

A Fresh Look at Reading Comprehension Instruction

How the *Concepts of Comprehension*[®]
Can Help Improve Students' Understanding of
What They Read in Grades K Through 6

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Agenda

Goal: To explore the major components of literacy skills that are crucial to the development of reading:

1. Inferential Thinking
2. Vocabulary Knowledge
3. Background Knowledge

We will:

- Demonstrate the impact of explicit instruction.
- Describe an approach designed to teach literacy skills specifically, consistently, and progressively across elementary grades.



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The Challenge

EXPLICIT INFORMATION

Sample
passage
Grade 5

Southern Bison

If it weren't for Mary Ann and Charles Goodnight, the great Southern bison¹ herd would probably be history.

In the late 1800s, thousands of bison roamed the plains of Texas. But during the winter of 1874, hunters killed almost all of the animals.

Angry over the destruction of the herd, the Goodnights rescued the orphaned calves, corralling² them on a farm.

When the Goodnights died, the animals were left to roam wild. The herd had shrunk to 250 by the 1960s. In 1997, only 38 of the great Southern bison were alive.

That's when the state of Texas stepped in. State officials herded the bison onto a 350-acre pasture near Amarillo, where they are now protected. Officials hope that the 56 survivors of the once-vast herd will breed and that the herd will again number in the hundreds.

¹bison: large mammal related to the ox, having a shaggy mane, a large head, short horns, and a large fleshy hump above the shoulders; buffalo

²corralling: herding animals into a pen

The Challenge

Polling Question:

Which **incorrect** answer did most students choose?

The method the Goodnights chose to help the bison was to:

- A) capture and care for the orphaned calves.
- B) try to keep hunters away from the land.
- C) herd them into a 350-acre pasture.

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Comprehension Breakdown:
What were students thinking? Why?

- 1. Limited inferential thinking skills**
The words "350-acre pasture" were right there in the text. Students resort to inappropriate strategies, like word matching, when struggling to comprehend.
- 2. Unfamiliar vocabulary**
Students may not understand the question at all. They may not know the meaning of the word "method" in the question. They may not know the meaning of the word "herd" in the passage.
- 3. Lack of background knowledge**
Even though the definition of "bison" is footnoted, students may not be able to visualize the animal if they've never seen one. Visualizing a "herd" of bison is equally challenging because herd may be an unknown word.



The Research

The Three Pillars

Reading Comprehension

Inferential Thinking

Research:
Joanna Williams

Teach students to use specific cognitive strategies.

Explicit instruction enhances understanding.

Vocabulary Knowledge

Research:
Isabel Beck

Comprehension requires knowledge of 90-95% of words in a text.

Vocabulary is best learned *in context* through *multiple strategies*.

Background Knowledge

Research:
E.D. Hirsch

To comprehend content readers require knowledge to put them into an appropriate context.

Students need exposure to a wide variety of topics.



The Solution

What to Teach: The Concepts of Comprehension®

These 21 Concepts utilize skills and strategies to support the inferential thinking required for successful comprehension of text.

- Genre
- Explicit Information
- Sequence
- Vocabulary in Context
- Fact and Opinion
- Main Idea
- Setting
- Character
- Predicting
- Text Features
- Point of View
- Classify and Categorize
- Compare and Contrast
- Cause and Effect
- Author's Purpose
- Plot
- Figurative Language
- Voice
- Theme
- Drawing Conclusions
- Pronoun Reference

Which Concepts are you surprised to see on this list?



The Solution

What to Teach: The Concepts of Comprehension®

The Concepts of Comprehension® were designed to be a framework to systematically address **ALL** areas of comprehension, instead of just a few.



The Solution

What to teach requires specificity.

The Concepts of Comprehension® support data-driven instruction by pointing out the specific area of instruction needed.

Standard Assessment

Data Might Show

Low proficiency in comprehension

Poor performance in summarizing

Concepts of Comprehension

- Plot
- Sequence
- Explicit Information



The Solution

How to Teach: Research Shows That Explicit Instruction Is Key

- Explicit instruction = The direct and specific teaching of skills and strategies.
- Studies show that explicit instruction makes a huge difference in learner outcomes, especially for low-achieving students. Studies by Rand and Carnegie Mellon found that reading instruction has a major impact on student performance.



