



# Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years

[www.popey.ca](http://www.popey.ca)



School District 42  
Maple Ridge & Pitt Meadows

*Learning Today, Leading Tomorrow*



## Oral Language & Vocabulary: Systematic Instruction to Support Reading Comprehension

January 28, 2025

8:30am - 2:30pm

Connect with us online!



@POPEYBC



@popeybc

Presenters:  
Lisa Thomas  
Traci Baillie

POPEY 



# Our learning objectives

Today we will explore evidence-based strategies and routines to help us support young readers to strengthen their word solving skills and reading comprehension by:

- Understanding the role of oral language in comprehension
- Making our vocabulary instruction intentional
- Recognizing the importance of knowledge and its impact on comprehension





# The shape of our day

## Part One

- revisiting session 1 in our learning series – foundational skills
- oral language and language comprehension; dialogic conversations
- the foundational elements of building students' comprehension skills

## Part Two

- why teach vocabulary?
- high impact classroom routines for building students' vocabulary
- planning for students' active engagement as word solvers
  - word curiosity, word solving, word study

## Part Three

- working memory, cognitive loads, mental models, background knowledge, text structures – and how they support reading comprehension
- article – When Young Readers Get Stuck
- what we know about reading comprehension



# Lets review – the foundations of literacy learning

The goal is for students to...

- be enthusiastic explorers of words:
  - ★ puzzle out letter–sound relationships
  - ★ see patterns
  - ★ take words apart
  - ★ investigate meanings
- connect to words in an active way

To **expand** their reading and writing powers



Students learn **HOW TO LEARN** aspects of words, and develop efficient and powerful word–solving strategies



# Remembering – it doesn't need to be either/or

➔ **and, and, and...**

Decodable texts	vs.	Authentic literature
Research	vs.	Classroom Practice
The art of teaching	vs.	The science of reading
Individual student needs	vs.	Whole class efficiency
Direct instruction	vs.	Discovery learning
Practice in isolation	vs.	Practice in context
Mastery of skills	vs.	Joy of reading
Structure	vs.	Choice
Urgency	vs.	Joy

Comprehensive = complete; including all elements or aspects of something



# Revisiting these models of reading...

## SCARBOROUGH'S READING ROPE (2001)

### LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

**BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE**  
(facts, concepts, etc.)

**VOCABULARY**  
(breadth, precision, links, etc.)

**LANGUAGE STRUCTURE**  
(syntax, semantics, etc.)

**VERBAL REASONING**  
(inference, metaphor, etc.)

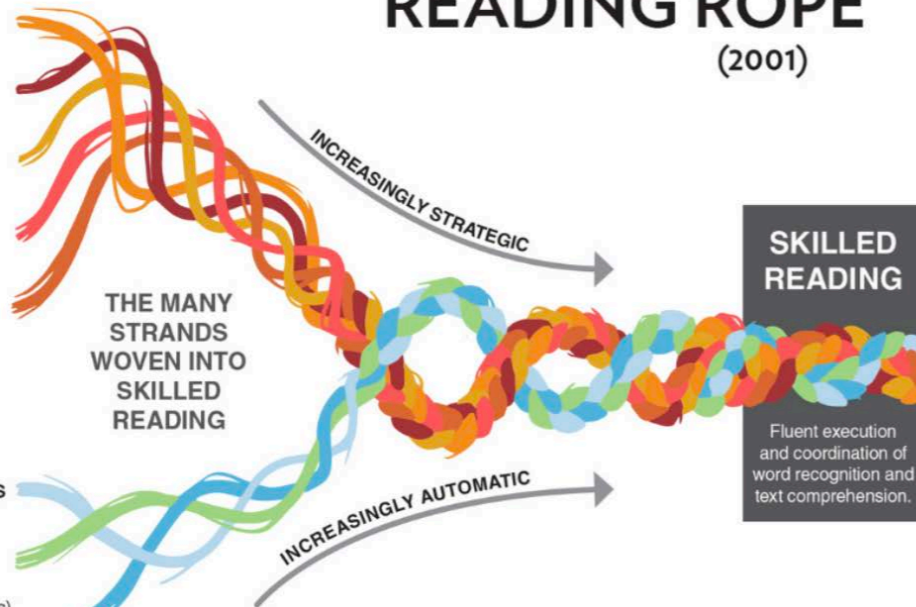
**LITERACY KNOWLEDGE**  
(print concepts, genres, etc.)

### WORD RECOGNITION

**PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS**  
(syllables, phonemes, etc.)

**DECODING**  
(alphabetic principle, spelling-sound correspondences)

**SIGHT RECOGNITION**  
(of familiar words)



### SKILLED READING

Fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

$$D \times LC = RC$$

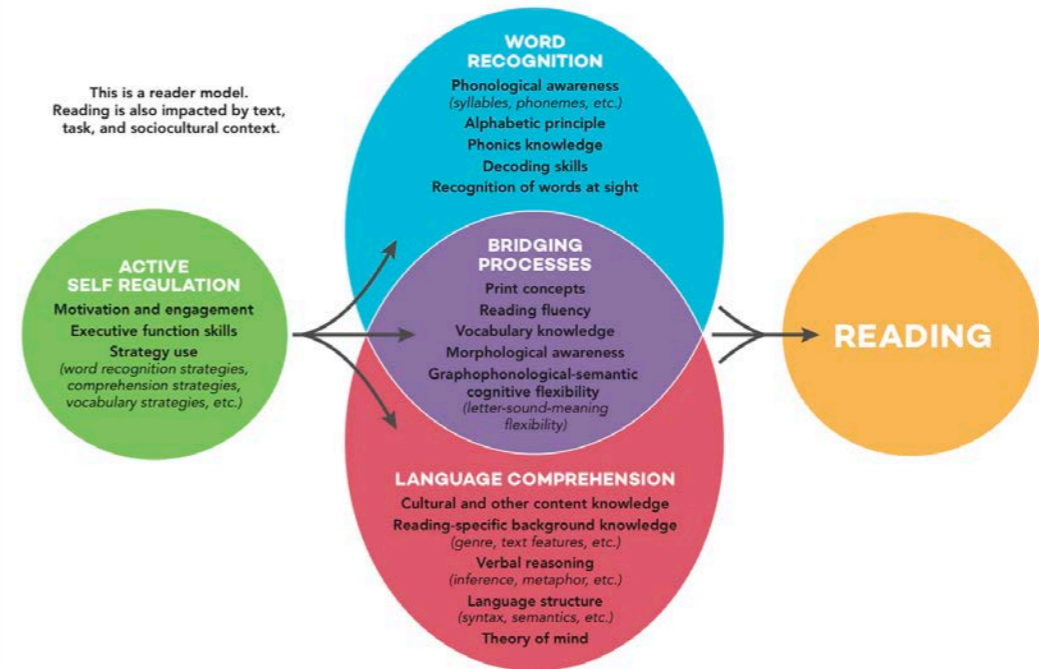
Decoding

Linguistic  
Comprehension

Reading  
Comprehension

## ACTIVE VIEW OF READING

This is a reader model. Reading is also impacted by text, task, and sociocultural context.





