Comprehension strategies for second grade students using California Young Reader Medal nominated books for 2000

Donna Lea Van Allen

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COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR SECOND GRADE STUDENTS USING CALIFORNIA YOUNG READER MEDAL NOMINATED BOOKS FOR 2000

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial
Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education:
Reading/Language Arts Option

by
Donna Lea Van Allen
June 2000
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Approved by:

Dr. Adria Klein, First Reader  
Date

Jan Schall, Second Reader
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project will be to supply teachers, specifically those of second grade students, with a variety of activities that match to appropriate comprehension strategies using California Young Reader Medal nominated books for the year 2000 at the primary level as read-alouds. The activities will be those that correspond to seven strategies that Keene and Zimmerman (1997) have identified as those that efficient readers use consistently to make meaning; activate prior knowledge, determine importance, create visual images, question, inference, synthesize and use fix-up strategies.

The activities in the handbook will fall within the sociopsycholinguistic approach of the reading continuum and will be used to scaffold the student's learning to interpret and construct meaning in order to become independent meaning makers. The emphasis of learning in this area is on the processes, in order for the strategies to be applied in many situations as needed.
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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Appropriate reading comprehension instruction utilizes the methodology of knowing what it is good readers do. Given that researchers and teachers can identify these solid practices and strategies, it is paramount that they be able to teach students how to actively employ these strategies in many reading situations. Students need to be able to use these strategies not only in the texts which assist in teaching them, but in independent text they may subsequently read as well. These strategies need to start as early as possible. Comprehension is as important in the early grades as decoding. Since the goal of a good reader is to actively construct meaning, decoding and comprehension are interrelated and recursive rather than individual and sequential. Teaching and learning these comprehension strategies can start even as the child is learning to decode. At the 1999 California Reading Association convention in Long Beach, Dr. MaryEllen Vogt, professor of Education at California State University at Long Beach stated, “just because they can’t read, doesn’t mean they can’t think.”

This notion, in conjunction with what happened at my own school site, led to the conception of this project. My school has a student population of 734 Kindergarten through sixth grade students. The ethnic breakdown is 213 White,
504 Hispanic, 130 African American, 9 American Indian and 3 Asian. It is a four track, year round system of sixty days on track and twenty days off track. The area has a low socioeconomic background, with approximately 90% of the students receiving free or reduced lunch. Last year, my school went through a State of California Program Quality Review. These reviews occur periodically, about every three years, and compel schools to scrutinize their programs to see what is working and what is not. One of the steps in this review process is to choose a curricular area of concern, collect samples of student work and use a rubric or grading scale to analyze the success or failure of the program in matching to the state standards. In my school the area in which we chose to be reviewed was language arts. Specifically, one of the questions that we attempted to answer was "What evidence do we have that all students are drawing upon a variety of grade level appropriate comprehension strategies on a daily basis?" As a member of the Leadership Team, it was our responsibility to review the work samples that had been collected in Kindergarten through grade 6 to determine whether or not the answer to the question was being addressed correctly through appropriate activities by the classroom teachers.

It was left to the teacher's discretion to choose the kinds of comprehension activities they felt were suitable
for their particular students. As the samples were reviewed, it was discovered most of the samples that had been collected were recall activities in which the students were required to write or draw main events from the story they had read. Some were answers to questions about the story dealing with only the most literal level of comprehension, and some were simple story maps to identify the sections of a narrative story dealing with character, plot, setting, events, problems and solutions. According to the samples that I saw for grades 1 through 6, comprehension activities seemed to be limited to the read-question-evaluate pattern that is referred to as an "after the fact procedure" (Beck, McKeown, Hamilton, and Kucan, 1997, p.19).

I then looked at the results of the Stanford Achievement Test 9 (SAT 9) standardized test that all our students in grade one through grade six had taken in February. I concentrated on the test results in the area of reading comprehension as this was the basis for determining whether or not a student would qualify for reading intersession assistance at our site. I looked at the national percentile ranks (NPR) and stanines (S) to see what kind of scores our students had received. I did not review Kindergarten test results, as there was not a comprehension percentile score or stanine ranking for that grade. The student scores that would be ideal for the students to acquire on the SAT 9
would be in the 50th national percentile range and 5th stanine. The results, as shown in Table 1, suggested a lack of strategy application in reading comprehension. The teachers needed something that could help them in their quest for strategies that would make their students more successful in constructing meaning as it applies to reading and to consciously connect them with appropriate strategies of reading comprehension. The purpose of my project will be to supply teachers, specifically those of second grade students, with a variety of activities that match to appropriate comprehension strategies using California Young Reader Medal nominated books for the year 2000 at the primary level as read-alouds. I chose to focus on second grade level activities for several reasons. One being, that second grade was the grade level I was currently teaching and I wanted something that I would be able to implement in my classroom right away. Second, many teachers at the primary level did not see a concern about, nor a need for, teaching comprehension strategies. They felt that those were strategies best left to the instruction of the third and above grade teachers. However, these strategies can and must be introduced as soon as possible as "the foundations for this proficiency begins in kindergarten" (California Language Arts Standards, 1999, p. 25). Third, read-aloud books that many second grade teachers use are a perfect platform to
Table 1

1999 SAT 9 Comprehension Scores for Gibson Elementary

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>48-5</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>35-4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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introduce students to strategies in a gradual approach method of teacher modeling. By reading aloud to students it helps them "hear and understand the ways in which a variety of texts can be interpreted by a strategic reader" (Flood and Lapp, 1992, p. 5). Many of the ideas and themes that are found in read aloud books are those that are considered to be above the level at which students in second grade may be able to read themselves. Reading aloud at a higher level gives students opportunities to engage in higher order thinking skills, and encourages the students to expand their schemas. Reading aloud of these books will allow the teacher to model appropriate strategies for the students, and "demonstrate ways to make personal connections and comparisons with books that children use for interactions in literature circles and forms a foundation for other reading and writing activities" (Fountas and Pinnell, 1996, p. 27). Finally, many of the comprehension strategies introduced through read alouds in the second grade would assist the students in transitioning to more independence at the third grade and above. Upper grade students will be "required to apply those skills in more complex tasks and contexts" (California Language Arts Standards, 1999, p. 103). The strategies and activities I will provide for the teachers, will involve their students in critical thinking and "support them as they build an understanding of what they are reading" (Beck, McKeown,
California Young Reader Medal nominated books were chosen as they have a strong appeal for the age group for which they are recommended. They are titles most often read or requested by children. They are current and accessible as they must have been published within the past five years and still be in print. Through a comprehensive handbook of activities, I will provide the teachers with the activities that will assist them in providing quality strategy instruction for their students to improve reading comprehension.

Teachers who lack the strategies needed for quality instruction in reading comprehension are more technicians than teachers. They can run a basal reading program well, according to the projected lessons specified in the teacher's manual in which the literal comprehension questions as well as the correct responses are all neatly laid out in a most organized fashion. The teachers use approaches to comprehension that may only serve to expose their student's lack of knowledge and understanding. Consequently, these approaches leave the teacher not knowing if the student's have constructed misconceptions about the text. They instruct, instead of create an environment for literacy learning. They inform, rather than demonstrate an infatuation and delight for books. They correct, rather than
cultivate learning by encouraging risk-taking. A common misconception of a good teacher has been of one “whose students listened quietly and recited the correct answers” (Meehan, 1997, p. 315). The activities in the handbook will be used to scaffold the student’s learning to interpret and construct meaning from what they read in order to become independent meaning makers. The activities will be those that correspond to seven strategies that Keene and Zimmerman (1997) have identified as those that efficient readers use consistently to make meaning.

