Eight legs
Some
Poisonous



6. Solve the problem

Many types of spiders live in Australia. They have two body parts and eight legs. Some are poisonous.

7. Evaluate

Compare summaries with others in the group.

Comprehension Strategies

Brainstorming and categorising

Procedure: Before children begin to read a piece of text ask:

What do you already know about this topic?

Record all responses on cards.

After initial brainstorm session work with children to categorise or classify information into some sort of logical structure.

This information could be used as a skeleton outline to be completed after reading.

Example: What do you know about insects?

6 legs many sorts make cocoons cockroaches have wings bite
bees 3 body parts they walk mosquitoes turns into grubs sting
they fly lay eggs have feelers ants

Now classify and group related information

<u>Types of Insects</u>	<u>Body Parts</u>	<u>Life Cycle</u>	<u>Movement</u>	<u>Other Features</u>
Bees Mosquitoes Ants Butterflies cockroaches	6 legs feelers 3 body parts some have wings	Lay eggs Turn into grubs cocoons	Fly walk	Sting bite

Then ask: What do you want to find out?

Children discuss or write one or two things they wish to know eg.

What do insects eat?

How do they bite or sting?

Children read to find information

Comprehension Strategies

Think Sheet

This strategy directs students to set a purpose for their reading when they are trying to gain information from the text. Chapter titles, headings and subheadings are used to predict what information will be in the passage.

Procedure:

- Use a specific chapter or section of a textbook
- List all the headings and subheadings or else topic sentence
- Students work with partners to think about what information might be included in each section. Discuss and record predictions (in pencil)
- Students read text to assess accuracy of predictions
- Students substantiate or revise predictions from the text
- Meet with the original partner to revise information and record any changes or additional information

Think Sheet – Spiders

Headings from text	What spiders look like: ----- -----	Information recorded by students before reading
	What spiders eat: ----- -----	
	Where spiders live: ----- -----	
	What people think of spiders ----- -----	

Comprehension Strategies

Selecting a Reading Style

Skimming-Involves glancing through material to gain a general impression or overview of the content. Headings, diagram and picture captions, sub headings and key sentences in a paragraph (usually the first sentence of the paragraph) can all help to get an overview or the main idea. The rest of the passage adds detail but is not needed when you skim a text.

Procedure:

- Students work with a partner or in groups. All have a copy of the same text. Texts with headings and subheadings are suitable starting points as they give students a focus to begin. Highlight these.
- Read out loud the parts highlighted.

Scanning-involves glancing through material to locate a specific detail such as name, date or place.

Procedure:

- Students work with a partner or in groups. All have a copy of the same text and a list of questions which can be answered directly from the text.
- Students read the question and identify the key word. Then they quickly scan the text to locate the key word and answer the question orally in groups.
- Students can work independently or in groups to complete the page.

Student Quiz

This activity is an effective way of assessing children's understanding of the content of the text.

Procedure:

- Students compile a set of questions based on the information they have gained from reading the text
- The questions may be written on a card and placed in an envelope for use by other readers.

Comprehension Strategies

Skeleton Outline

Procedure:

- Identify vocabulary that is essential for understanding the concepts and supporting detail of text.
- Arrange these words into a pattern that shows their relationship.
- Skeleton Outlines can be used before, during or after reading to form an overview of a topic. They help readers to link new information with existing knowledge in logical framework.
- Skeleton Outlines can be used as a basis for making notes. They assist students to extract and organise important information.
- Discussion plays an important part in this strategy as students need to substantiate, make judgements and deal with new information so that meaning is made.

Pyramids

This strategy can be used to record and organise important information according to main headings, sub headings and supporting details.

Procedure:

- Students read a chapter, section or short article.
- Students read aloud facts from the passage, teacher writes each fact on a card.
- Teacher displays cards
- Students sort detailed cards into groups-form the base blocks of the pyramid.
- Teacher asks for suitable headings for the baseline groups (sub headings)
- Students are then asked to discuss all the information in the pyramid.
- Main idea of passage is derived by asking the question, '**What is the author saying about the subject?**' which is written into top block of pyramid.

Comprehension Strategies

Flow Charts

A flow chart is an excellent replacement for notes.

To construct a flow chart, students need to identify and extract important information. The need to draw conclusions and make judgements about what is important. In order to complete this activity students often need to return to the text many times.

Procedure:

- *Use arrows to link important steps or information*
- *Students may use pictures, words or a combination of both, in a flow chart.*