# Phonemic Awareness Instruction

## Keep in mind:

- Short and frequent sessions
- Focus primarily on blending and segmenting (phoneme-level skills)
- Begin to add letters to this work
- Often integrated into phonics lesson



## Ideas for instructional strategies:

- Use manipulatives to keep it playful
  - ★ Elkonin boxes + bingo chips
  - ★ Pop It fidget toys
  - ★ Race cars + tracks
  - ★ Unifix cubes
- Encourage gestures
  - ★ Hand choppers
  - ★ Tap down arm
  - ★ Finger/thumb tap
- Word Chains – build phonemic awareness and phonics skills at the same time



# Phonics Instruction

## Keep in mind:

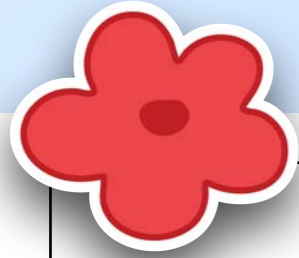
- Systematic: Move from simple to complex
  - Following a scope and sequence
- Explicit: “*Today I want to teach you...*”
- Keep students engaged by:
  - Inviting student responses
  - Have students come to the board to find a word, highlight a phonics skill in a word



## Ideas for instructional Strategies:

- Understand “the code” yourself
- Consider using a systematic and explicit phonics program
- White boards will be your best friend!
- Keep lessons lively, and stick to suggested times
- Don’t forget to unpack word meaning
- Word sorts
- Word chains
- Try multi-sensory methods
- Use Elkonin (sound) boxes to support encoding
- Weekly progress monitoring is critical!





# Building Fluency

## Keep in mind:

- More than just reading fast
- Don't teach phonics in isolation
- Avoid "round robin" reading
- Be mindful of how you use independent reading time



## Ideas for instructional Strategies:

- Remember...fluency is not an isolated skill
  - subskills: phonemic awareness, sound-symbol knowledge, automaticity at letter or word level
- Small Group instruction affords specific, immediate feedback
- Model, model, model!!!
- Whole Group Reading including:
  - Read aloud, cloze reading, choral reading, echo reading
- Partner Reading
- Reader's Theatre
- Beat the Clock Timed Reading
- Repeated Reading



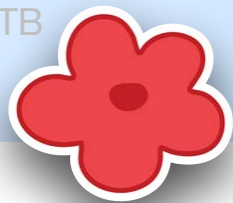
The best phonics instruction is **active**, **engaging**, and **thought-provoking**. Students are **playing** with letters and sounds and **discussing** what they observe about **how words work** to deepen their understanding of our alphabetic system so they can read and write.

Phonics instruction involves **talk**. It involves **observation**. And it involves **tons of application** to **authentic** reading and writing experiences.

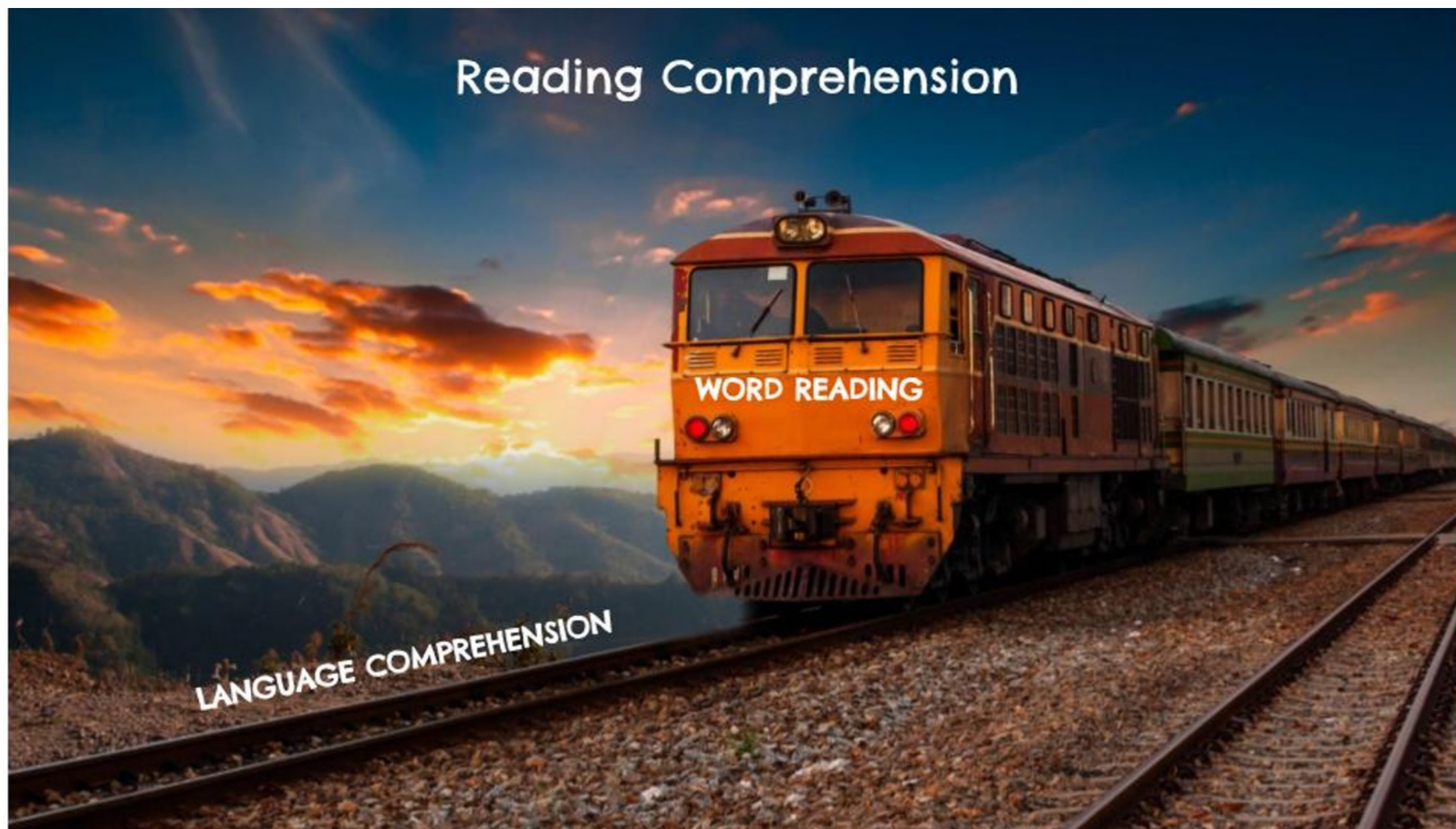
Differentiating Phonics Instruction for Maximum Impact – Blevins



