



Improving Your Child's Reading Comprehension at Home: Tips for Parents

www.kidsacademy.mobi

Over the last few years, many children experienced learning loss in some academic areas due to the pandemic. Parents are concerned that their elementary students struggle with developing reading skills, so important for learning success. We'll provide ways to address these issues using the science of reading—the latest teaching approach based on extensive research.



In order to fully understand reading comprehension, we need to take a close look at the way a reader develops. The science of reading has shown that reading begins with decoding, which includes:

- the alphabetic principle
- letter-sound correspondence
- phonological awareness, which refers to syllables and word parts.

With those skills, a reader can access words and build strategies to help them comprehend, or understand, what they are reading.

Besides decoding, students need to be able to utilize a variety of strategies in order to extract the meaning as they read and make sense of the words and ideas they are presented with. Elements of comprehension include background knowledge of the subject being read about, vocabulary development, and higher-order skills like making inferences and understanding metaphors. A skilled reader will use a variety of strategies as they read in order to make meaning and retain what they have learned.

Let's look into each component of reading comprehension in more detail!

Concepts of Print, "Reading" the Pictures and Repeated Reading

At its most basic level, children begin to understand the concepts of print—figuring out how to correctly hold a book and turn the pages. They learn that the pictures can tell a story and will later connect those pictures to the words on the page.

"Little Red Riding Hood"

Illustrations

Match the illustration to the part of the story. Check the correct answer.

1. Little Red Riding Hood set out immediately to go to her grandmother, who lived in another village.



2. When Little Red Riding Hood entered the woods a wolf came up to her.



3. Little Red Riding Hood ran off into the woods looking for flowers.



4. The wolf took the grandmother's clothes, put them on, and put her cap on his head.



A great activity that parents can do with emergent readers is to ask them to “read” the pictures. Ask your child to look at each page and tell you what is going on. Encourage them to point to the parts of the picture as they tell you what is happening. Children love to reread their favorite books over and over again. And while this may seem redundant, it is actually very beneficial for the developing reader. The repetition and predictability helps them to become familiar with the story and builds their confidence in remembering what has happened in a book.

Making Predictions

Making predictions is another comprehension strategy that readers use all the time. Particularly when reading a new book or story, this strategy can be beneficial. The key to making good predictions is to help you child use what they have already learned about the characters and the text to make a guess about what might happen next. Robust predictions are based on text evidence, so encourage your reader to think about the information they already know in order to come up with a strong prediction.

For early readers, you may want to stop at certain points in a well-loved book and ask your child to tell you what will happen next. This familiar classic, [Peter Rabbit](#), is perfect for pausing at certain points to encourage your child to tell you what will happen next.




Watch on [YouTube](#)

Vocabulary Development

Children begin to grow their vocabulary as soon as they are born. Talking to them as babies helps them start making connections in their brain between sounds and words. As they get older, books serve as a source of words in a new context and the introduction

to [new words](#). Nursery rhymes, like the one shown here and short stories are excellent for keeping a young child's attention while exposing them to new vocabulary.


Rub-a-Dub-Dub Nursery Rhyme



Fill in the boxes next to the characters that belong in the nursery rhyme.

Rub-a-dub-dub,
Three men in a tub,
And who do you think they were?
The butcher, the baker,
The candlestick-maker,
They all sailed out to sea,
'Twas enough to make a man stare.

☐☐☐☐☐



In higher-level texts, readers may need to use context clues in order to figure out the meaning of new vocabulary. This means that they need to pay attention to how the word is used in the sentence to determine its meaning. Encourage your reader to use context when they come to a word that they are not familiar with.

Story Structure

Readers begin to notice that stories have a simple structure. At the early levels, this is a beginning, a middle, and an end. You can support your child's comprehension by asking

them to tell you who the characters are and what happens at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. If they are not able to tell you, go back and model rereading in order to find the missing information. Rereading when we don't understand is an important strategy that strong readers use.

As your reader grows, so will the complexity of the texts they are reading. The plot of higher-level books will be more complicated and require a greater degree of understanding by the reader. The plot refers to the events in a story and can include the character dealing with a problem and ultimately solving or resolving that problem. You can encourage your reader to retell the most important events in the story or chapter that you are reading. This is a skill that is often difficult for new readers because it means they have to determine which details are most important. To support them in this, encourage them to think about events that help to move the story along. Events that help the main character get closer to solving their problem or help them to learn a lesson are often important parts of the plot.

Story Structure

A story has a **beginning** where the characters and setting are introduced, a **middle** where the major events happen, and an **ending** which usually wraps the story up. Read this story and identify these parts.



Maggie and her best friend Jo did everything together.

They were always going on all sorts of adventures.

One sunny afternoon they ventured into the woods.

Maggie ran ahead of Jo and hid in a small cave.

Jo ran right by the cave without noticing. When Jo realized she was alone, she stopped walking.

"Maggie! Where are you?" Jo yelled, her voice beginning to shake. When there was no answer Jo grew frightened.

She slowly crept over to a cave she had passed and looked in.

"Boo!" Maggie shouted.

The two friends laughed and continued exploring the woods.