**Theoretical Foundations**

The activities I will provide will fall within the same area of the reading continuum as my theoretical belief of teaching which is the sociopsycholinguistic approach. This approach is based on understanding and meaning, or that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. There is an emphasis on process rather than product. It is “whole-to-part, top-to-bottom, deep-to-surface, inside-out processing” (Weaver, 1994, p. 42). The emphasis of learning in this area should be on the process and not the product. This process can be applied in many authentic situations and students who are securely grounded in their strategies become more aware and in control of these processes. Subsequently they are better able to use them in appropriate circumstances and gain understanding from the text. Students need to be involved in
their learning and take an active role in connecting textual situations to their learning experiences.

The learner will be the explorer and the teacher will be the navigator. The strategies that I plan on introducing will allow the students to command their own learning. The teacher will be the facilitator that will guide and scaffold the students through the process of comprehension to enhance their understanding of the text.

There are as many methods of teaching reading as there are teachers who are willing to try them. Teachers use what works for them with the learners that they have because “all methods of teaching reading look as if they achieve some success, with some children, some of the time” (Smith, 1997, p.3). However, it is imperative for me to understand my personal theoretical position with regards to literacy in order to help students become successful readers. I need to identify the kind of teacher I am so that I may better serve my students, because my identity as a teacher will directly affect the students in my classroom. Saint Jerome, a third century Latin scholar once said, “begin to be now what you will be hereafter.” Who I am as a teacher will define what kinds of students I will create. Where I stand on the continuum will reflect in my students and when I am better able to identify my disposition, I will then see more clearly what kind of student will be created, for “without
understanding, instruction is founded on superstition” (Smith, 1997, p. 4). If what I see is not acceptable, then change will come from within, and I will be the instigator of that change. It will not come from any kind of external curriculum, as the theoretical perspective will be the vessel by which the curriculum is delivered.

As a socio-psycholinguist, I believe learning to read requires bringing meaning to the text, and not just simply decoding the letters and sounds. The sounds of the words themselves have "insufficient information to convey meaning" (Smith, 1997, p. 59). Meaning in reading is a priority. As stated by Goodman (1993), "reading is making sense of print, and that's a much more efficient process than accurately identifying words" (p. 53). This is not to say it is the only important piece. Put simply, meaning must have a high priority along with the ability to sound out a word or identify its function in a sentence. All three cueing systems must be in place in order for a reader to be successful.

The three cueing systems, graphophonic, syntactic and semantic, need to be merged so the reader can predict, confirm and integrate meaning. The graphophonic system provides information about letter and the sounds associated with them. This strategy would be used when a student uses letters and sounds to decipher unknown words. The syntactic
system is comprised of grammatical cues such as word order, function and word endings. It is the ability for the student to understand the correct structure of the language. It helps the student make sense of what is being read in the context of how their language sounds. The semantic cueing system uses "meaning cues from each sentence and from the evolving whole as one progresses through the entire text" (Weaver, 1994, p. 5). Students who use this strategy can tell whether or not what they are reading makes sense. It provides information about the meanings associated with words and longer pieces of writing. Student learning must be facilitated in such a way that meaning takes precedence and yet the other systems are also used. These cueing systems enable a student to monitor their own reading and provide fix-up help when comprehension breaks down. There is so much more to reading than sounding out words. There is a correlation between all three cueing systems and there are many reasons not to rely solely on the structured teaching of phonics.

Most children will learn phonics patterns through meaningful print and predictable text. (Weaver, 1994) As they read they will learn to read and when reading in meaningful context, readers will often guess at meaning and even try to identify unfamiliar words. As Goodman (1993) so aptly stated, "a little bit of phonics goes a long
way" (p. 53). Children develop phonics knowledge through read-alouds and shared readings of favorite stories where they can see the words and make connections to the written and spoken word.

There are too many rules and exceptions to the rules and not all visual information is equally important, especially when working with vowels. Many phonics programs emphasize word attack by focusing on vowels. If all the vowels were removed from a reading passage, it would still be understandable. Yet, if all the consonants were removed from the same passage it would be undecipherable, as the amount of visual information would be greatly reduced. Even when a rule does apply to a word, it is not always possible to know which rule to use unless the word is already known. Many emergent readers have great difficulty learning abstractly. For many of these children "it is far harder to do phonics than to learn to read" (Weaver, 1994, p. 198). Yet some readers do need to be taught phonics in a direct, systematic way. There is a difference between systematic direct teaching and a prescribed, synthetic, scripted program. It is possible to have a balanced literacy program and still directly teach. This scenario, actually, is the ideal. Readers do not learn to read through osmosis, and we as teachers need to provide them with the balanced program that they need.
A balanced literacy program is much like a balanced diet, or the nutrition pyramid. A student needs to have a variety of literacy skills and strategies, much as they need a variety of foods from each group. But their nutritional or literacy needs may be different than that of another student. Also, the diet of a 5 year old would not be the same as that of an 18 year old. One may again need more of a certain group than the other, to develop strategies to a different level. Each student's requirements are delivered by the teacher according to individual need. One student may need more phonics skills than another, or more practice with questioning, activating schema or some other strategy, but each student still gets some of whatever it is that they need.

Too much of a sound-it-out approach greatly reduces a student's ability to discover other strategies available for getting words and meaning. Children need to focus on constructing meaning and they need to have many strategies at hand for reading. Proficient readers use prior knowledge, context, prediction of text and confirmation to reduce the amount of visual information needed. They usually go from print to meaning without recoding the written word into spoken word in order to get meaning. The use of structured phonics can result in a child being labeled a slow learner. It would be better if phonics were taught "primarily as the
need and opportunity arise during authentic reading and writing" (Weaver, 1993, p. 198).

Prior knowledge or schemas are "an organized chunk of knowledge or experience, often accompanied by feelings" (Weaver, 1994, p. 18). It is the activation of this knowledge that enables the child to make sense of events and of language. Without this prior knowledge they would not be able to attach meaning to the text. Schemas develop as students interact with the outside world, but students "may often lack appropriate schemas" (Weaver, 1994, p. 17) for understanding what they hear or read. When the student has an adequate schema and it is activated, only then will they have a greater understanding and recall of what they have read. This prior knowledge and the meaning that a reader brings to the printed word is a natural way for the reader to make sense of words and of their world. Children pay less attention to actual words and "focus on getting to the meaning" (Goodman, 1993, p. 53). Discussions and personal experiences of the students to get ready to read are very important in the meaning making process. Especially since differences in meaning can occur with no difference in physical characters, such as words with multiple meanings.

Students need to be involved in their learning and take an active role in connecting to their learning experiences. Students need to be engaged in reading and
writing daily, for only through daily practice can they improve in these areas. They need to be provided with quality instruction and appropriate activities and skills that will support them in their goal of using strategies for learning.

By providing students opportunities for real world learning, I will celebrate their diversity. They will transact with the written text, and the meaning they construct will depend on their background experiences and the purposes for reading they bring to the text. They will become members of the literacy club where "differences in ability and in specific interests are taken for granted" (Smith, 1997, p. 114).

Students must become members of the literacy club in order to understand reading and it is the teacher's role to facilitate admission into the club. Students will read the things that are meaningful to them. It is my job as a teacher to provide this meaningful print and to make maximum use of what is already known by the learner. This prior knowledge gives a purpose to reading and the literacy club provides a purpose as well. It allows the learner to see what written language does. Children will immerse themselves in literacy when it "furthers the purposes of their own lives in the here and now" (Weaver, 1994, p. 86).