TB



# Laying the Language Track for the Word Reading Train



Reading Comprehension

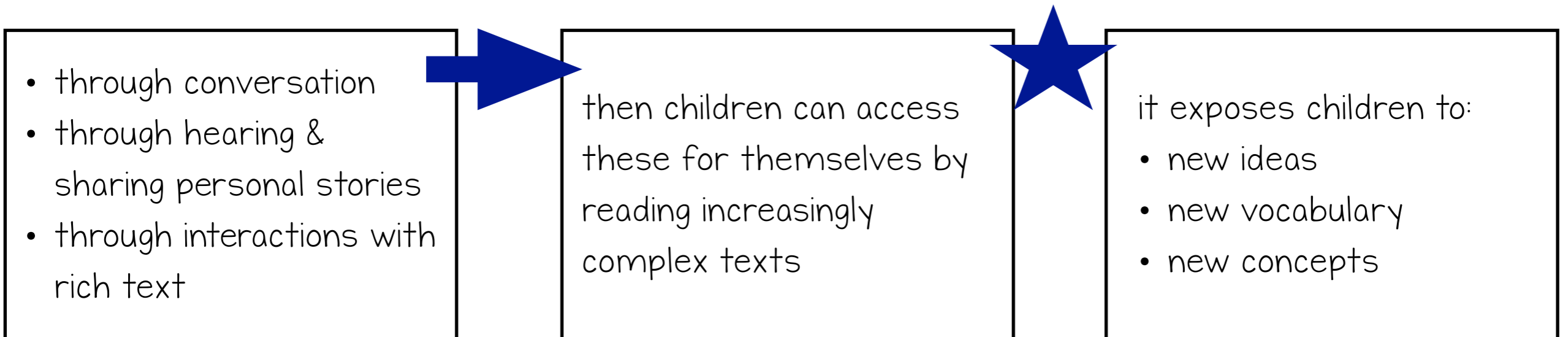
WORD READING

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION



# The Role of Oral Language in Comprehension

Comprehension begins with oral language and the capacity to understand spoken language (listening comprehension):



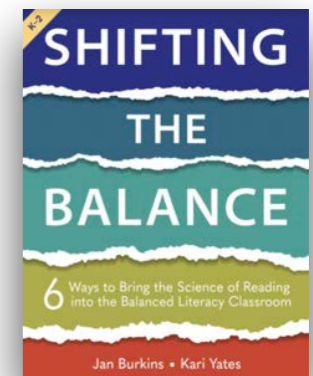
Treat oral language development as an essential ingredient for comprehension.



# The Role of Oral Language in Comprehension

High-leverage instructional routines for **language development**:

- ✓ Make space for planned and incidental conversation
- ✓ Ask quality questions
- ✓ Provide wait time
- ✓ Repeat and expand
- ✓ Use interesting words
- ✓ Read aloud
- ✓ Teach with text sets to build content area knowledge



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How can you intentionally support oral language development to maximize early listening comprehension in the classroom?



# Oral Language and Language Comprehension

Gather what you need to support language comprehension:

✓ **Read-aloud texts**

- ★ choose texts that will stretch listening comprehension by providing exposure to rich ideas, wide vocabulary, background knowledge, and novel language structures

✓ **Text sets**

- ★ built around a particular topic/theme, representing a range of text complexity. These will provide multiple entry points for students to build background knowledge, acquire language structures, and expand vocabulary around key topics

✓ **A collection of high-leverage instructional routines**

- ★ for building and extending both intentional and incidental classroom conversations – including reading aloud and using interesting words



# Dialogic Conversations

## 1. Engage

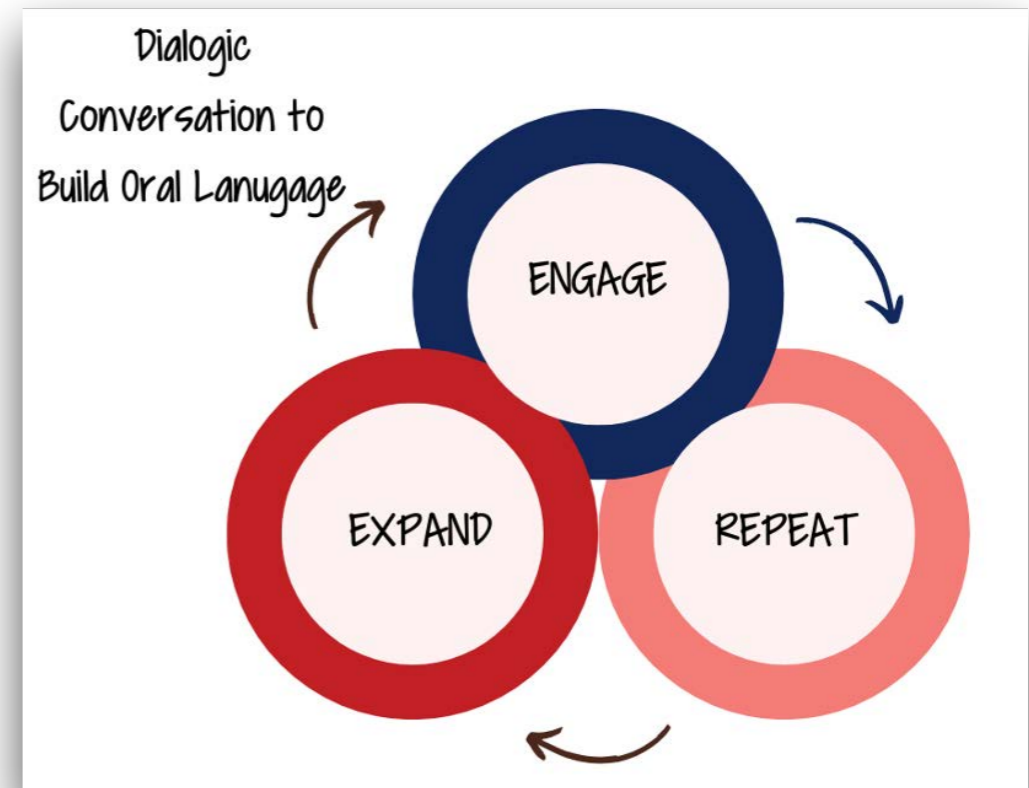
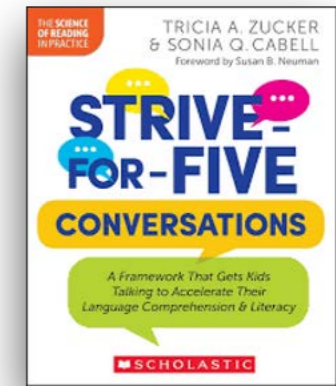
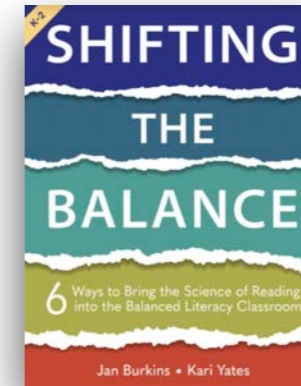
- verbal interaction around a text or general conversation
- may involve asking children's opinion, to name or recall something from a text, or to make a connection

