

Monitoring Meaning

Key Ideas Taught During a Comprehension Strategy Study

- ✧ Proficient readers monitor their comprehension during reading. They know when the text they are reading or listening to makes sense, when it does not, what does not make sense, and whether the unclear portions are critical to overall understanding of the piece.
- ✧ Proficient readers can identify when text is comprehensible and the degree to which they understand it. They can identify ways in which a text becomes gradually more understandable by reading past an unclear portion and/or by rereading parts or the whole text.
- ✧ Proficient readers are aware of the purpose for which they read and direct attention to the parts of the text they most need to comprehend for that purpose.
- ✧ Proficient readers are able to assume different “stances” toward a text. For example, the child can read a book from the point of view of different characters within it, of a book reviewer or of a writer seeking new techniques for his/her work.
- ✧ Proficient readers identify difficulties they have in comprehending at the word, sentence, and whole-text level. They are flexible in their use of tactics to solve different types of comprehension problems:
 - ▷ They solve word and sentence-level problems with surface structure strategies such as decoding strategies and/or word analysis.
 - ▷ They solve text-level problems by monitoring, evaluating, and making revisions to their evolving interpretation of the text while reading. They then compare the emerging meaning to their background knowledge and make adjustments to incorporate new information into existing memory stores.
- ✧ Proficient readers can think aloud about their reading process. They are aware of and can articulate the surface and deep structure strategies they use to identify words, read fluently, and comprehend, and they can manage and create solutions to reading and learning problems.
- ✧ Proficient readers can identify confusing ideas, themes, and/or surface elements (words, sentence or text structures, graphs, tables, etc.) and can suggest a variety of different means to solve problems.
- ✧ Proficient readers are independent, flexible, and adaptive:
 - ▷ Working independently, they can use surface and deep structure strategies to solve reading problems and enhance understanding.
 - ▷ Showing flexibility, they can use a particular strategy (i.e., determining importance) to a greater or lesser degree depending on the demands of the text.
 - ▷ Working adaptively, they can “turn up (or turn down) the volume” on a particular strategy or use all comprehension strategies in concert, as needed.

Monitoring Meaning *(continued)*

- ✧ Proficient readers use text management strategies. They pause, reread, skim, scan, consider the meaning in text, and reflect on their understanding with other readers.
- ✧ Proficient readers understand and can articulate how monitoring enhances their comprehension.

Using Relevant Prior Knowledge, or Schema

Key Ideas Taught During a Comprehension Strategy Study

- ✧ Proficient readers spontaneously and purposefully recall their relevant prior knowledge (schema) before, during, and after they read and learn (text-to-self connections).
- ✧ Proficient readers use their schema to make sense of new information and to store those new ideas with related information in memory.
- ✧ Proficient readers assimilate information from text and other learning experiences into their relevant prior knowledge and make changes in that schema to accommodate the new information.
- ✧ Proficient readers adapt their schema as they read, converse with others, and learn; they delete inaccurate information (naïve conceptions), add to existing schema, and connect chunks of knowledge to other related knowledge, opinions, and ideas.
- ✧ Proficient readers can articulate how they use schema to enhance their comprehension in all forms of text and in all learning situations.
- ✧ Proficient readers connect information from text and other learning experiences to schema in long-term memory. Information is learned, remembered, and reapplied because it is linked to other learned information.
- ✧ Proficient readers understand and can articulate how using schema enhances their comprehension.
- ✧ Proficient readers capitalize on five types of schema when comprehending text and learning new material:
 - ▷ specific knowledge about the topic and general world knowledge (text-to-world connections)
 - ▷ specific knowledge about text topics, themes, content, structure, and organization (text-to-text connections)
 - ▷ their knowledge of potential obstacles to comprehension (particularly in nonfiction text or text with completely unfamiliar content)
 - ▷ knowledge about their own reading tendencies, preferences, and styles
 - ▷ specific knowledge about the author/illustrator and the tools he or she uses to create meaning
- ✧ Each type of schema permits students to monitor for meaning, pose questions, make predictions, draw conclusions, create mental images, synthesize, and determine importance as they read and learn.
- ✧ Proficient readers can articulate ways in which using schema enhances their comprehension.