The SAT 9 standardized test given to the students at the
end of the year is designed to give the teacher all the information needed as to whether the student is performing at an appropriate national standardized level. As a socio-psycholinguist, I think that a one time assessment cannot give a true picture about the ability of the student. This standardized test evaluates programs rather than assesses students. Assessment should be on-going and should drive instruction, however, because the SAT 9 is given at year end it cannot be used to guide the instruction of the student tested. It should be complex and multidimensional, with the highlight being the process of learning. The test our district gives is strictly a read the story and answer the question, after the fact type. Assessment should mirror the student's ability to engage in authentic reading, writing and thinking. Standardized tests do not encourage students to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge or abilities. Through on-going assessment the teacher can formulate strategies to help the individual student achieve to their highest ability. Assessment should be based on day to day activities, and should involve kid-watching. Assessment should be process oriented, which in turn can lead the student to discoveries about strategies. It should be based on a variety of viewpoints and be balanced between individual-referenced and criterion-referenced. Students themselves should also have a role in assessment. It opens
the door to new ideas, modifications and changes. Decision
are made collectively and individually on an as needs basis.
The teachers and students can formulate goals and assess
progress toward these goals.

My goal as a socio-psycholinguist is to somehow balance
the skills approach to the curriculum that my district
dictates I follow, and the belief that “humans fundamentally
construct their own knowledge” (Weaver, 1994, p. 342). I am
beginning to understand how this can happen. I have learned
how drastically important it is for students to construct
meaning from their reading. I have learned how the
strategies that proficient readers use in order to make
meaning can be taught at all grade levels. Higher order
thinking skills are not just for older students.

It is critical for me to model those strategies for my
students so they can become proficient readers also. I used
to believe that by not following the skills approach, the
other teachers I worked with would think I was not following
through with my responsibility to impart the curriculum to my
students. Now I realize that even though students do need to
be directly taught skills, “a skill becomes a strategy when
the learner can use it independently, when she can reflect on
and understand how it works and then apply it to new reading
materials” (Robb, 1996, p. 67).

The project that follows will deal with teaching second
grade students comprehension strategies that good readers use when they are constructing meaning from the text. These strategies will be used in conjunction with California Young Reader Medal nominated books in the primary category for the year 2000. Each book will have three activities connected to it for the classroom teacher to use that are based on the seven strategies that Keene and Zimmermann (1997) have identified as ones used by proficient readers. These activities will be taught using a gradual release model (Gallagher and Pearson, 1983), in which the responsibility of comprehension through guided practice progresses from teacher to student. The students will, through student and teacher directed techniques, be able to articulate and demonstrate the use of these strategies.
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose for this project is to provide teachers with comprehension activities they can use with California Young Reader Medal nominated books for the year 2000 in the primary category in a second grade classroom. The California Young Reader Medal nominated books were chosen for several reasons, these books are well-written and likely to hold the readers attention. They are books that appeal to children. By using these books as read-alouds, we are giving all students a common literary experience and exposing them to more sophisticated text that requires them to think. These books can and do prompt stimulating discussion.

The activities aligned with the books use comprehension strategies that Keene and Zimmermann (1997) have identified as those that proficient readers use. The purpose of using these activities is to help students see, through teacher modeling, and practice comprehension strategies that good readers use. Strategic readers are active in constructing meaning as they read and can "monitor their own comprehension by continually challenging themselves to understand what they are reading by questioning, reviewing, revising, and rereading to enhance their overall comprehension" (Flood and Lapp, 1992, p. 3). The literature review will look at an overview of the history of the California Young Reader Medal
Program, the term comprehension as a set of related processes, and finally, detail the seven comprehension strategies identified by Keene and Zimmerman (1997).

Overview of the California Young Reader Medal Program

The California Young Reader Medal (CYRM) program began in 1974, created by Dr. Becca Wachtmann as an extension of the International Reading Association’s Book Year Project. Books are nominated in four categories: Primary (K-2), Intermediate (3-6), Middle School/Junior High (6-9), and Young Adult (9-12). Students may read the books or have them read aloud and vote for their favorite book in a category. The criterion for voting is that the students must have read or heard all the books in the category in which they are voting.

Nominated books are chosen from those titles suggested by children either directly, or through numerous requests to teachers and librarians. However, there are some criteria the books need to follow. The books must be an original work of fiction published within the last five years, by an author who is still living. The titles are compiled into a list of possible nominees to be considered by the CYRM committee. The committee reads each suggested book, discusses their merits and appeal to children, and decides upon a well balanced list of nominees. This committee is comprised of representatives from each of the following statewide
organizations: California Association of Teachers of English (CATE), California Library Association (CLA), California Reading Association (CRA), and California School Library Association (CSLA). The committee make available an informational packet about the program which includes all materials needed in order to participate, such as ballots, nomination forms, and lists. There are also resource and activity books available that the teacher may use as follow up or extensions to reading.

After reading or hearing all the books and voting in the category, ballots are submitted to the CYRM committee by April 1 of each year. The ballots are tabulated and the winning titles are announced in May.

The goal of the California Young Reader Medal program is achieved by “introducing students to the joy of reading quality literature purely for pleasure” (California Young Reader Medal Resource Book, 1999, p. 1).

By using these books as read alouds, we immerse students in terrific literature, and can vividly show students the process called comprehension.

**Comprehension as a Set of Related Processes**

Comprehension is a transactional process. A reader will construct meaning according to his or her own schema, the personal experiences he/she brings to the text, and the purposes for reading. The reader will change and adapt this
schema of the world as more information is added, categories are broadened and experiences are integrated. Reading comprehension defines the reader’s ability to connect the known to the unknown. Students will use the information in their schema to connect with unfamiliar areas in order to build meaning. This scaffolding of learning “pushes children beyond where they have been” (Short, Harste and Burke, 1996, p. 320), and allows them to bring deeper meaning to the text. The activities that will help them gain new levels of understanding are transactional in that they “are determined jointly by teachers and students as they interact with text” (Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Schuder, Bergman, Almasi, and Brown, 1992, p. 515). Students need to collaborate with the teacher in order to determine the goals of instruction as well as the implementation, evaluation and any needed modification of the strategy. The teacher should not only help the student understand what they are learning, but also why they are learning it. Strategic readers understand that, by actively involving themselves in the process of reading, they create the meaning.

Comprehension is an evolving process. It can change before the book has been opened, as the book is read and “it continues to evolve even after the book has been closed” (Shanklin and Rhodes, 1989, p. 497). The meanings that students derive from the text evolve through the result of
interpretations made and shared by the readers. It can, according to Shanklin and Rhodes (1989), be changed as simply as changing the reader, environment or the work itself. The reader must identify each new piece of information and decide how it relates to information already given. The reader forms a representation of the message and continually updates it as ensuing text information is gathered (Beck et al., 1997). The inability of younger readers to update and change their schema to adapt to new information can result in conflicts between the information provided in the text and the meaning of the text. This conflict can be a signal that poor or younger readers fail to "monitor their reading for inconsistencies and errors" (Kang and Gillotte, 1993, pg. 2). As supported by McLain (1991) "younger and poor readers have little awareness they they must attempt to make sense of text and focus on reading as a decoding process, rather than as a meaning-getting process" (pg. 170). Strategic readers do not use the same strategies in the same way with every text they read. It is dependent upon the material and the purpose for reading. These strategies are also not considered linear and sequential as the reader will continually set purpose and monitor comprehension throughout the reading interval.