The Solution

How to Teach: Research Shows That Explicit Instruction Is Key

“The explicitness with which teachers teach comprehension strategies makes a difference in learner outcomes, especially for low-achieving students.”

“Explicit instruction provides a clear explanation of the criterion task, encourages students to pay attention, activates prior knowledge, breaks the task into small steps, provides sufficient practice at every step, and incorporates teacher feedback. **It is particularly important for the teacher to model the comprehension strategies being taught. Careful and slow fading of the scaffolding is important.**”

from the RAND Reading Study Group. (2002). *Reading for Understanding Toward an R & D Program in Reading Comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA: Snow.



The Challenge

Polling Question:

How many of your students struggle with reading comprehension?

- A) Fewer than 10%
- B) 10 – 25%
- C) 50%
- D) More than 50%



The Solution

How to Teach: Explicit Instruction

The **Gradual Release of Responsibility** is a research-based instructional model developed by Pearson and Gallagher (1983).

The basic approach includes:

- Teacher **Modeling** (I)
- **Guided** Practice (We)
- Student **Independent** Practice (You)

The Solution

How to Teach: Explicit Instruction

I = Teacher Modeling

- Each Concept of Comprehension® is defined.
- Specific teacher language is required for modeling the skills and strategies using specific sections of text.

We = Guided Practice

- Teacher and students read and think aloud about the text.
- More responsibility is put on the students; the teacher is a facilitator.

You = Independent Practice

- Additional materials are provided to students.
- Now students have an opportunity to independently apply the new skills.



The Solution

How to Teach: Explicit Instruction

The screenshot displays the 'WEEKLY READER Connect' website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, Weekly Reader Multimedia Units, Reading Comprehension Lessons, Using WR Connect, and About WR Connect. Below this is a search bar and a 'HELP' link. The main content area is titled 'Reading Comprehension Lesson' and includes a brief description of the lesson's focus on inferential thinking skills. The lesson is for 'GRADE 2' and is titled 'PREDICTING'. The main text is 'Traveling Turtles: A Trip Across the Atlantic'. A cartoon wolf character is shown with a speech bubble that says, 'Think about what could happen next in a piece of writing. Doing that will make the story more interesting.' Below the character are buttons for 'Click here for questions' and 'Print this lesson'. The text of the lesson describes loggerhead turtles on a beach in Florida, their nesting habits, and the journey of baby turtles across the ocean. A 'Clues' section on the right lists four questions for students to answer based on the text.

WEEKLY READER Connect INVITE THE WORLD IN

Home Weekly Reader Multimedia Units Reading Comprehension Lessons Using WR Connect About WR Connect SEARCH HELP

Reading Comprehension Lesson
This lesson focuses on one of the Concepts of Comprehension® to help you develop your students' inferential thinking skills. It includes an on-screen reading passage and clues, comprehension questions (below, left), links to a PDF lesson plan, and an additional passage with accompanying questions ("More Practice").

GRADE 2 PREDICTING Lesson Plan More Practice

Traveling Turtles: A Trip Across the Atlantic

It is a warm spring night on a beach in Florida. In the moonlight, giant loggerhead turtles swim toward the shore. Each turtle slowly crawls onto the sand. They have traveled a long way to this beach. They are all female turtles. They have come to dig their nests.

Each turtle uses her flippers to scoop out a big hole in the sand. Then she begins to lay her eggs. About 100 eggs go into the nest. Then she covers them with sand. By the time the night is over, the mother turtles have finished laying eggs. Then they swim back out to sea.

Two months later, tiny turtles hatch and travel out to sea. Their mothers are far away. They must find their way to the sea by themselves. Most babies do not go for a swim when they are hours old. But baby loggerhead sea turtles do. They head straight for the ocean and start swimming.

