



MARYGROVE COLLEGE
Master in the Art of Teaching

▶▶ K-6 Reading Comprehension Best Practices

MAT offered in partnership with

D.E.A.R. in the Headlights.

Making the Most of Silent, Sustained Reading

Like any skill, reading “muscles” become stronger when exercised regularly. However, just like any sport or exercise, a competent coach is vital to individual progress. As the reading coach in your classroom, you must motivate as well as instruct. We’ve compiled a Best Practices Guide that can help you build a successful reading program in your classroom...today. Good readers, struggling readers– and every reader in between– will benefit from these time-tested strategies. They really work. No fads, no politics; just common sense scholarship for K-6 reading comprehension.

K-6 Reading Comprehension Best Practices

Universal Reading Do’s

What every teacher should be doing to foster better reading and comprehension:

- Do let children have a say in their reading materials. Offer a selection of books at “just right” reading levels.
- Do encourage students to recommend books to each other.
- Do expose your students to a wide range of literature and sources—poetry, fiction, non-fiction, magazines, newspapers, and online articles. Variety of genre is key to exposing readers to material they may find interesting, and can generate a love for reading.
- Do read to your students. Read-alouds are important to model language and build vocabulary for students of ALL ages.
- Do model good reading behaviors for your class. “Think Aloud” about what the class is reading, share your personal reading choices, and encourage students to do the same. Your students want to know what you like to read, and even why you like to read. Tell them often!

A Dozen Comprehension Strategies You Can Use Now.

Use only a few of these together, and you’re on your way.

(1) Explicit Word Analysis Instruction

Words, words and more words get students interested in reading. Teachers provide explicit instruction, build word knowledge, and directly teach skills and strategies for word analysis (phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, structural analysis, context clues, vocabulary) e.g. direct phonics instruction, (yes, phonics!) word walls, word sorts, making words, picture clues, songs, poems, rhymes. According to the Children’s Reading Foundation www.readingfoundation.org, researchers report children who have memorized six to eight nursery rhymes become good readers.

Exemplar: An effective best practice for reading comprehension uses the simple post-it note. Every time students encounter a word or phrase that causes them to pause, ask them to place a colorful post-it note on it. When a chapter is completed, students go back and read each paragraph that contains a post-it. If the passage now makes sense, the post-it is removed. If

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the student is still confused, then the post-it remains until a peer or a teacher helps. As readers improve, post-it notes become places to record the reader's questions to the author, the reader's connections to the text, and, still later, the reader's research questions. Post-it notes are a habit good for life.

They can also clear up misperceptions about the topic which might have shown up in the Know column before they actually read anything. Assess metacognition: did they get it or not?

- Frey, N. and Fisher, D. 2007. *Reading for Information in Elementary School*. New Jersey: Pearson Publishers.

(2) Instructional Planning

Teachers should plan instruction around all three phases of reading: before, during and after. Each phase is uniquely important. Use integrated thematic units, anticipation guides, journal reflections, mind maps (The Mind Map Book by Tony Buzan, ©2000 and Thinking Maps - www.thinkingmaps.com) and especially the strategy of K-W-L:

Exemplar: K - W - L
(Ogle, 1986)

K-W-L uses a three-column chart that helps readers define the Before, During, and After phases of reading. Long recognized as a method for promoting interest and sustaining learning, K-W-L invites students to formulate an understanding of the material.

- K stands for Know
This question seeks prior knowledge. What do I already know about the topic?
- W stands for Will or Want
This question makes readers active participants in the reading. What do I think I will learn about this topic?
What do I want to know about this topic?
- L stands for Learned
This question encourages follow-up. What have I learned about this topic?

How Does It Work?

1. Draw three columns on the chalkboard, overhead, or smart board or have students draw them on a clean sheet of paper.
2. Label each column with 1)K for Know 2)W for Will or Want and 3)L for Learned.
3. Before reading, students fill in the Know column with words, terms, or phrases from their background or prior knowledge.
4. Then have students predict what they feel they Will learn about the topic, which might follow a quick glance at the topic headings, pictures, and charts that are found in the reading.
5. After reading, students should fill in their new knowledge gained from reading the content.



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(3) Collaboration and Reflection

Teachers should routinely self-reflect and collaborate on instructional practices and student progress within school and or district, shared planning time, mentoring, grade level meetings, school wide reading plan. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has a great web site to help you get started: <http://webserver3.ascd.org/ossd/collaborativeplanning.html>

(4) Assessment to Inform Instruction

Teachers should routinely monitor and assess the reading levels and progress of individual students. This ongoing evaluation directs and informs instruction. Keep portfolios, individual reading records, learning reading logs, anecdotal notes, response journals, rubrics. One Marygrove College instructor, who is also a 4th grade teacher, uses Raz-Kids (www.raz-kids.com) to keep track of reading results. Here's how:

Exemplar: Technology Facilitates Running Records
(Berkowitz, 2010)

Running Records are a way to keep track of students' comprehension and fluency progress.

- The student is presented with a text of an appropriate level to read aloud.
- The teacher has a copy of the same text which has been triple-spaced.
- The teacher marks the mis-cues the student makes when reading, then asks the student to retell the story.