Comprehension is a social process. Encouraging children to pose and answer their own questions results in students sharing and extending their comprehension of a text.
According to Rosenblatt (as cited in Daniels, 1994), students cannot successfully "move to the level of analysis until they have worded through, processed, savored, shared their personal response" (p. 23). Thoughtful readers are those that ask questions. The process of questioning can lead to a better understanding of the text. By using self-questioning techniques, the students constantly model for one another and react to the comments and interpretations of the others. The interactions between the students "have the potential for stimulating cognitive growth and understanding" (Pressley et al., 1992, p. 542). Students who engage in these interactions use a natural and extremely valuable method of making meaning. A study by Yopp (as cited in Duke and Pearson, 1999) found that when students learn to elicit questions on their own for reading, their overall comprehension improved. Students need to engage in fewer formal responses to text and more authentic reflection. As Hoyt (1999) so eloquently stated, "...when I finish an enjoyable story...I have never once felt the urge to snatch up glue and scissors to create a diorama" (p. ix).

Comprehension is a metacognitive process. Metacognition is a deliberate turning inward to reexamine our processes of comprehending, changing interpretations of the text and our reflections. By becoming more conscious of the thinking processes as readers, students can actually deepen and
enhance their comprehension of the text (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997). Students need to know what they are thinking in order to know if they comprehend or not. Proficient readers manipulate their thinking independently in order to comprehend more deeply. They are to be reminded "that they need to solve comprehension problems actively" (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997, p. 40). It is important that they be aware of the invisible mental processes that are at the nucleus of reading. As evidenced by McLain (1991) the awareness and control of the thinking process has a direct relationship to better understanding. Students need to see evidence that the strategies they are learning and using are leading to improved performance reading comprehension. They must also see where and when a strategy can be used profitably. If it cannot be determined on their own, teachers should do all they can to encourage the development of this knowledge. The teacher should make the students aware of the use of the strategies throughout the school day and across the curriculum. When strategies are modeled they are more effective when done explicitly, which leaves the student little room to infer about the strategy and its application, but also flexibly, adjusting its use to the text.
As stated by Keene and Zimmermann (1997):

If reading is about mind journeys, teaching reading is about outfitting the travelers, modeling how to use the map, demonstrating the key and the legend, supporting the travelers as they lose their way and take circuitous routes, until, ultimately, it’s the child and the map together and they are off on their own. (p. 28)

Activating Prior Knowledge

The first comprehension strategy that proficient readers use is activating relevant, prior knowledge, or schemas, during all phases of reading: before, during and after. Schemas are “an organized chunk of knowledge or experience, often accompanied by feelings” (Weaver, 1994, p. 18). It is the activation of this knowledge that enables the child to make sense of events and of language and provides a basis for inferential elaboration of the text. Without this prior knowledge students would not be able to attach meaning to the text. Schemas develop as they interact with the outside world and students “may often lack appropriate schemas” (Weaver, 1994, p.17) for understanding what they hear or read. Direct experiences would greatly enhance the child’s schema but the reality of the classroom is that sometimes it is a very difficult thing to provide. The alternative would be to shift the emphasis from providing this direct experience to asking, “What is it that they do know about that I can hang my hat on” (Pearson and Johnson, 1978, p.34)? Strategies that help the student activate, analyze and modify
their assumptions of the text can assist them in realizing when the interpretations that they make in relation to their prior knowledge is inconsistent with information in the text. When students have an adequate schema and it is activated, only then will they have a greater understanding and recall of what they have read. In this way, they are relating the new to the known thereby allowing them to assimilate the new information into their schema. Successful readers can use the information from their own schemas to clarify or extend ideas in the text. They can make the connections between the known and the unknown. The teacher, by giving the student an example of suitable reasoning they can use as a basis for prompting background knowledge, assists the student in cultivating metacognitive control. When the teacher releases the cognitive control, through mental modeling, it minimizes the doubt that poor readers have about what good readers do. Duffy, Roehler, and Herrmann (1988) state that “mental modeling minimizes such doubts by including illustrations of appropriate reasoning that students can use to construct their own schemata for how to make sense of text” (p. 165).

**Determining Importance**

The next strategy used is that of determining the most important themes and ideas in a text. By using this strategy the readers are better able to know what parts of their schemata they will need to use in order to construct meaning.
It helps the reader to place “ideas in logical relation to one another” (Pearson and Johnson, 1978, p. 94). There are three levels in which readers make decisions about what is important in the text, “whole-text level, the sentence level, and the word level” (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997, p. 87). By having students identify the important sentences and words first, it allows them to monitor their own understanding and to gradually work towards identifying important themes and ideas in longer passages. Sometimes by the teacher helping the students identify the unimportant areas allows the student to recognize the differences between the areas more clearly.

This is a very critical strategy, especially when students read expository text as opposed to narrative text. Expository text is often unfriendly to the reader because of the large amount of unfamiliar terms that may obscure the underlying concepts. This type of text “is inconsiderate when it is written in a way that its intended audience has difficulty comprehending it” (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997, p. 87). Decisions that students make about importance are based on the reader’s purpose, prior knowledge, and ideas from others. Rarely is there one right answer when it comes to identifying importance, however students will work towards being able to justify their decisions.

The teacher begins by modeling this strategy and
thinking out loud in order to allow students to gradually assume responsibility in making conclusions about importance in texts. This thinking about thinking model lets "kids read more actively and analytically. They go deeper and get more" (Atwell, 1998, p. 211). When thinking aloud is taking place, it is a form of monitoring the comprehension and it offers an appropriate means to access and use various strategies for enhancing understanding. According to Baumann, Jones and Selfert-Kessell (1993), it can assist the reader in the identification and construction of important themes and ideas.

**Questioning**

Asking questions of the author and the text is another important strategy skilled readers use. They use these questions to clarify and focus their reading. It allows them to "construct meaning rather than retrieve information from what they read" (Beck et al., 1997, p. iv). These questions asked by proficient readers are not those that will assess comprehension, but rather will assist it. These questions tend to prompt student to student, student to author and student to text interactions. These questions are asked during the reading and show the students that "questioning and reading are symbiotically related, enhancing each other in mutually beneficial ways" (Beck et al., 1997, p. 25). These are not typically traditional questions that restrict
and confine thinking. They do not seek specific answers, nor do they limit students thinking or ideas about the text. Questioning of this nature while reading casts out mix-ups, helps delve deeper into new areas and strengthens student's abilities to analyze and interpret. Smith (1997) simply states that "reading with comprehension becomes a matter of getting your questions answered" (p. 99). These types of questions need to be asked before, during and after reading and will help the students realize that they help them focus on and understand text. Teacher modeling is the key for success in this strategy and should include ways questions help students understand more fully. Proficient readers use these questions to help them determine if they can be "answered by the text or whether they will need to infer the answer from the text" (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997, p. 119). Students are then put in the position of being responsible for figuring out the authors intended meaning. By answering these questions, students are given the opportunity to formulate complete thoughts, respond to the text, react to one another's questions and collaborate to construct new understandings. The focus of questions then is on "building understanding, not on checking understanding" (Beck et al., 1997, p. 25).

Creating Images

Another comprehension strategy competent readers use is
creating visual and other sensory images during and after reading. The images can be emotional as well as sensory. Along with thinking of how something in the text would have smelled, sounded, tasted, felt or looked, the student can also think about what the feelings are that may have been experienced. This process helps the students pay closer attention to their reading.