Using Relevant Prior Knowledge, or Schema *(continued)*

- ✧ Teachers assist readers in activating schema (giving students the necessary tools to recall relevant prior knowledge) when exploring new content knowledge.
- ✧ Teachers help readers build schema (actually create background knowledge on a given topic, author, text structure, etc.) if they lack adequate schema for a particular reading situation.

Asking Questions

Key Ideas Taught During a Comprehension Strategy Study

- ✧ Proficient readers spontaneously and purposefully generate questions before, during, and after reading depending on their purpose in reading.
- ✧ Proficient readers ask questions to:
 - ▷ clarify meaning
 - ▷ speculate about text yet to be read
 - ▷ show skepticism or a critical stance
 - ▷ determine an author's intent, style, approach to a topic, or text format
 - ▷ locate a specific answer in text
 - ▷ consider rhetorical questions inspired by the text
- ✧ The types of questions differ based on the type of text (genre) and the reader's purpose.
- ✧ Proficient readers use questions to focus their attention on ideas, events, or other text elements they want to remember or wish to explore later.
- ✧ Proficient readers understand that many of the most intriguing questions are not answered explicitly in the text but left to the reader's interpretation.
- ✧ However, when an answer is needed, proficient readers determine whether it can be answered by the text and, if so, whether it is explicitly stated or will require them to infer the answer from the text, their background knowledge, and/or other text.
- ✧ Proficient readers understand how the process of questioning is used in other areas of their lives, both academic and personal.
- ✧ Proficient readers understand and can describe how asking questions deepens their comprehension.
- ✧ Proficient readers are aware that as they hear others' questions, new ones—called generative questions—are inspired in their own mind. In some cases, a reader's own question generates more questions.

Evoking Images

Key Ideas Taught During a Comprehension Strategy Study

- ✧ Proficient readers spontaneously and purposefully create images while and after they read. The images emerge from all five senses and the emotions and are anchored in a reader's prior knowledge.
- ✧ Proficient readers use images to immerse themselves in rich detail as they read. The detail gives depth and dimension to the reading, engaging the reader and making the text more memorable.
- ✧ Proficient readers use images to draw conclusions, to create distinct and unique interpretations of the text, to recall details significant to the text, and to recall a text after it has been read.
- ✧ Images from reading frequently influence the reader's writing.
- ✧ Proficient readers adapt their images as they continue to read. They revise images to incorporate new information in the text and new interpretations they develop as they read.
- ✧ Proficient readers understand and can articulate how creating images enhances their comprehension.
- ✧ Proficient readers adapt their images in response to the images other readers share.

Inferring

Key Ideas Taught During a Comprehension Strategy Study

- ✧ Inferring is the process of creating personal and unique meaning from text. It involves a mental process that combines what is read with relevant prior knowledge (schema). The reader's unique interpretation of text is the product of this blending.
- ✧ When proficient readers infer, they create a meaning that is not stated explicitly in the text. The process implies that they actively search for or become aware of implicit meaning.
- ✧ Inferring may cause the reader to slow his/her reading, reread sections, converse, write, or draw to better understand the content.
- ✧ Inferences may be more thoroughly developed if the reader pauses to reflect and consider multiple interpretations and perspectives.
- ✧ When they infer, proficient readers:
 - ▷ draw conclusions from text
 - ▷ make reasonable predictions as they read, then test and revise those predictions as they read further
 - ▷ create dynamic interpretations of text that they adapt as they continue to read and after they read
 - ▷ use the combination of background knowledge and explicitly stated information from the text to answer questions they have as they read
 - ▷ make connections between conclusions they draw and other beliefs or knowledge; they use the inferences to extend and adapt existing knowledge
 - ▷ arrive at insight after struggling to understand complex concepts
 - ▷ make critical or analytical judgments about what they read
- ✧ When proficient readers infer, they are more able to remember and reapply what they have read, create new and revise existing background knowledge, discriminate and critically analyze text and authors, engage in conversation and/or other analytical or reflective responses to what they read.
- ✧ Proficient readers revise their inferences based on the inferences and interpretations of other readers.
- ✧ Proficient readers understand and can describe how inferences deepen their comprehension.
- ✧ A wide variety of interpretation is appropriate for fiction and poetry; a narrower range of interpretation is typical for nonfiction text. Teachers should allow great latitude for inferences, provided that the reader can defend his/her inferences with a description of relevant prior knowledge and specific text they have read.