## 2. Repeat

- repeat, embedding the child's response in a natural way
- repeat only the correct part of a student's response, or integrate a correction into this step

## 3. Expand

- as you repeat, say a little more
- expand the language to include a new word, phrase or idea





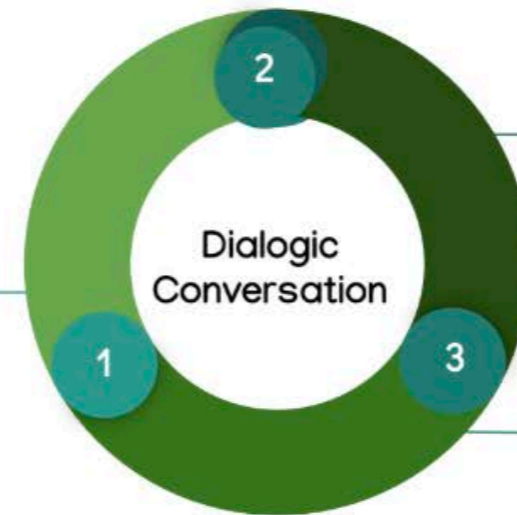
# A Sample Dialogic Reading Conversation

Try it with a partner, repeating and expanding on what they say. Then switch so you each get a turn.

**1. Engage**  
Engage children in a verbal interaction around a text or just in general conversation. This may involve asking the child's opinion, asking the child to name or recall something from a text, or asking the child to make connections to personal experience.

**Sample Prompts:**

- What are you thinking about?
- How did you celebrate?
- What was your favorite part?
- What did you do last night?
- What do you think \_\_\_\_\_ means?



**2. Repeat**  
Repeat what children say, embedding this in your response in a natural way. If the student's response includes a mistake, only repeat the correct part or integrate a correction into this step.

**3. Expand**  
As you repeat, say a little more than what the child said. Expand the language to include a new word, phrase, or idea. Then begin the process again!

## Sample Dialogic Reading Conversation

<b>1 Engage</b>	What was your favorite part of the book?	When the mouse saved the lion.
<b>2 Repeat &amp; Expand</b>	Oh, when the mouse saved the lion! That was so surprising!	
<b>1 Engage</b>	How do you think the mouse felt?	Happy!

### Sample Prompts:

- What did you do last night?
- How do you usually celebrate your birthday?
- What's your favourite book?
- What do you like to do for fun?

### Dialogic Conversation Tips

1. Adjust your responses and language based on the age of the child.
2. Make your conversation authentic. Show interest in the child, the conversation, and/or the text.
3. Be intentional! This process is simple to understand but takes intentionality and practice.





# Rethinking Reading Comprehension

**Reach All Readers**

Using the Science of Reading to Transform Your Literacy Instruction

Anna Geiger

FOREWORD BY DR. STEPHANIE STOLLAR

JOSSEY-BASS  
A HOLT RINEHART AND WINSTON COMPANY

- Reading comprehension is complex and is not a single 'skill' or just a set of strategies
- Instead, we can think of reading comprehension as an **OUTCOME**

Reading comprehension is a combination of:

- The **READER**
  - ★ each reader brings their own knowledge and interests
- The **TEXT**
  - ★ texts vary in genre, topic, and difficulty
- The **ACTIVITY**
  - ★ the activity varies depending on the purpose for reading

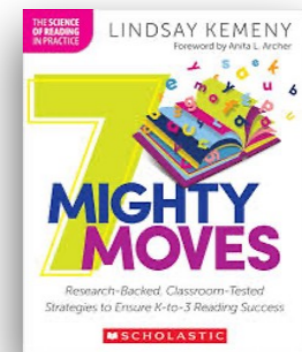




# Rethinking Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension differs from language comprehension in that it **RELIES ON PRINT**

- ★ A reader needs to be able to read a text accurately and fluently to comprehend the text

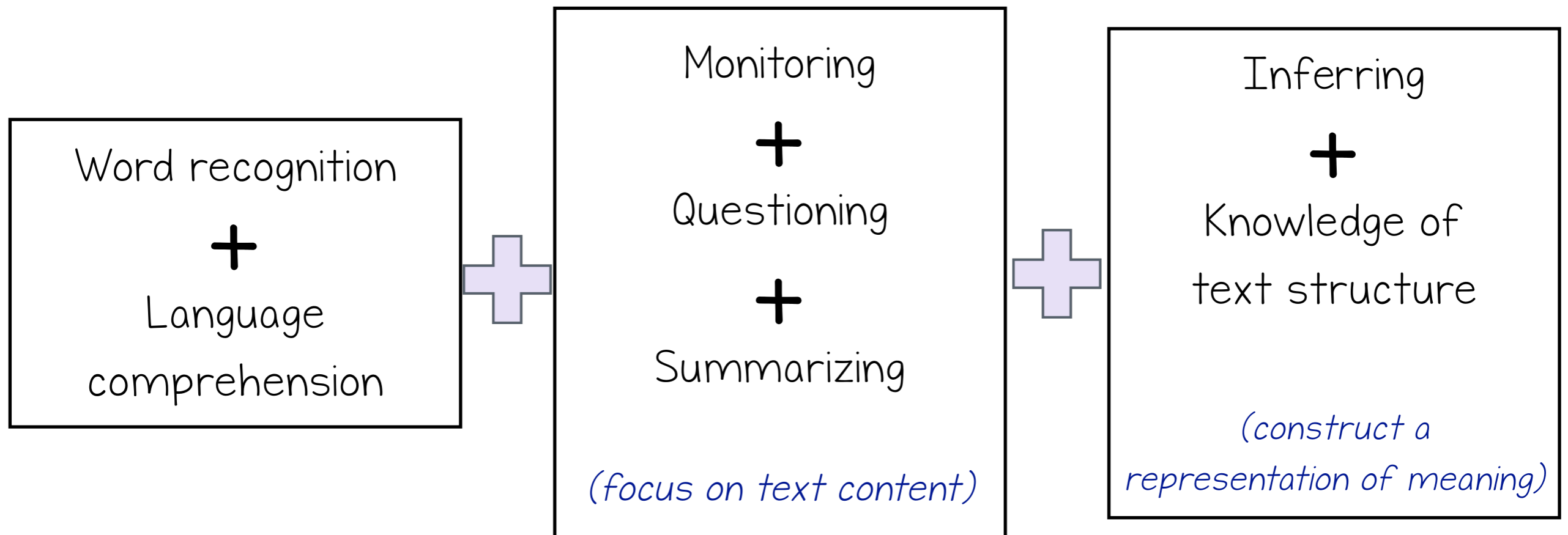


“There is no comprehension strategy powerful enough to compensate for the fact that you can’t read the words.”