These images are more easily remembered if they are connected to the student's own personal experiences. Student formulated images, in their minds, make the characters and events more realistic and the text more memorable and meaningful. These representations "take on a three-dimensional character in our minds and connect us personally, often permanently with the text" (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997, p. 128). The students are lead to draw conclusions and recall significant details. The awareness of images deepens comprehension, for when students pay attention to only strict interpretation something integral is lost in the construction of meaning. The strategy of creating images to connect meaning to text changes in order to incorporate new information and interpretation. The ability to understand, develop and attend to these images give students flexibility and capacity to experience an added depth of interpretation. Students can also be given the opportunity to express their representations using different response options and time in
which to share them. As stated by Short et al. (1996), these response options are "tools for gaining new perspective on our world" (p. 296). These mental images will help connect students personally to the text. Through oral sharing, the students are metacognitively aware of how this can help them make and connect meaning with the text. These think-alouds "help students monitor their own comprehension" (Rhodes and Shanklin, 1993, p. 224).

Inferencing

Inferencing is the next important comprehension strategy used by efficient readers. Inferencing is when the students use their prior knowledge and schema along with information from the text to draw conclusions, make critical judgments, and form unique interpretations about meaning. Because each student has their own unique background of prior knowledge and experiences, inferencing is a very unique experience. It can evolve through sharing with others and adding new experiences to their schemas. This allows the student to create an original memorable interpretation.

Drawing conclusions and making inferences may involve using material that is implicit or not directly stated in the text. It can be thought of as predicting outcomes. This level of comprehension, which is interpretive, requires the reader to apply more reasoning skill than factual recall. When a student draws a conclusion, the main idea, supporting
details and sequence of events in a passage are often used as the basis for the conclusion. A conclusion can be regarded as a reasoned deduction or inference. Although fine differences can be made between the two terms, teachers may surmise that they describe students' endeavors to infer a "reasonable prediction of outcomes or conclusions based on the available information" (Johns and Lenski, 1997, p. 237). Teachers can help students by teaching them to be aware of the types of inferences as listed by Johnson and Johnson (1986) as location, agent, time, action, instrument, cause-effect object, category, problem-solution, and feeling-attitude that generally make up the majority of their reading.

Inferencing is a strategy that can be used with all stages of students. The teacher's responsibility is to "create classroom structures that permit children to discuss, ponder, argue, restate, reflect, persuade, relate, write about, or otherwise work with the words and ideas they read" (Keene and Zimmermann, 1997, p. 161). The teacher uses the literal to propel students to higher levels. Through scaffolding and working with what the students have, the teacher can take them to higher and higher levels of critical thinking. When the student can put words from the book together with something from their own personal experience, they can add meaning, making text their own.
Synthesizing

This leads to the next comprehension strategy competent readers use of retelling or somehow synthesizing what it is they have read. Synthesizing is the ability to order information into a coherent whole. It allows the students to create interpretation. It is more than retelling and more than summarizing. It is an amalgam of strategies that proficient readers use. The ability to synthesize text is a tool requiring the reader to conceptualize information they have learned from the text in order to provide a personalized summary. Hoyt (1999) reports that students who engage in synthesizing must review all they know about a text; select key points that reflect main ideas; consider key events, problem, solution, characters and setting, then weave the information into a significant communication. Synthesizing can be very different from student to student. It allows the teacher insights into "if and how a student constructs his own meanings using the text as a blueprint" (Rhodes and Shanklin, 1993, p. 232). Students can mentally keep track of what they are reading while they read. The strategy is flexible in that a mid point synthesis may differ from reflection after reading due to extra information being added to their schema.

Students should be encouraged to synthesize text for authentic reasons. Depending on the reason for a retelling
or summarizing, it can produce different results. Synthesizing text for the benefit of a friend who is looking for a good read may give the teacher different data that doing it to merely check comprehension. The synthesis of text can be done orally or in writing. A caution of a written synthesis would be that since the act of writing can slow down the thinking process and some students do not write fluently, "the written retelling is apt to be a truncated version of what the student could have produced orally" (Rhodes and Shanklin, 1993, p. 235).

Students need to view synthesizing text as a learning strategy that will enhance understanding. Good readers continually reflect as they read, sifting through events and understandings in order to construct meaning and develop their schema. This strategy, "when internalized and applied consciously, becomes a tool for lifelong learning" (Hoyt, 1999, p. 41).

Fixing Up

Finally, the seventh comprehension strategy proficient readers use is monitoring their reading and using a variety of fix-up strategies when comprehension breaks down. The awareness and use of support strategies differentiate the good and poor reader. Good readers not only keep track of their comprehension during reading, they can also take action to manage any difficulties that may arise along the way.
This process of monitoring reading comprehension and using fix-up strategies when required "are essential to efficient reading" (McLain, 1991, p. 170). The most commonly used systems are graphophonc, lexical, syntactic, semantic, schematic and pragmatic. Three of these cueing systems were mentioned earlier as to their importance to construction of meaning. They are also important to the reader as strategies for fixing up any problems or misconceptions they may encounter as they are reading. These cueing systems provide the students with a surplus of information as they read. They are used according to the student's purpose and context for reading. Some may be used more heavily than others according to the reader's needs.

The graphophonc system provides information about letter and the sounds associated with them. This fix-up strategy would be used when a student uses letters and sounds to decipher unknown words.

The lexical or orthographic system provides information about word recognition, although no meaning is associated with the word. Readers can become independent by "recognizing different forms of the same word and dissecting word parts to support recognition of a new form of the word" (Keene and Zimmerman, 1997, p. 202).

The syntactic system is comprised of grammatical cues such as word order, function and word endings. It is the
ability for the student to understand the correct structure of the language. Students who use this strategy can tell whether or not what they are reading makes sense.

The semantic cueing system uses "meaning cues from each sentence and from the evolving whole as one progresses through the entire text" (Weaver, 1994, p. 5). It provides information about the meanings associated with words and longer pieces of writing.

The schematic system provides information from a reader's prior knowledge and personal association with the text. Proficient readers can connect their prior knowledge to what they are reading in order to make meaning. This activation comes at relevant times during reading situations. When a reader can be aware of this system, it can be used consciously when necessary.

The pragmatic system provides the purpose the reader has while reading and rules what the reader considers important and necessary. This can help the reader stay engaged with the reading and assist them in finding a purpose for reading.

These cueing systems can be used simultaneously in varying combinations to move toward constructing meaning. Proficient readers draw upon their knowledge in using all the cueing systems to construct meaning without being cognizant of the fact they are doing so. They know when they comprehend and when they do not in order to use their
language cues to move towards reading strategies that will help them make meaning as they go. Effective readers use all their systems before, during and after reading.

**Conclusion**

Comprehension is a complex set of strategies and processes used to construct meaning from text. It takes place continually, always leading to more questions and understandings. Comprehension has traditionally been thought of as a product of reading rather than a process. However, reading is a related set of transactional, evolving, social and metacognitive processes. Student's comprehension may vary with situational, textual, conceptual, and experiential factors. Awareness of these factors allow teachers to "begin to figure out optimal conditions to encourage comprehension" (Rhodes and Shanklin, 1993, p. 216). Readers use a multitude of comprehension strategies in the process of constructing meaning from text. Teachers create environments in which their students use these strategies to comprehend in ways that proficient readers do. Reading is more than decoding the sound/symbol code, reading is thinking.