Across the Ocean

The baby turtles have a lot of swimming to do. Loggerheads start to swim 8,000 miles not long after they hatch! The tiny turtles swim across the ocean and back again. The trip takes between five and ten years. When female turtles grow up, they will go back to the same beach to lay their eggs.

Scientists aren't sure how the turtles can find their way back across the wide ocean. They think they may be able to sense magnetism in the Earth. It would be like having a built-in compass.

However they do it, the turtles manage to come back. Then a new group of hatchlings starts the trip all over again.

Clues

- (1) The title helps you predict what the story is about.
- (2) Think about why the turtles are digging nests.
- (3) What do you think will happen to the eggs?
- (4) The outback helps predict where the baby turtles are going.

Think about what could happen next in a piece of writing. Doing that will make the story more interesting.

Predicting is deciding what will most likely happen next in what you are reading.

Click here for questions

Print this lesson

WEEKLY READER Connect INVITE THE WORLD IN

Home Weekly Reader Multimedia Units Reading Comprehension Lessons Using WR Connect About WR Connect

SEARCH | HELP

Reading Comprehension Lesson

This lesson focuses on one of the Concepts of ComprehensionSM to help you develop your students' inferential thinking skills. It includes an on-screen reading passage and clues, comprehension questions (below, left), links to a PDF lesson plan, and an additional passage with accompanying questions ("More Practice").

GRADE 2 **PREDICTING** [Lesson Plan](#) [More Practice](#)

Think about what could happen next in a piece of writing. Doing that will make the story more interesting.



Predicting is deciding what will most likely happen next in what you are reading.

[Click here for questions](#)

[Print this lesson](#)

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WEEKLY READER Connect INVITE THE WORLD IN

Media Units Reading Comprehension Lessons Using WR Connect About WR Connect

SEARCH | HELP

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PREDICTING [Lesson Plan](#) [More Practice](#)

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Questions About the Text

1. Predicting what will happen in a story
 - A. is part of the fun of reading.
 - B. helps you understand what you are reading.
 - C. both of the above.
2. If you read carefully you
 - A. can always predict what will happen in a story.
 - B. can sometimes find clues about what will happen in a story.
 - C. never know what is going to happen next.
3. In this story, the writer uses subheads to
 - A. confuse the reader.
 - B. make jokes.
 - C. help you guess what is coming next.
4. If you have a question about the story
 - A. the author will always answer it.
 - B. that might be a clue about what will come next.
 - C. don't think about it just keep reading.

The Solution

How to Teach: Explicit Instruction

4. Introduce the following vocabulary words from the model passage:

loggerhead: a giant sea turtle that nests in Florida
magnetism: the properties of attraction caused by magnets and electric currents

Direct Teaching

Time: approx. 20 minutes

1. Project the model passage ("Traveling Turtles: A Trip Across the Atlantic") onto a screen or whiteboard. Explain that one way to understand a passage or story is by predicting what will happen based on information in the text. Define the word "predicting" (*thinking about what comes next; making a reasonable guess*).

Guided Practice

Time: approx. 15 minutes

1. Display the Guided Passage ("The Sandwich Thief") on a screen or whiteboard, or print the passage out and distribute it to the class. To access this passage from the lesson page, click on "More Practice." To display the passage and the questions together on a screen, choose "two up" from the View menu.
2. Guide students to examine the text features—the title, text layout, and illustration. Discuss what these text features tell about the passage. (Example: Text in quotation marks shows a conversation between characters.)

Grade 2: PREDICTING • Concepts of Comprehension Lesson Plan • wrconnect.com

WEEKLY READER CONNECT



Concepts of Comprehension Lesson Grade 2: PREDICTING

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to predict what will happen next based on information in a story or passage.

Materials:

- Model passage about loggerhead turtles, with clues showing students how to make predictions about the text and questions about the text. This passage appears on the lesson screen.
- Guided practice passage about a boy, his dog, and the sandwich he makes for himself. The passage asks readers to make predictions. Get this passage by clicking on "More Practice"; it will open on your screen as a PDF.
- Independent reading passage and questions about a competition between two people who like to bake cakes. This material is included in the More Practice PDF.