–Archer, 2001



# Rethinking Reading Comprehension





# Vocabulary Instruction: Why It's So Important

Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related related to reading comprehension - in primary, intermediate, and high school students, and in adults. Beck et al, 2013



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Vocabulary can be developed:

- **INDIRECTLY** - by engaging in daily oral language with peers and adults, by listening to reading and by reading extensively on their own
- **DIRECTLY** - explicitly teaching individual words and word-learning strategies

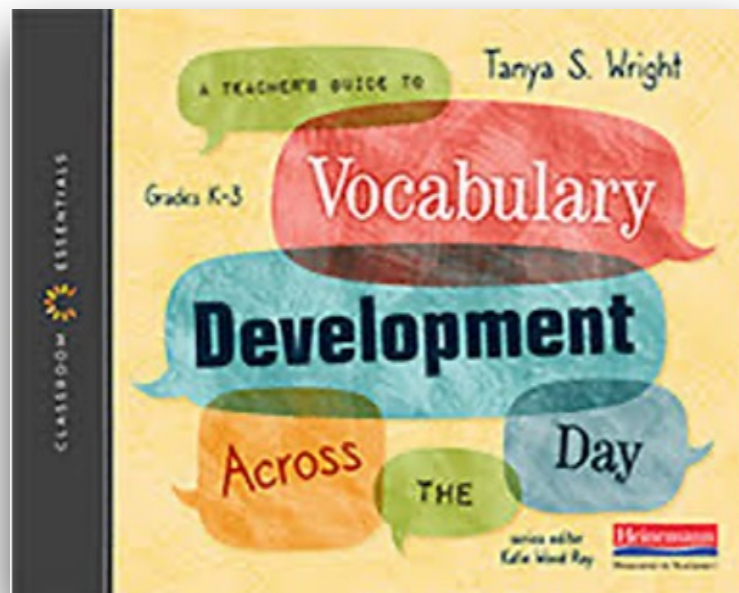
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A rich vocabulary enhances what an individual wants to say and write



# Why Teach Vocabulary?

“Even if we spend lots of instructional time teaching decoding and strategic reading, students will continue to struggle to comprehend text unless we also support their vocabulary development.”



*Tanya S. Wright*



# What it means to really know a word...

## I can:

- ✓ share an informal explanation
- ✓ use a synonym or antonym
- ✓ give categorical information
- ✓ recognize nuances between similar words
- ✓ recognize word parts (morphological understanding)
- ✓ connect to personal experience
- ✓ recognize multiple meanings – bark/bark, duck/duck





# How do we learn new words...?

...when we are engaged in conversation

## What can this look like in the classroom?

- ✓ Regularly and intentionally using sophisticated language throughout the day for students of all ages
- ✓ The more interesting words we use around students, the more words they will pick up and use themselves.





# How do we learn new words...?

...when we are read to and read a lot ourselves

## What can this look like in the classroom?

- Read aloud in a fantastic way to explicitly teach new vocabulary:
  - ★ select texts with intention – relate to content area
  - ★ read first for enjoyment, then re-read across days
  - ★ plan ahead for student-friendly definitions
- Independent reading time, small groups, partner reads







# Active Processing & Engagement w Words

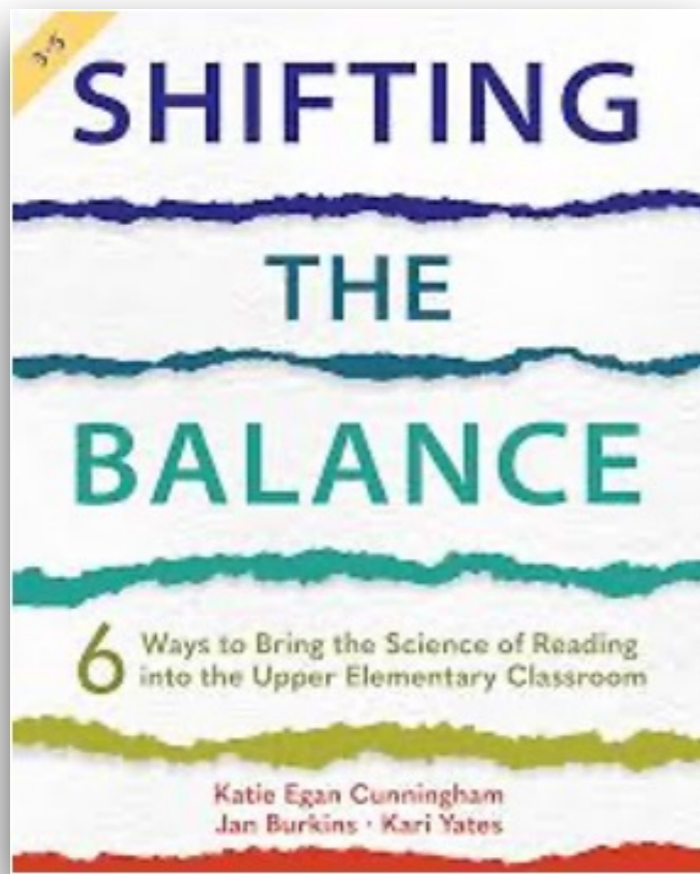
Children are more likely to learn when they can actively engage with a word and its meaning, rather than passively receiving information from the teacher.

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- ✓ Discussing **images** related to a new word
- ✓ Discussing and exploring **objects**, e.g. a **thermometer**
- ✓ Using **movement** – demonstrating **migration** by walking from one side of the room to the other
- ✓ Thinking of **real life examples** – a time when you felt **exuberant**
- ✓ Discussing **multiple meanings** of a word – **season** (your food), **season** (winter, spring)
- ✓ Thinking about and noticing meaningful parts of words (**morphology**) – **tricycle**, **triangle**, **tripod**
- ✓ Using new vocabulary in **writing**



# Why Teach Vocabulary?



The goal of vocabulary instruction is not to learn words for their own sake. The goal is for students to apply knowledge about words and their meanings to better understand what they're reading and to expand the possibilities for expressing their own ideas.

*Burkins, Cunningham & Yates*



# How do we learn new words...?

...when we learn new things!