A very worthwhile program to have students involved with, while developing strategies for comprehension, is the California Young Reader Medal program. It provides quality literature with which to scaffold the students to higher order thinking skills, and enables them to enjoy reading
while focusing on meaning making strategies. The books are well crafted, with vivid language and expressive illustrations. They are self-contained and provide a complete set of ideas and information for the entire group. They are easily reread to clarify confusion and to better construct meaning. They are accessible to readers of many different learning styles and ages. By using the Young Reader medal books as read alouds, it enables all children, regardless of their decoding capability, the opportunity to engage in critical and interpretive thinking.
GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND LIMITATIONS

Goals

The main goal of the project is to provide ideas of activities that a teacher could use in a second grade classroom with California Young Reader Medal nominated books for 2000 as read alouds. Another goal is to develop three different comprehension strategies into activities for each lesson to be used with the read alouds. A third goal is to provide the students with opportunities to take part in a set of activities planned around the reading aloud of good literature. The read alouds will be at a level above the average reading level for second grade students, for whom the activities were planned. This will allow the students to expand their schemas, and their vocabularies and give them an opportunity to enrich their literacy levels. The books are captivating and captivation leads to remembering what is read, acquiring knowledge and enhancing understanding.

Objectives

The students will access and use prior knowledge in a group setting to provide background to those with limited experiences and allow any misconceptions to be cleared up for a concise understanding of the text. Activities will be provided to assist the student to determine important ideas and justify their reasons for them. They will also question the text and each other to create deep meaning and make
connections to other literary experiences. The students will respond to the texts in various ways through the creation of images. They will be given opportunity to infer and create meaning. The students will synthesize the information through retelling and reflection. Finally, the students will be carrying out activities that will reinforce selection of various fix-up strategies. The activities are designed to be used before, during and/or after reading.

Limitations

Comprehension is a process of strategies that, when used in an efficient manner, improve the proficient reader’s understanding of text. No one comprehension strategy takes precedence over another and an effective reader can change and adapt the strategies for different textual needs. This project was not designed to limit the strategies to the few that will be used in the reading of the stories. Of the strategies previously outlined, each story will only have three activities. Not all strategies will be used in the development of lessons for each story.

The activities that were chosen in conjunction with the Young Reader Medal books are not the only ones that could be utilized with each book. They simply are the ones that were chosen in context with this project. Other strategies could, and should, be used with each book depending on the requirements of the teacher and the students. Each student
working with these books may have different needs that may or may not be addressed with the activities that are laid out in the project for each book.

The design of the project is simply a guide, or framework for possible activities to be used if so desired. These activities are also not intended to be used as a step by step plan. They should not be used in a linear fashion as a complete program to comprehension strategies. The books and strategies may be used in any order so chosen. There is not a straightforward progression to the activities. Not all of the activities outlined for each book need to be used. One, two or all three activities can be used according to the needs of the individuals.

The lessons were designed for use in a second grade classroom, however, some of the activities may also be adapted to suit different grade levels and groupings. If students in following grade levels have not had much experience in some of these strategies it would be appropriate to use these lessons with them. If so desired, some of the partner activities may be changed to group ones and large group activities may be adapted to small group, partner or even individual activities according to needs. The comprehension strategies developed by these activities will provide students with a learning environment that will encourage discussion and thoughtful reflection.
REFERENCES


Kang, Hee-Won, Gillotte, Helen. (1993). When Background Knowledge Doesn't Help: Helping Young Readers Cope. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Atlanta, GA.


APPENDIX A
Strategy: Inferencing

Title: *Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice*

Author: Sylvia Rosa-Casanova

Illustrator: Robert Roth

ISBN#: 0-689-31921-0

Objective: The students will activate their prior knowledge by making, confirming and changing predictions about what will happen in the story at predesignated intervals, as determined by the teacher.

Materials: book, *Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice*
- PostIt™ notes
- Chalkboard, whiteboard or chart paper
- Markers

Procedure: Students consider the title of the book, and the teacher asks, "What do you think this book will be about?" Their responses are charted on paper or the board. The teacher begins reading the story aloud to the class. At preselected points, tabbed with PostIt™ notes, the teacher asks students to predict and to either confirm or change the prediction through the text. Discussion includes the reasons predictions are or are not confirmed. The questions need to be open-ended in order to deepen understanding. Validation needs to be continuously given to all predictions, and not just the ones that are deemed "correct". Three or four preselected points are appropriate for a text of this length. The responses may be charted on the board or on paper, or the students may write down their predictions individually to become more involved in the reading. Some sample questions for confirming the predictions may include,
but not be limited to, the following: Why do you think that? What did you hear in the story that makes you think so? Why did you make that prediction? Have you had something similar happen to you? Does this remind you of something? The confirmed predictions that have been charted can be identified to indicate any patterns that may exist.
Strategy: Questioning
Title: *Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice*
Author: Sylvia Rosa-Casanova
Illustrator: Robert Roth
ISBN#: 0-689-31921-0

Objective: The students will develop and answer questions about the story in a teacher modeled setting using the ReQuest Procedure.

Materials: book, *Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice*

Procedure: The teacher reads the first sentence of the passage. After the sentence is read, a student asks as many question as he or she can, supported by what has been read. The teacher then answers all of the questions as clearly and completely as possible with the book closed, modeling looking back and mental reasoning. Next, the teacher takes a turn to ask questions about the same sentence and a student answers as thoroughly as possible, with the book closed using the modeled strategies whenever possible. In this way, the teacher can model both good questioning strategies and appropriate, complete answers. The procedure continues to the next sentence, and so on, sentence by sentence. Gradually, as students begin to use the strategy effectively, larger passages of text can be read prior to the questioning. "I don’t know" is not an acceptable answer. If a question is unclear, the answerer may ask for clarification and the questioner can rephrase the question.
Strategy: Determining Importance
Title: *Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice*
Author: Sylvia Rosa-Casanova
Illustrator: Robert Roth
ISBN#: 0-689-31921-0

Objective: The students will identify and explain the importance of selected points in the story.

Materials: book, *Mama Provi and the Pot of Rice*
PostIt™ notes precut into strips

Procedure: This activity is most effective as a small group, partner or individual activity. The teacher reads a page or two of the book while the students listen. Each child is directed to place a sticky strip on either a part of a picture or a point in the text that they feel has some importance. They then share with the group why that spot is important. The teacher also places a sticky strip at a part he or she feels is significant and shares the reason with the group. If the teacher is participating as a group member, he or she needs to share last so as not to influence the responses of the group. It is important that the choices are justified, and as the students share their responses, they need to make statements such as "I chose to mark this place because..." or "I think this is important to the story because...". As students become more comfortable with the strategy, longer sections of text may be read at a time before using the sticky strips. An extension to this activity is for the students to find partners and work together to rank their important points from greatest to least.
Strategy: Activating Prior Knowledge
Title: Lost
Author: Paul Brett Johnson and Celeste Lewis
Illustrator: Paul Brett Johnson
ISBN#: 0-531-09501-0

Objective: The students will complete an anticipation guide prior to hearing the story and explain their responses. The students will use the information from the text to support or change their predictions after hearing the story.

Materials: book, Lost
Anticipation guide
pencils

Procedure: The students will read each statement, form a response to it and explain their opinion. Discuss each statement with the class. Ask how many students agreed or disagreed with each statement. Ask one student from each side of the issue to explain their response.
After reading the selection, allow students to confirm, or revise their original responses. This can lead into a group discussion on what they learned from the book that they may not have known before.
Deserts are dry sandy places where nothing can live.

Dogs only eat dog food.