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- The teacher can then develop a fluency rate (words per minute), a comprehension score, and a profile of the types of reading mis-cues the student made.

There are two problems with this system – 1) it takes a lot of time to work one-on-one with each student and 2) the rest of the class is not making progress while the teacher assesses individual students. Technology, however, solves these problems.

How Does It Work?

1. Prepare the reading materials for each student (you can use basal materials, district tests, or materials from a site like Raz-Kids.com). Each reading passage should be approximately 100-300 words long.
2. Have each student call your cell phone and read the passage in as a message.
3. Students can call back to retell the story in a separate message.
4. While a few students are busy calling your cell phone, you are working with the class.
5. During your preparation period, or at another time, you can transcribe the messages.

- Harry Berkowitz, 4th Grade Teacher, West Maple Elementary, Birmingham Public Schools, Michigan.

ing (oral and or silent) every day to increase fluency and vocabulary. This time is often called D.E.A.R. (Drop Everything and Read) or SSR (Sustained, Silent Reading). Time should be allotted daily to silent reading, books should be available at a variety of reading levels in class, offer take-home books, incorporate reading workshops.

Kelley and Clausen-Grace (2006) found it is not enough to sit students down in a quiet time and place and expect them to read in a variety of genres and to benefit from their reading.

Exemplar: R⁵

(Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006) Structured Sustained Silent Reading can increase student comprehension, choice of genre, and motivation.

"We were well aware of the strengths of SSR but equally aware of possible weaknesses. Students often read inappropriate reading material (too hard or too easy), and many students were fake reading during this time. The lack of response or feedback left some students without a purpose for reading. And in our situation, many students were unable to engage in their texts because they lacked strategies needed to monitor comprehension." (p. 150)

(5) Learning Standards

Ongoing teacher in-service and standards posted in classrooms help teachers reinforce curriculum and instruction alignment to standards. Principals must encourage and facilitate their teachers' conceptual knowledge of state language arts learning standards. Standards should be articulated to parents, as well. Here is a link to the newly adopted Common Core standards for English/Language Arts: www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards

(6) Genre Variety and (7) Independent Reading

Students must have broad reading and writing experiences, multiple genres and styles, reading to students at all grade levels is part of this broad experience. Literature circles, integrated thematic units, teacher read-alouds, dramas, books on tape, online reading and classroom wiki writings.

Students must have opportunities for sustained read-



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Kelley and Clausen-Grace developed a 5-step process to guide students through the silent reading period. They found that this process reduced “fake reading” as well as improving comprehension and variety of genres read. Most strikingly, motivation to read improved tremendously:

“A pervasive culture of avid readers was born, causing even reluctant readers to compete for the first shot at new books. Students began asking the teacher to purchase specific titles for the classroom collection. They started coaxing their parents to purchase new titles (which they actually read, rather than letting them stack up) or to take them to the public library to get books. They also began clamoring for more R5 time.” (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006, p. 150).

How Does It Work?

- Read and Relax – After drinks, trips to the bathroom and other distractions have been eliminated, students have a set purpose to read a book of their choice in a location of their choice. Students practice strategies they have been taught. Teacher moves through the room recording who is reading what, helping students make reading selections, and conferring on reading strategies.
- Reflect and Respond – Students reflect and respond in a reading log which teacher circulates and continues conferences.
- Rap (Share/Discuss) – Students pair up and share something interesting from their book. Students actively listen to each other. Teacher circulates, then facilitates a whole class sharing time where strategies are emphasized.

- Kelley, M. & Clausen-Grace, N. (2006) R5: The sustained silent reading makeover that transformed readers, *The Reading Teacher* 60 (2) pp. 148-156.

(8) Appropriate Instructional Levels

Students need opportunities to read at their instructional level every day. Make available leveled books for student choice, guided reading and paired/partner reading. Sometimes, however, students insist on selecting books that are either too easy or too difficult for them to read independently. Have students apply one or both of these rules:

- The Goldilocks Rule: Is the book too hard, too easy or just right?
- The Five Finger Rule: As you read the book, put up a finger each time you find a word you don't know. If you raise all 5 fingers on one hand before you are done with the page, the book is too difficult.

- Read.Write.Think (2006) downloaded from www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson916/right.pdf



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(9) Reading for Purpose

Students have extensive opportunities to read for a variety of purposes and to apply what is read every day. Discussion and writing are used by students to organize their thinking and they reflect on what they read for specific purposes. Literature circles, reader's workshop, journal writing.

Exemplar: Literature Circles Still Make Sense!

The popularity of book clubs and reading circles across all age groups remains high, and is proven to be immensely effective in strengthening comprehension skills. Literature circles can be used for non-fiction books which support subject areas as well as fiction books and poetry.

Literature circles are small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article or book. While reading each group-assigned portion of the text (either in or outside of class), members make notes to help them contribute to the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with ideas to share. Each group follows a reading and meeting schedule, holding periodic discus-

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sions on the way through the book. When they finish a book, circle members may share highlights of their reading with the wider community; then they trade members with other finishing groups, select more reading and move into a new cycle.