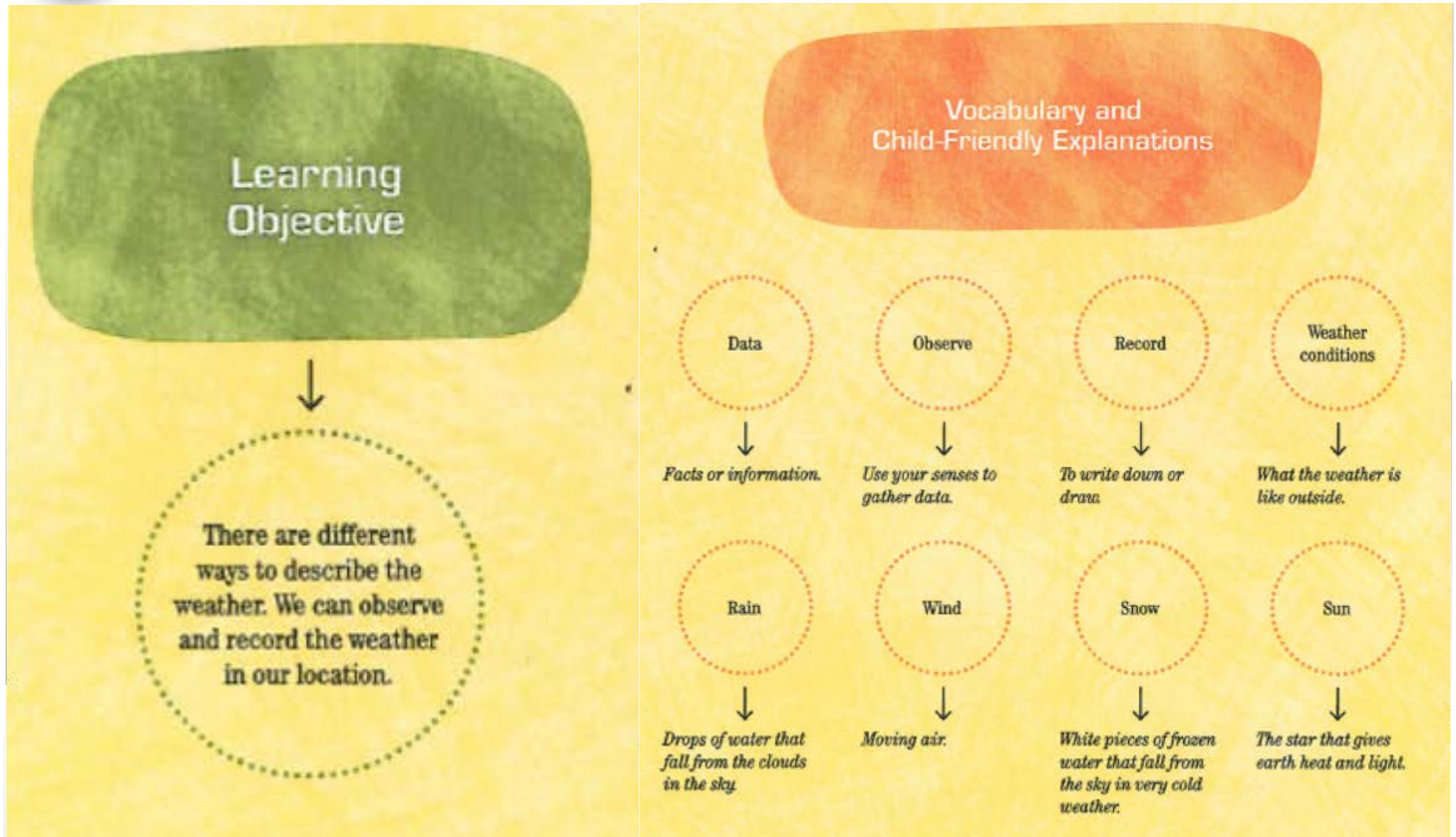
## What can this look like in the classroom?

- We can plan to support vocabulary development during content area learning:
  - ★ first, we want to **identify the content** we want to learn
  - ★ next, curate informational **text sets**
  - ★ then, make an ambitious **list of words to teach**
  - ★ consider **how** and **when** you will **teach** the words
  - ★ finally, **plan** for ways students will be **actively engaged in word learning**





# Planning Vocabulary & Content Learning





# Planning Vocabulary & Content Learning

When will I introduce new vocabulary?

↓

During read-aloud, *What's the Weather?*  
*weather conditions, rain, wind, snow, sun.*

↓

While showing materials right before outdoor observation of weather conditions:  
*observe, data, record.*

When will children have opportunities to use these words in a meaningful context?

↓

Children will go outside to observe weather conditions on a recording sheet with space to draw and write or label.

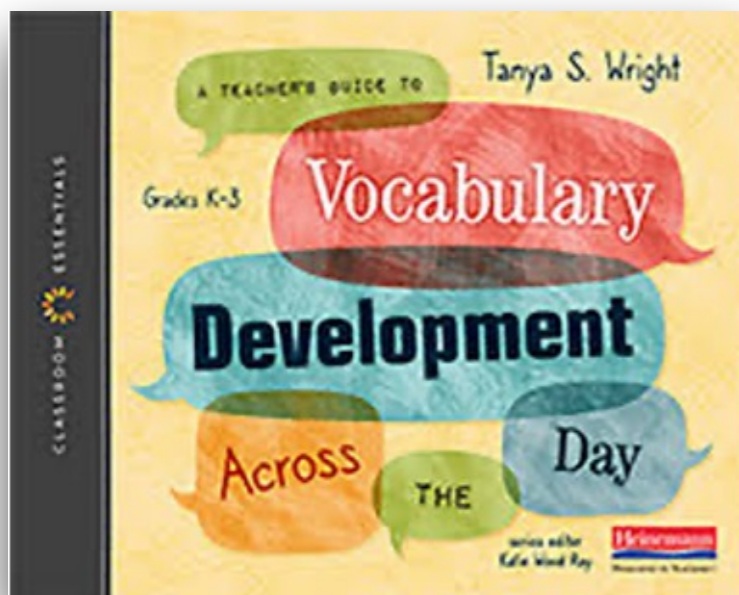
↓

Questions to ask while children observe:  
*What do you observe about the weather conditions?*  
*How did you observe this?*  
*What data are you recording about the weather conditions?*



# Vocabulary and Knowledge

In order to create opportunities for young children to learn new words, we need to build their knowledge of the world and make sure that they are learning new things.