Time Needed: 45 minutes (one class period)

Activate Prior Knowledge

Time: approx. 5–10 minutes

1. Tell students they will be reading a passage about giant turtles. Tap prior knowledge by asking:

2. Highlight the description of predicting on the left-hand side of the screen. Read the definition aloud, and then read the cartoon character's kid-friendly description. Say: "As we read this passage, we will be paying attention to clues that will help us predict what will happen next."

3. Point out the title and subhead of the model passage. Explain that they suggest what the passage is about.

4. Set a purpose for reading by displaying the comprehension questions. You can display the questions side by side with the text by using the "Click here for questions" button. Read through the three questions and tell students that these questions will help us predict what will happen, based on what we read in the text.

5. Read the passage aloud. The passage contains four clues about predicting events.

6. Roll over Cue #1 on the right-hand side of the screen and read it aloud. Explain that the highlighted text in the passage title tells what the story is about.

7. Roll over the subsequent clues to model how to make predictions about the passage.

8. Redisplay the questions. Read the first question and its answer choice aloud. Then model answering the question based on information in the text.

Constructive writing prompts. If your students are reading on one device in a classroom, use the "two up" button. When students give their answers, ask, "How do you know?" and have them explain where they found the information in the text.

Guided Practice

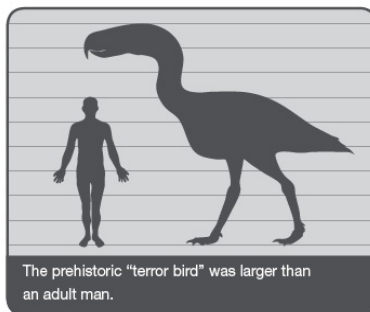
Time: approx. 15 minutes

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The Solution

Building Vocabulary and Background Knowledge

Now, That's a Big Bird!



In October 2006, a teenager discovered the skull of a huge prehistoric¹ bird in Argentina, a country in South America. Scientists say the 10-foot-tall bird had a sharp, hooked beak and thin legs. They think that the bird probably ate animals as large as sheep and ran fast.

The big bird belonged to a group of birds called "terror birds" that once lived on Earth. "It is an unbelievable creature. This is the largest known bird, with a skull bigger than a horse's head," says Luis Chiappe, director of the Dinosaur Institute, a part of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, California.

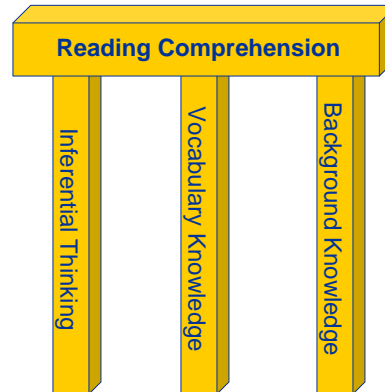
ILLUSTRATION: JAMES HARRIS

¹ prehistoric: relating to times before written history

Summary

Three Pillars → Reading Comprehension

- Reading Comprehension is complex.
 - Inferential Thinking
 - Vocabulary Knowledge
 - Background Knowledge
- Explicit Instruction is key to building strong readers and thinkers.
 - Concepts of Comprehension
 - Gradual Release of Responsibility



Our Goal: Student Success and Achievement



I get it now!



**Thank you for participating in this
Weekly Reader webinar.**

“Education is the movement from darkness to light.”
~Allan Bloom, American author and philosopher.



Speaker's Biography

Presenter: Rachel Etienne

Rachel Etienne is the Director of Teacher Training & Curriculum, at the Urban Education Exchange (UEE), which is a nonprofit organization focused on supporting teachers with the resources needed to teach reading comprehension in urban classrooms. Rachelle oversees teacher training at all of UEE's partner schools across the country and manages the organization's Teacher Trainers. She also taught at the Family Academy School in Harlem, NY, where she mastered UEE's curriculum and became a model teacher for her peers. She received her B.S. in Education from Eastern Michigan University.

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