Check the box if the description is of the beginning, middle or end of the story.

1. Maggie pops out of the cave and the two girls laugh.

beginning

middle

end

☐☐☐

2. Maggie hides in the cave. Jo realizes she is alone and grows afraid.

beginning

middle

end

☐☐☐

3. Maggie and Jo enter the woods together.

beginning

middle

end

☐☐☐

Fluency

As your child progresses and becomes more confident in their decoding skills, they may want to read to you! While listening to them read, listen for the elements of fluency: accuracy, proper speed, attention to punctuation, and expression. Fluent readers recognize word patterns and decode almost automatically. They also show that they understand what they are reading by reading with expression.

Modeling fluent reading is an excellent way to help them hear what good reading sounds like. If your child is reading out loud to you and it is choppy or monotone, model reading the passage fluently and then ask them to read it again, paying attention to smoothness, rate, and expression.

Reading Non-fiction Texts

Reading a variety of types of books is also important for growing readers. Encourage your child to read a mixture of fiction and non-fiction. Non-fiction texts provide an opportunity for students to seek out new knowledge about a topic of interest to them. They can ask questions and try to find the answers as they read. This can be very motivating for even reluctant, struggling readers.

Non-fiction texts have a very different structure than fiction, and therefore we use different comprehension strategies. Readers need to be able to identify and use text features such as:

- pictures and captions
- headings
- bold words
- table of contents
- glossary
- index

These features help readers navigate the non-fiction text and assist in their comprehension. When previewing a non-fiction text it can be helpful to look for these text features in order to begin to activate prior knowledge about a topic.

As children begin to read non-fiction, simply recalling facts that they have read about is a great way to help them build an understanding of a text. More experienced readers can also work to find the main idea and supporting details of a non-fiction text. Ask your reader what the text is mostly about and then help them to find details that connect to that.

More About Dinosaurs



1. Read about dinosaurs.



There were many types of dinosaurs. Some ate meat, and some ate plants.



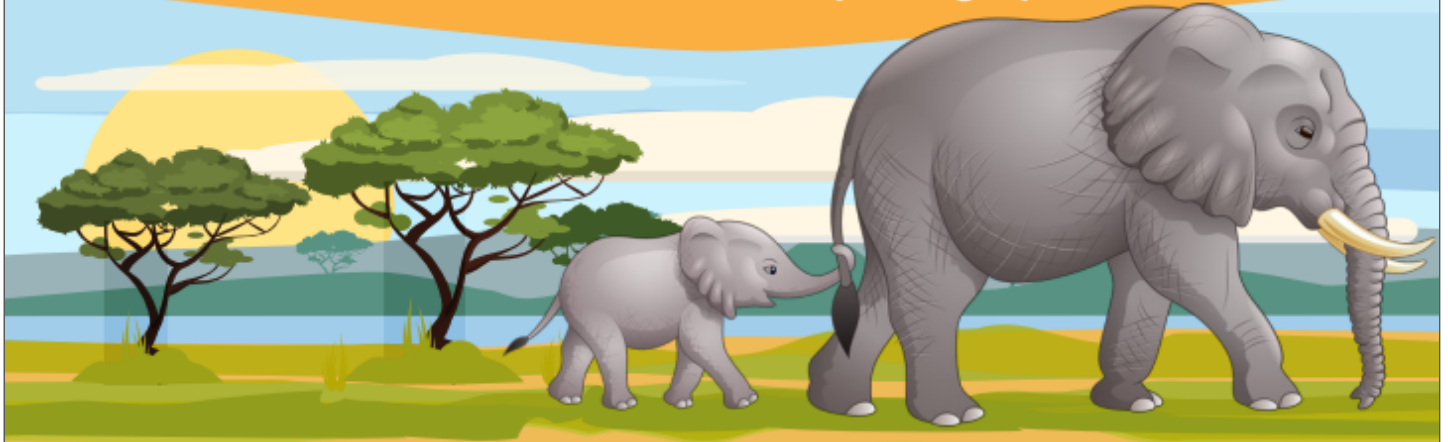
Some dinosaurs had feathers. Others had bumpy skin.

2. Circle the foods that dinosaurs ate.



Nonfiction Features

1. Listen to the captions read aloud. Then check the one that best matches the photograph.



Elephants take care of their babies.

☐

Elephants climb mountains all by themselves.

☐

2. Check the table of contents that could be in the same nonfiction book as this photograph.

TITLE:
ANIMALS
IN THE WILD



Chapter 1:
Giraffes



Chapter 2:
Elephants



Chapter 3:
Gorillas

☐

TITLE:
HEALTHY
FOODS



Chapter 1:
Fruits



Chapter 2:
Vegetables



Chapter 3:
Grains

☐

In summary, reading comprehension begins with decoding, which is based on recognition of letter-sound correspondence and of word parts. Building a solid foundation of decoding skills is the key to being able to read words and make meaning of texts. That, paired with utilizing a variety of comprehension strategies such as making predictions, checking for understanding, and thinking about story structure and plot, will help your reader develop into an independent reader and thinker.

By Nora Brown, certified K-6 teacher in South Windsor, CT