Determining Importance in Text

Key Ideas Taught During a Comprehension Strategy Study

- ✧ Proficient readers make purposeful and spontaneous decisions about what is important in text at three levels:
 - ▷ *Word level:* Words that carry the meaning are *contentives*; words that connect are *functors*. Contentives tend to be more important to the overall meaning of passage than functors.
 - ▷ *Sentence level:* There are usually key sentences that carry the weight of meaning for a paragraph, passage, or section; often, especially in nonfiction, they contain bold print, begin or end the passage, or refer to a table or graph.
 - ▷ *Text level:* Texts contain key ideas, concepts, and themes; our opinions about which ideas are most important change as we read the passage. We typically make our final conclusions about the most important themes after reading the passage, perhaps several times, and/or after conversing or writing about the passage. Clues such as repetition for emphasis, illustrations or diagrams, symbolism, foreshadowing, character and setting prominence, and conflict all point to importance at the text level.
- ✧ Decisions about importance in text are made based on:
 - ▷ the reader's purpose
 - ▷ the reader's schema for the text content—ideas most closely connected to the reader's prior knowledge will often be considered most important
 - ▷ the reader's sense of the aesthetic—what he or she values, considers worthy or beautiful
 - ▷ language that surprises or otherwise captures the reader's sustained focus
 - ▷ the reader's beliefs, opinions, and experiences related to the text
 - ▷ the reader's schema for text format—text that stands out visually and/or ideas that are repeated are often considered most important
 - ▷ the reader's understanding of text structures—for example, in a cause and effect text structure, the reader should direct his/her attention to those elements
 - ▷ concepts another reader mentions prior to, during, or after reading.
- ✧ Proficient readers are able to articulate how they make decisions about what is important in a given context and how those decisions enhance their overall comprehension of the piece.
- ✧ Frequently, pointing out non-examples (what is unimportant) helps students to distinguish importance more clearly.
- ✧ Interesting discussion emanates from dispute about what is most important. Children need to work toward defending their positions, but there is rarely one main idea.

Synthesizing

Key Ideas Taught During a Comprehension Strategy Study

- ✧ The process of synthesizing occurs during reading:
 - ▷ Proficient readers are aware of changes in their ideas and conclusions about text as they read further into the text.
 - ▷ Proficient readers understand and can articulate how their thinking about a given text evolves and/or alters as the text itself changes.
 - ▷ Proficient readers maintain a cognitive synthesis as they read. They monitor the overall meaning and themes in a text as they read and are aware of the ways text elements “fit together” to create the overall meaning and themes.
 - ▷ Proficient readers are aware of text structures in fiction and nonfiction and understand that text elements provide clues to help them predict and synthesize and thereby understand the overall meaning and themes.
 - ▷ As they read, proficient readers attend more directly to character, setting, conflict, sequence of events, resolution, and theme in fiction and to text structures such as chronological order, cause and effect, compare and contrast, description, enumeration, and problem/solution in nonfiction. They use their knowledge of these text structures to make decisions about the overall meaning of a passage, chapter, or book.
 - ▷ Proficient readers actively revise their cognitive synthesis as they read. New information is assimilated into the reader’s evolving ideas about the text, sometimes rendering earlier decisions about the text obsolete.
- ✧ The process of synthesizing occurs after reading:
 - ▷ A synthesis is the sum of information from the text, other relevant texts, and the reader’s background knowledge, ideas, and opinions produced in an original way.
 - ▷ Proficient readers are able to express, through a variety means (written, oral, artistic, or dramatic), a synthesis of what they have read. The synthesis includes ideas and themes relevant to the overall meaning of the text and is cogently and succinctly presented.
- ✧ Proficient readers use syntheses to share, recommend, and critically review books they have read.
- ✧ Proficient readers can articulate how using synthesis helps them better understand what they have read.