

PARENT TEACHING TIPS

... on Your Child's Reading Comprehension

By Bill Welker, EdD

What is reading comprehension or understanding? Below is one contemporary definition:

“Reading comprehension is the reconstructing, interpreting, reevaluating, reacting emotionally, and creating new ideas from the author’s written content by means of prior knowledge gained from life.”

As parents, you should introduce your child to the types of thinking processes that take place as he or she reads. The following are the four levels of comprehension (from lowest to highest) a student should experience when reading any textbook:

Literal Comprehension

It is the reader’s ability to remember ideas and information that is directly stated in the textbook material.

Example: Who was the 16th President of the United States and where was he born?

Interpretive or Inferential Comprehension

It is the reader’s ability to extract ideas and information not directly stated in the textbook material, using prior or background knowledge to assist in such understanding.

Example: John slammed the front door upon entering the house, ran upstairs, and threw his books on the bedroom floor. What is John’s mood?

Critical Comprehension

It is the reader's ability to respond with personal judgments and ideas about the content of the textbook material, using his or her past knowledge and thoughts on the subject.

Example: After reading an editorial on abortion, the student gives his reasons for disagreeing with the columnist's views.

Creative Comprehension

It is the reader's "emotional" response to the content of the textbook material read. This level of comprehension also includes creating new ideas from what was learned in school and life.

Example 1: While silently reading the novel "The Call of the Wild," Bobby laughs aloud at the actions of Buck, as the dog experiences his first snowfall.

(Emotional Response)

Example 2: After reading a mathematics selection on linear equations, the student correctly devises a simpler method for solving the problems (Creating New Ideas)

Always the teacher, I now want to test your understanding of the various reading comprehension levels. Read each statement and question below. Then decide which reading comprehension thinking process comes into play. You may refer to the previous descriptions of the four levels of reading comprehension while performing this activity. The answers can be found at the end of the column.

- 1. Inspired by reading W. W. Jacob's "The Monkey's Paw," a middle school student rewrites the ending of the story, and enthralls his or her classmates with a more frightening conclusion.**
- 2. In a social studies class, the students asked to list the 13 original American colonies on a weekly quiz.**
- 3. Although it was never actually explained in the textbook, what do you think were the personal motives of Dr. Jonas Salk for developing the first polio vaccine?**
- 4. After reading an editorial against gun control, a well-informed high school student writes a letter to the editor rebutting the article.**
- 5. Upon finishing the novel "Moby Dick," Susan is asked to name the ship in the story.**
- 6. As the class was reading a selection on the living conditions in German concentration camps, one student began to cry.**
- 7. Given a mystery to read for literature class, Bobby figures out who committed the crime before the perpetrator is revealed in the story.**
- 8. A college student disagrees with the textbook author's logic regarding certain causes of the U. S. Civil War. Hence, he writes a paper giving sound reasons for other causes of the conflict which he believes to be more significant.**

In closing, it is important to note the following. When your child understands textbook material at all four levels of comprehension, he or she has acquired an abundance of background knowledge in that subject area. In other words, the more

a student knows about a topic, the higher his or her level of comprehension will be.

Remember, the key to subject mastery is in-depth study.

*(Activity Answers: 1. Creative; 2. Literal; 3. Interpretive; 4. Critical; 5. Literal;
6. Creative; 7. Interpretive; 8. Critical.)*

Parent Proverb

“A true friend never gets in your way unless you are going down.”

- Arnold H. Glasow

Next Month’s Column: “Finding Main Ideas”

(Editor’s Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. Most recently, Dr. Welker was inducted into the West Virginia University College of Education and Human Services’ *Jasper N. Deahl Honors Society* for career achievement and community involvement. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)