
4. About 'before, during and after' reading comprehension strategies

1. Background

A good way to help your child's reading comprehension skills is by using what's known as the 'before, during and after' reading comprehension strategy. This approach is part of the Guided Reading philosophy, and its goal is to equip students to become fluent readers who can solve problems strategically and read independently.

Traditionally teachers have adopted the 'after' strategy more readily than the other two - that is, they asked students questions after they had read, rather than before or while they read.

Although there was a slight veering away from this strategy in the 1990s, it is still the most common approach among school teachers today.

A technique called 'reciprocal teaching' was developed in the 1980s encouraging students to predict, summarize, clarify, and ask questions about passages of a text. The idea was that students would develop stronger reading comprehension skills on their own if the teacher gave them the tools to decode text through dialogue and role reversal.

The technique was considered a success at the time, and is now seen as one of the most important elements of reading comprehension instruction.

2. Some activities to try out

Below are a number of before, during and after reading comprehension strategies that you may find valuable.

What you need:

- ***Copy/exercise book***
- ***Post-It notes/stickies***
- ***A3 sheets of paper (if available) or chalkboard***
- ***A highlighter pen***
- ***Crayons or felt-tip pens***

a) Before Reading

Quick Write

- Ask your child to write a short description of what he thinks the passage or story is going to be about, based on the title
- Get him to do this in a copy book, on a Post-It note, or on big sheets of paper that can be attached to the wall

Word Splash

- Choose a dozen or so words from the story you are about to read with your child, and write them down
- Then ask her to predict what the story is going to be about. You can either do this verbally, or alternatively you can encourage her to write her prediction down on paper or a chalkboard

Probable Passage

- Select a dozen or so words from a story that describe its various elements – e.g. the characters, plot, conflicts etc.
- Then get your child to write a ‘best guesstimate’ prediction of what the story will be about

Voice from the Past

- Ask your child to think about and explain what he thinks might have happened in the past to make a certain character in the story feel the way they do about another character or a certain situation

b) During Reading

Skimming

Often ‘skimming’ or speed-reading through a story or a piece of text will help provide a reference framework for a young reader.

- With a very young reader, who might not yet be skilled enough to be able to skim effectively, point out important information throughout the piece that could help provide this framework for him. This in turn would help your child to understand its context and meaning

Get The Main Idea

Understanding the main idea, or theme, of a story is crucial in helping a young reader to pick up the story’s overall meaning.

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- Help to provide context to your child by outlining the main idea of the story, or better still encourage him to find it out for himself by pointing him in the right direction with clues, prompts and questions

Highlighting and note-taking

- When you read together with your child, use a highlighter pen (or a pencil if you don't want to write on the book itself) to select passages of text that you think are important to the story
- For slightly older children you could ask them to make notes in the margin in pencil for passages they struggle to understand. This can help them to think creatively about what the author might be trying to say

Predicting questions

- Encourage your child to guess what the author is going to say next in the text. To do this she will need to draw on the relevant background knowledge she already has about the topic

This strategy also enables your child to use the structure of the text, headings and subheadings as clues to what is about to happen.

c) After Reading

Re-telling the story

- After you have finished reading a story or passage together, get your child to tell you what happened in his own words. You may need to guide him along the way with little prompts, but that's fine

Drawing a picture

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- Always a great way to free their imaginations, drawing or painting a picture is also an ideal way to allow kids to express what they have learned from reading a story. They may need to create a number of different drawings to represent the different chapters or scenes in the story, but you can be guaranteed they'll love doing it!

Answering questions

- Jot down a few questions about the story you are reading together with your child, and ask them afterwards
- Alternatively, rather than writing anything down you can go back through the story after you've finished it and ask questions about each page or section

Books with illustrations provide a great opportunity for questions, as they are an obvious place for your child's attention to be focused.