*Tanya S. Wright*

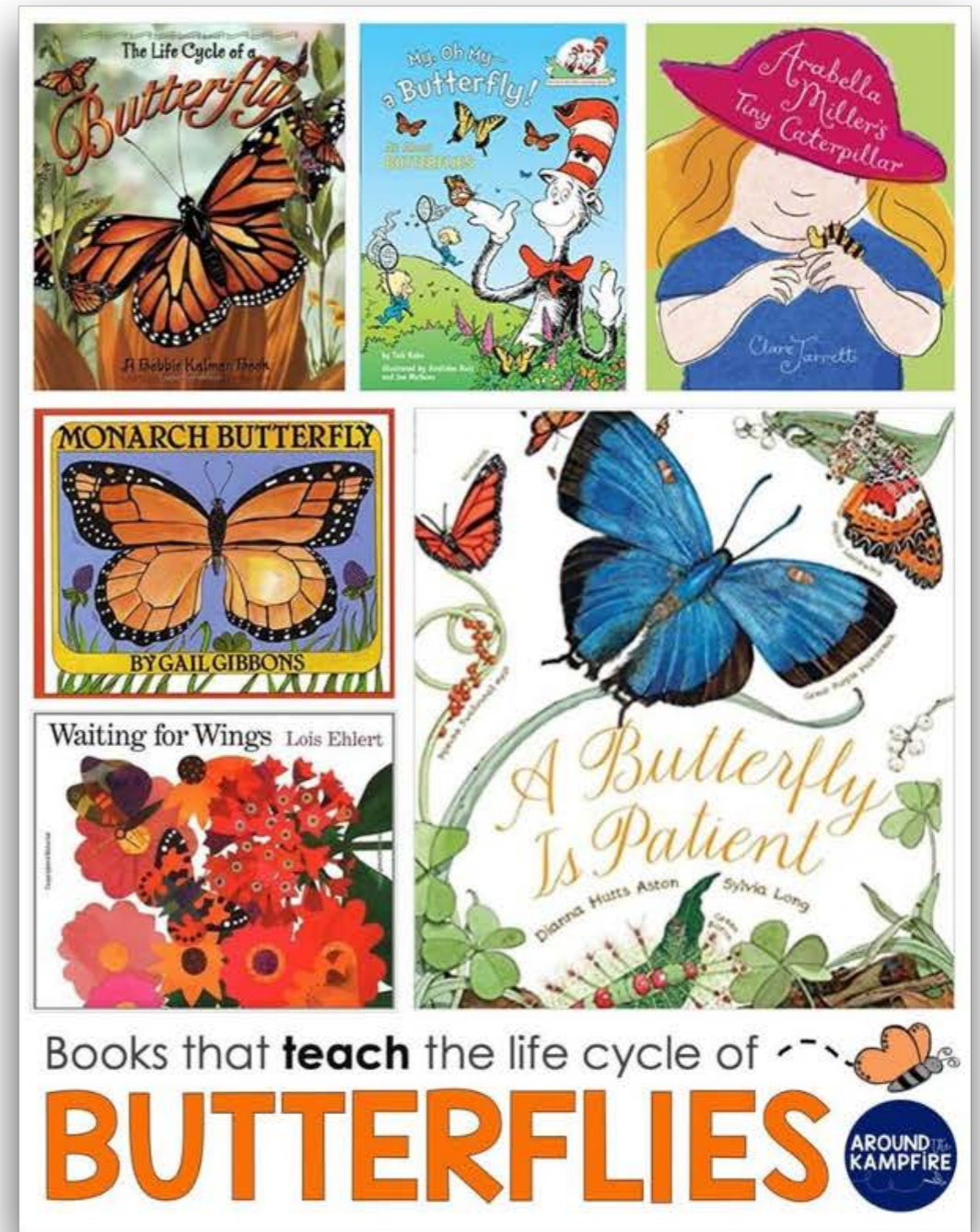


# Text Sets to Build Background Knowledge & Vocabulary

A text set is a collection of sources that support a common theme, issue or topic.

Text sets should include a variety of genres, text types, levels and formats, such as...

- fiction
- nonfiction
- apps
- poetry
- images
- articles
- websites
- artwork
- songs

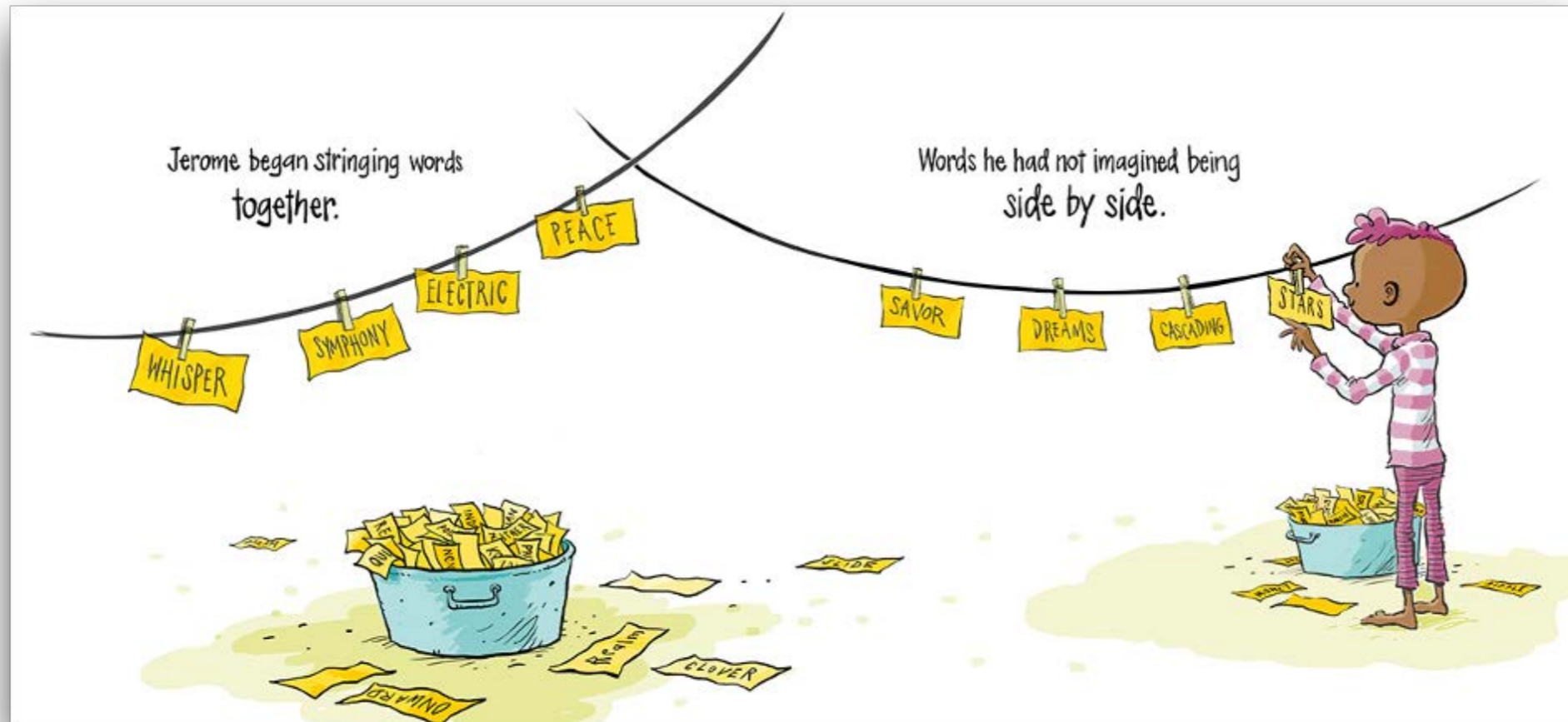


We can use text sets to build background knowledge and vocabulary for readers with a range of abilities, experiences, and interests.