When something is lost, you can never find it.

Cactuses have sharp pointy needles.

A dog could not survive for 30 days lost in the desert.
Strategy: Synthesizing

Title: Lost

Author: Paul Brett Johnson and Celeste Lewis

Illustrator: Paul Brett Johnson

ISBN#: 0-531-09501-0

Objective: The students will reflect on the story and fill out the story pyramid to describe elements of the story

Materials: book, Lost
  story pyramid form
  pocket chart
  cards

Procedure: The teacher will read the story to the students. A discussion will follow about the elements of the story such as character, setting, problem, event and problem resolution. The teacher can write the responses on cards and categorize them in the pocket chart. Students will be partnered and be given one story pyramid to complete. The students will complete their pyramids and share their responses in small groups or whole group.
Directions

1. Insert 1 word that names a character.
2. Insert 2 words that describe the setting.
3. Insert 3 words that describe a character.
4. Insert 4 words that describe the problem.
5. Insert 5 words that describe an event.
6. Insert 6 words that describe the problem resolution.
Strategy: Determining Importance

Title: Lost

Author: Paul Brett Johnson and Celeste Lewis

Illustrator: Paul Brett Johnson

ISBN#: 0-531-09501-0

Objective: The students will select events from the story and evaluate their level of importance.

Materials: book, Lost evaluation form

Procedure: After the students have heard the story, the teacher acts as the scribe to note their ideas. The students reflect on a key story element (characters or events) and list the four they think to be the most crucial. Rank the elements in order with 1 being least important. List words beside each that describe that element or provide justification for the ranking. Depending on the students level of understanding, this activity may be used for whole group, small group, individual, or as a shared or interactive writing experience.
Strategy: Activating Prior Knowledge

Title: The Secret Shortcut

Author: Mark Teague

Illustrator: Mark Teague

ISBN#: 0-590-67714-0

Objective: The students will use their own knowledge and experiences to predict, by using pictures, what a story may be about.

5 pictures from the book (preferably in color) cut jigsaw style into 4 pieces each

Procedure: Begin by distributing at random one jigsaw piece to each student. The students must find the 3 other members of their group by matching their puzzle piece to the others in order to make one complete picture. Once their picture has been completed, the students are directed to discuss the picture in the small group. They may discuss such things as, what is seen in the picture, what might be happening in the picture, or any personal connections they can make to the picture. After the groups have had a chance to discuss their picture, they are directed to move about the room in an orderly manner to look at and discuss the remaining pictures in a similar fashion. They will also discuss at this point, how all the pictures seem to fit together, what story they may tell, what their order may be. After the students have seen and discussed all the pictures, each group will share out some of their predictions. The teacher will then read the story and the students will be encouraged to retain, change, or confirm their predictions.
Strategy: Creating Visual Images

Title: The Secret Shortcut

Author: Mark Teague

Illustrator: Mark Teague

ISBN#: 0-590-67714-0

Objective: The students will draw a picture of their favorite part of the story, and sequence them in the order in which they occurred.

drawing paper, one sheet per student
crayons (optional)

Procedure: After the students hear the selection, they are instructed to think of a part of the story that they particularly enjoyed. Have the students tell about their choice, what it is and why they chose it. The teacher may also participate, but wait until all the students have had an opportunity to share so as not to influence their responses. Next, the students are given a sheet of drawing paper and asked to draw a picture (and color if so desired) about that part of the story. They can also add a caption to the story. Once all the pictures are finished, the students sit in a circle holding their picture so they can be seen by all students. They explain their picture using as many descriptive words as possible. They then collaborate to choose the first picture, second, third, and so on until all the pictures have been sequenced. In the case of more than one picture about the same event, the students really need to scrutinize the pictures for some kind of detail that may set it apart sequentially from the others. This activity leads to some very creative discussion about sequence. The illustrations may be kept at a center for follow up work with
sequence and possibly even matching the pictures to some student generated sentences from the story.
Strategy: Determining Importance/Synthesizing

Title: The Secret Shortcut

Author: Mark Teague

Illustrator: Mark Teague

ISBN#: 0-590-67714-0

Objective: The students will fill in the alphabet boxes using words that reflect important parts of the story.


Alphabet boxes

Procedure: After having heard the story, the students are placed into small groups or partners. Each group is given a copy of the alphabet boxes form. The students are then instructed to think of words that reflect important points in the story. They write their words into the appropriate boxes on the form, making sure they tell how each selected word relates to the story. A large alphabet box form may be filled in with a class compilation of the most interesting words generated by the groups, making sure to hear each justification.

An extension to this activity would be to use the words to form a question much like the game show Jeopardy©. e.g. From the story The Secret Shortcut, if a word in the box labeled "E" is excuses, the question may be "What did Wendell and Floyd always give their teacher about being late?"
**Alphabet Boxes**

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![Diagram of alphabet boxes with trees and a bush]
Strategy: Fix-Up

Title: Meanwhile

Author: Jules Feiffer

Illustrator: Jules Feiffer

ISBN#: 0-06-205155-5

Objective: The students will participate in the activity "Say Something" to use alternate independent strategies for making meaning.

Materials: book, Meanwhile (multiple copies can be used if the book is to be read silently by the students.

Procedure: The students will work with a partner. As the teacher reads the selection, she will stop periodically to allow the partners to "say something" to each other about what they have heard. They may comment on what was just heard, make predictions about what will happen next, share connections and experiences related to the text or ask a question about something that is confusing them. This strategy should be modeled many times by the teacher using the "Think Aloud" technique as follows.

Think Alouds are used to learn what students attend to as they read, so teachers can make proper instructional decisions. They tap current thinking regarding metacognition and they "show" some of the reader's in-process thinking. Think Alouds help us as educators understand what confuses readers and simultaneously slows down reading and encourages thinking about text. Students can learn about each other's thinking when Think Alouds are shared.

Any text may be used, but a good variety is suggested such as:
- Familiar/unfamiliar
- Fiction/non-fiction
- Narrative/expository

The text should be challenging, but not frustrating and it is recommended that
you use text from eight to twenty sentences in length.

You may save the Think Aloud by taking notes right from the student as he or she things aloud or tape record and assess later. Taped Think Alouds may even become part of an assessment portfolio
Keep directions simple and model the expectations for the student. It is recommended that students read the text aloud before they think aloud, rather than reading silently.
Make time for modeling and guided practice, coaching the students with the entire process.

Remember the following:
Make predictions
Describe the visual images you are forming in your head from the information in the text
Make analogies to link prior knowledge to new information in the text
Verbalize confusing points to monitor ongoing comprehension
Demonstrate fix-up strategies to correct lagging comprehension
Strategy: Creating Visual Images

Title: Meanwhile

Author: Jules Feiffer

Illustrator: Jules Feiffer

ISBN#: 0-06-205155-5

Objective: The student will work in a group to develop a visual representation of the key points of the story.

Materials: book, Meanwhile
pocket chart
sentence strips
markers
large sheets of butcher paper

Procedure: *This activity should only be attempted in small groups only after it has been modeled by the teacher and the students have practiced and are familiar enough with the format to begin independent work.*

After hearing the story, the group will identify the areas that the character visited in the book, for the teacher to write on sentence strips, one area per strip. The students will also identify key points of action in each area for the teacher to write on sentence strips, one action per strip. The action strips will then be categorized under each area strip. The group will then discuss how each action may be represented by a graphic. It will be explained by the teacher that the graphic representations will not be complete pictures, but small clip arts. The students will be grouped into threes or fours and each group will be responsible for mind mapping the areas and the actions as identified previously. Each area and corresponding actions will be in the same color but other areas and actions will be in different colors. The completed
mind maps can be displayed and used to practice retelling of the story.
Strategy: Questioning

Title: Meanwhile

Author: Jules Feiffer

Illustrator: Jules Feiffer

ISBN#: 0-06-205155-5

Objective: The students will use question starter cards before, during and after reading the selection to help self-monitor for understanding.

