Comprehension Strategies with Reading For All Learners Sets 4+ and Fluency Builders programs.

Comprehension is the pinnacle of the reading skill hierarchy. Helping student be able to accurately and thoroughly comprehend text is the goal of reading instruction. Built into Reading For All Learners are connected text discussion questions. Using these questions consistently beginning in the first book helps students learn they are to understand what they are reading. In the Reading For All Learners series these discussion questions help student develop inferencing skills. There are several additional comprehension strategies supported by evidence. These strategies are best employed after some initial introduction and explanation. Below we have outlined a number of comprehension strategies that may be employed.

Specific Text Features

Text features are those visual and organizational elements that enhance understanding and navigation in nonfiction texts. Here's how to introduce and leverage them in early grades reading instruction:

1. Setting the Stage:

- **Start with the Familiar:** Focus on common text features readily found in their environment, like labels on objects or signs with clear pictures and words.
- **Book Introductions:** Before diving into a text, explore the cover illustration and title together. Discuss what they might learn from the title and how the picture relates to the content.

2. Unveiling the Toolbox:

- **Introduce Text Feature Detectives:** Turn students into detectives who search for special tools within the text (pictures, captions, charts) that help them learn more.
- **Feature Focus:** Highlight specific text features one at a time. Introduce the purpose of each feature with clear explanations and examples.
  - **Titles & Headings:** Give a quick overview of the content (think chapter titles in a book). Both Reading For All Learners and Fluency Builders include a table of contents.
  - **Illustrations & Photographs:** Enhance understanding and bring the text to life.
  - **Captions:** Explain the pictures and add details not directly mentioned in the text.
  - **Tables & Charts:** Organize information in a clear and visual way.

- **Interactive Anchor Charts:** Create charts with visuals and explanations of different text features. Students can add new features as they encounter them.

3. Deepening Learning:

- **Text Feature Talks:** After reading, have students discuss how specific text features helped them understand the content. "The map showed where the dinosaur was found."
- **Information Quest:** Pose questions that require students to utilize specific text features to find the answer. "Lok at the diagram of the solar system. Where is earth located?"
- **Feature Recreation:** After reading, have students create their own simple text features (diagrams, captions) to explain a concept from the text.

Remember:

- **Focus on Functionality:** Don't overwhelm students with too many features at once. Gradually introduce and reinforce their purpose.
- **Connect to the Text:** Show students how text features work together with the main text to provide a complete understanding.

Signal Words

Signal words, those helpful hints authors leave behind, are crucial for understanding text structure and meaning. Both Reading For All Learners and The Fluency Builders programs contain many opportunities for students to practice identifying and using these words. You can get students started by explicitly introducing them. Then as opportunities are presented you can identify them for students or as the students to identify them. Let's explore how to introduce and leverage them in early grades reading instruction:

1. Building Awareness:

- **Start with Familiar Routines:** Connect signal words to everyday routines. For example, "First" before putting on shoes or "Then" when brushing teeth.
- **Read Aloud Power:** While reading aloud, emphasize and point out signal words. "See how the word 'but' tells us something different is going to happen next?"

2. Decoding the Clues:

- **Introducing Signal Word Detectives:** Turn students into detectives who hunt for special words that help them understand the text.
- **Categorize and Conquer:** Introduce different categories of signal words with clear explanations and examples.
    - **Sequencing:** First, then, next, after, finally (helps understand the order of events)
    - **Cause and Effect:** Because, so, therefore (explains why something happens)

o **Comparison:** Like, as, different (shows similarities or differences)
- **Interactive Charts:** Create anchor charts with signal words and their functions. Students can add new words as they encounter them.

3. Putting it into Practice:

- **Highlighting Hunt:** Provide students with texts and highlighters. Ask them to highlight specific signal words based on the category (e.g., all sequencing words in yellow).
- **Sentence Scramble:** Jumble sentences with signal words and have students reorder them to make logical sense.
- **Fill in the Blank:** Provide sentences with missing signal words and have students choose the most appropriate one based on the context.

4. Deepening Comprehension:

- **Prediction Power:** Encourage students to use signal words to predict what might happen next ("We saw the word 'but' so maybe the character won't get what they wanted").
- **Cause and Effect Connections:** Use signal words like "because" or "so" to help students understand the relationship between events in the story.
- **Compare and Contrast Champions:** Use signal words like "like" or "different" to guide students in comparing characters, settings, or events.

Remember:

- **Keep it Age-Appropriate:** Start with a few basic signal words and gradually introduce more complex ones as students progress.
- **Connect to Real-Life:** Help students recognize signal words used in everyday speech ("First, I'll tie my shoes, then I'll put on my jacket").

Inferencing

Inferencing, the ability to draw conclusions based on clues in a text, is a critical reading comprehension skill. In Reading For All Learners the embedded questions help students use these skills but you can jump start these skills by introducing them explicitly. Here's how to introduce and develop this skill in early grades:

1. Laying the Foundation:

- **Start with Everyday Life:** Make inferencing a fun everyday activity. Ask questions like "It's raining outside. What can we infer?" (The ground is wet) or "I see someone wearing a hat and scarf. What can we infer?" (It's cold outside).
- **Picture Power:** Use pictures! Show students a picture with clear clues (a child bundled up with a snowman) and ask them to infer what's happening (playing in the snow).

2. Building the Skills:

- **Introducing the Detective Work:** Explain inferencing as "detective work" where we use clues in the text to figure out things that aren't directly stated.
- **Explicit Instruction:** Model inferencing for students. Read a sentence with clues and think aloud: "The girl frowned and threw her book on the floor. I can infer she might be mad because the book was too hard."
- **Question Time:** Create open-ended questions that require inferencing. "Why do you think the character feels this way?" or "What might happen next based on the clues?"

3. Strategies and Activities:

- **Character Clues:** Help students identify details about characters (clothing, dialogue, actions) and infer their emotions, personalities, or situations.
- **Think-Pair-Share:** Pose an inferencing question. Students think individually, then discuss possible answers in pairs, sharing their reasoning before sharing with the class.
- **Graphic Organizers:** Create charts where students record clues from the text and use them to draw inferences about characters, settings, or plot.

4. Deepening Understanding:

- **Text Evidence:** Train students to find evidence in the text that supports their inferences. "I can infer the girl is lost because the text says she's walking around crying and doesn't know where her mom is."
- **Multiple Inferences:** Acknowledge that sometimes there can be multiple reasonable inferences based on the clues. Discuss why different interpretations might exist.
- **Revisit and Revise:** Encourage students to revisit their inferences as they read further. New information might change their initial conclusions.

Remember:

- **Start Simple, Gradually Increase Complexity:** Begin with clear and obvious clues, then move to more subtle ones as students progress.
- **Celebrate the Process:** Focus on students' thinking and reasoning, not just finding the "right" answer.

By following these steps, you can equip your young readers with the detective skills needed to unlock the deeper meaning within texts!