- Daniels, Harvey, 2002. *Literature Circles*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

(10) Integration

Reading and writing are integrated and used as tools to support learning in all curricular content areas. Integrated thematic units, peer conferencing, research projects, author's chair.

Exemplar: Implementing Author's Chair in your Classroom. Author's Chair is the final step in the writing process for grades 3-6. A special time and place is allotted to writers who wish to share their final products with an audience. Because the writing has already gone through revising and editing based on constructive criticism, Author's Chair is an opportunity for the writer to receive positive feedback from their classmates.

Purpose of Author's Chair:

- Providing an audience for hard work done well is a motivating force for children to write more in the future.
- As active-listening audience members, students develop listening and attention span skills.
- Analyzing written work requires reflection and critical thinking abilities. Giving and receiving feedback is beneficial for both parties. Both the presenter and the audience member's own writing improves as a result of the critique.

What does it look like?

A special chair such as a director's chair, an oversized office chair, or a spare teacher's chair is designated as the Author's Chair. Audience members face the presenter and listen carefully, critiquing the story silently. Critiquing involves thinking of parts of the writing that one likes and doesn't like. Only those things he or she likes should be shared with the author. Authors are encouraged to respond to the comments they receive.

How long should it last?

Third through sixth graders can sit and listen well for about 15 to 20 minutes.

-TeacherVision.com

(11) Literacy Rich Environment

Literacy rich environments display words and print everywhere, provide opportunities and tools that engage students in reading and writing activities, and celebrate students' reading and writing efforts. Each classroom has an extensive collection of reading materials with a wide range of high interest, multiple genre books at developmentally appropriate reading levels which motivate and support reading and writing. The room design should support whole group, small group and individual instruction.

Classroom libraries to include newspapers, magazines, leveled books with at least 15 books per student, displays of student work, environmental print, resource books, staffed school library, computers and software to support reading program.

(12) School, Family and Community Partnerships

Schools, families and communities collaborate to support literacy development of students at home and school by providing guest readers, cross-age reading, at-home reading logs, business/community partnerships, family reading night, tutors and mentors.

Exemplar:

A great example of School, Family and Community partnerships could be found in Dr. Lydia T. Wright School in Buffalo, New York. In 2006, they ran a successful reading marathon for 26 days to focus the entire community on reading. This event involved parents, grandparents, and others in the community— for example, police officers, firefighters, local authors of books for children, the mayor, judges, local celebrities, and older students— in reading activities.

- Epstein, Joyce. 2007. *Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships and the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University* jepstein@jhu.edu

Excerpts from *Illinois Right to Read Initiative*.

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Here are the TOP TEN things you should know about GOOD READERS:

1. Good readers are active readers.
2. Good readers have clear goals in mind for their reading. They constantly evaluate the text.
3. Good readers typically look over the text before they read, noting the structure of the text, and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals.
4. Good readers frequently make predictions about what is to come, as they read.
5. Good readers try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in text.
6. Good readers draw from, compare and integrate their prior knowledge with material in text.
7. Good readers think about the authors of the text, their style, their beliefs, intentions, etc.
8. Good readers monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary.
9. Good readers evaluate the text's quality and value, and react intellectually and emotionally.
10. Good readers read different kinds of texts differently.

- Duke, N. and Pearson, P. 2002. *Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension*. Scholasticred.com

A Checklist for Assessing the Comprehension Environment and Instruction in the Classroom

Ask yourself these questions to see if your classroom is on track for optimal literacy:

About the overall reading program:

- How much time do students spend actually reading?
- How much reading do students routinely do in texts other than those written solely for reading or content area instruction?
- Do students have clear and compelling purposes in mind when reading?
- How many different genres are available to students within your classroom? How many students read across genres?
- Do students have multiple opportunities to develop vocabulary and concept knowledge through texts?
- How much time do students spend writing texts for others to comprehend?

About other teaching considerations

- Are students helped to orchestrate multiple strategies, rather than using only one at a time?
- Are the texts used for instruction carefully chosen to match the strategy and students being taught?
- Is there concern with student motivation to engage in literacy activities and apply strategies learned?
- Are students' comprehension skills assessed on an ongoing basis?

- Duke, N. and Pearson, P. 2002. *Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension*. Scholasticred.com

When it's all said and done, and you have tried everything you can, but mastery is still not being achieved, a comprehension difficulty could be holding your student back. The following list can help teachers discern if intervention or greater reading support is necessary. Two or more of the following could indicate an issue.

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Reading Comprehension Red Flags:

- Difficulty understanding what is read
- Difficulty understanding oral instructions and/or directions
- Trouble “listening”; may be seen as inattentive
- Distractible
- Difficulty with oral language, discussing experiences, telling a story (story may be out of sequence, missing important details)
- Similar difficulties with written language, student may also lack ideas
- Difficulty understanding math or word problems
- Describes reading as “boring” and rarely picks up a book to read it
- Poor sense of direction
- Difficulty getting the point of a joke
- Has been labeled as having “attention deficit disorder” with or without hyperactivity

www.readingfoundation.com



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