Materials: book, Meanwhile question cards

Procedure: The teacher will have three containers labeled; BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER. Each container holds the question cards. At various intervals before, during and after reading the story, the teacher will have a student pull a question out of the container. If the student is able to they can read the question to the class. If they are having difficulty, the teacher can read the question to the class. The students will then turn to their reading partner and each in turn discuss their response. The teacher will then choose two or three students to share their responses with the group. If students are having difficulty answering the questions, the teacher can focus the student into looking at a particular element of the text. E.g. “While you are looking at the picture, why would...?” or “Let’s read this sentence again and ask, do you think...?” or “While you are looking at the word , I want you to tell me what would happen if...”. If the teacher is also acting as a reading partner, he or she will always share with the child last so as not to influence the response. If this activity is to be used after modeling and guided practice, students will each be given 3 envelopes containing before, during and after cards. At
various intervals of reading the story, (before, during and after),
the teacher will direct the students to pull one card from the
appropriate envelope, read the question, reflect on the answer
and share the answer with a reading partner. In this manner each
dyad could feasibly be discussing two separate questions.
An extension to this activity would be to add a fourth container
labeled THINKING CRITICALLY, in which, critical thinking
question starters could be used at any point of the story, before,
during or after.
**Before Question Cards**

What kind of selection is this?
Does it give me information or tell directions? How do I know?
What will this selection be about?
What do the title and the pictures tell me?
What do I already know about the topic? The story? The author?
Why would someone write about this?
Why would someone read this?
Why am I reading this?
Can I read this quickly or should I read it carefully?

**During Question Cards**

What do I think will happen next?
How do I know?
Does this make sense?
What can I do to make sure I understand it?
What can I do if I don’t understand what I am reading?
What have I learned so far?
What have I found interesting so far?
Is this easy to read or hard to read? Why do I think so?
What strategies will help me understand this kind of selection?
Should I look for the plot, the main idea?
What is the author trying to tell me?
Can I visualize what has been described?
What do I think about what the author is saying?

**After Question Cards**

What are the answers to the questions I had before I started reading?
What can I do if I still have unanswered questions?
What can I do if I can’t remember what I have read?
Would I recommend this selection to someone else? Why or why not?
Did I like it? Why or why not?
Do I agree with what the author said?
How would I summarize what I read?
Are there any parts that I should read again to be sure that I understand?
How was this selection similar to and different from other stories I have read?
Did the selection remind me of my own experiences?
Critical Thinking Question Starters

I WONDER
I wonder why
I wonder how
I wonder when
I wonder if it's true that
I wonder what would happen if

WHAT
What if
What was your favorite
What did you like about
What was your least favorite
What did you think about
What would you do if
What should

WHY
Why do you think
Why would you
Why wouldn't
Why did the author
Why is the picture
Why would it be necessary to

DO YOU
Do you think
Do you understand why
Do you know why
Do you believe

HOW
How is
How are
How were
How did you remember
How does
How should
How would you change

WHEN
When did you realize
When did you decide
When did you begin to think
When would you have

CAN YOU
Can you figure out
Can you explain
Can you compare
Can you summarize
Can you take a guess
Can you decide

DID YOU
Did you ever
Did you think
Did you like
Did you know
Did you learn anything new about
Strategy: Activating Prior Knowledge

Title: Saving Sweetness

Author: Diane Stanley

Illustrator: G. Brian Karas

ISBN#: 0399-22645-1

Objective: The students will use words, concepts and pictures from the story to create a prediction map of how these things might interact in the story.

Materials: book, Saving Sweetness
words and phrases from the story, written on index cards (or one set per group)
pictures of things from the story (or one set per group)
Large sheet of butcher paper (or one sheet per group)
tape or PostIt™ glue

Procedure: The students are each given either a word, phrase or picture card. A large piece of butcher paper is on the wall. The students are directed to (one at a time) place their card on the butcher paper in a story web format. When the map is assembled it will enable them to form an impression of how they predict the characters and events may interact in the story. They may take turns using the map to tell the story as they predict it will be. This activity may also be done in small groups once it has been modeled enough that the students are capable of making independent decisions. Divide the class into groups of three or four. Give each group a large sheet of butcher paper and a set of words, phrases and pictures of things from the story. The students are to lay out the items on butcher paper in a web to link
the words, phrases and pictures together. They then do a telling of the story based on their story map. The teacher can then read the story and compare the students predictions with the actual story.
Strategy: Creating Visual Images
Title: Saving Sweetness
Author: Diane Stanley
Illustrator: G. Brian Karas
ISBN#: 0399-22645-1
Objective: The students will select a saying from the book, draw a picture of what it means literally, and then define the saying figuratively.
Materials: book, Saving Sweetness
idioms on sentence strips
pocket chart
drawing paper
 crayons
 pencils
Procedure: After the teacher reads the book, the students will discuss the regional idioms that were used. The idioms will be written on sentence strips, read and placed in the pocket chart. A discussion will take place on the author's purpose of using them to illustrate the story to make it more colorful. The group will discuss the literal meaning and the figurative meaning of each idiom. The students will then choose one idiom to illustrate and to give an explanation of meaning. The pages can then be bound into a book as a companion text for Saving Sweetness. Students who are English Language Learners may be paired with a fluent English speaker for this activity.
An extension to this activity would be for the students to create a new class book of idioms that are used in their region.
She looks like somethin' the cat drug in and the dog wouldn't eat.
She's nasty enough to scare night into day.
She came in hollerin' like a banshee.
He's as mean as an acre of rattlesnakes.
It was as hot as blazes.
Seemed like the wind was too tired to blow.
She was as cute as a speckled pup under a wagon.
She lit off like she was tryin' to catch yesterday.
I was feelin' like somethin' that was chewed up and spit out.
He was loaded for bear.
He gave me a look that would freeze a cat.
I'm gonna knock you into the middle of next week.
She fell on me like Grandma on a chicken snake.
He jumps when she hollers frog.
Strategy: Synthesizing

Title: Saving Sweetness

Author: Diane Stanley

Illustrator: G. Brian Karas

ISBN#: 0399-22645-1

Objective: The students will analyze and draw conclusions about text elements of two stories by the same author.

Materials: book, Saving Sweetness
book, Raising Sweetness
pocket chart
chart headings
large index cards

Procedure: The teacher will read Saving Sweetness and Raising Sweetness to the class. The group will discuss and write the elements of setting, characters, relationships, problem and problem resolution from each story separately on large index cards. The cards will be placed in the pocket chart corresponding to the correct columns and row headings. The teacher will guide the students in completing the chart, encouraging them to draw relevant conclusions about their observations from the stories and writing them on large index cards.

An extension to this activity, after much modeling and guided practice, would be to divide the class into five groups and assign each group a different story element and have each group be responsible for completing the chart for its element.

Other stories that may be used in conjunction with themes from Saving Sweetness for this activity may be:
Spunky Girls
Koala Lou by Mem Fox. Harcourt, 1989

Frontier Life

Sheriffs

Orphans
Train to Somewhere by Eve Bunting. Clarion, 1996.