# In the classroom – inspiring word curiosity

High leverage instructional routines to support word noticing and curiosity – Word Collection Notebooks



We can support and empower our students to:

- ✓ become aware of and interested in new words
- ✓ develop word awareness
- ✓ notice when they encounter new words





# In the classroom – supporting word solving

## High Leverage Instructional Routines to Support Independent Word Solving (and spelling)

### Explicit Morphology Instruction

- Teaching one new affix or root per week adds to their word solving toolkit

**Morphology**

The study of how morphemes are combined to form words.

Words are made up of morphemes:

Prefixes      Roots/Bases      Suffixes

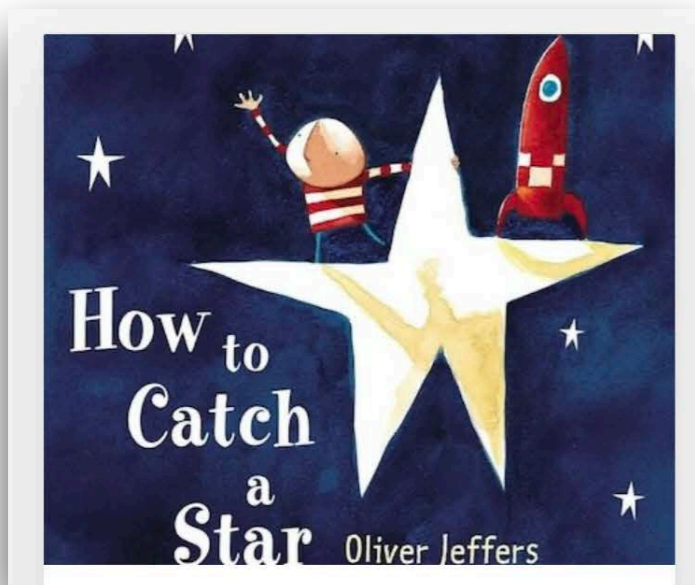
Morphemes are the smallest unit of *meaning*.

un    pre    dict    able    dis    tract    ion    s  
"not"    "before"    "to say"    "able to"    "away"    "pull, drag"    "state of"    plural

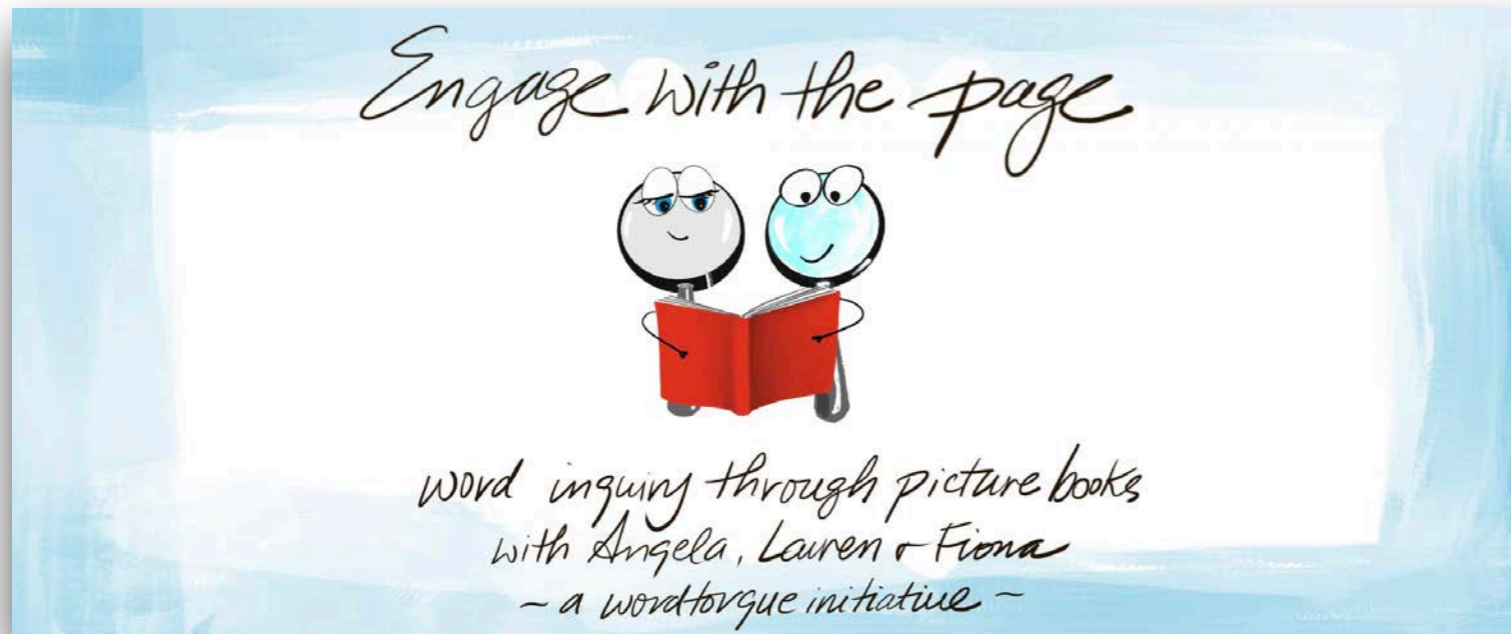
SARAH'S teaching SNIPPETS



# In the classroom – inspiring word study



Word Inquiry can support students as they study the structure of words.



<b>super</b>	<b>star</b>	s ing ed y less
		dom let
		<b>dust</b> <b>light</b> <b>struck</b> <b>fish</b>
		<b>gaze</b>   ing



# Exploring words with a word matrix & word sums

re	read	s	
mis		ing	able
proof		er	s

**Prefixes**

**Suffixes**

**BASE Word**

**Word Sums**

re + read = reread

proof + read = proofread

read + er = reader

read + er + s = readers



# You Try It!

How many words  
can you make?

base words

go            break  
act           watch  
play         comfort  
take

root words

tract  
struct



# Word Study Builds Students' Word Wealth

## High Leverage Instructional Routines to Support Independent Word Solving

### Shades of Meaning:

- Teaches that synonyms can be closely related but still differ in small ways
- Helps understand nuances as readers
- Supports strong word choice as writers

#### synonyms for WILD

fierce  
untamed  
ferocious  
rough  
rugged



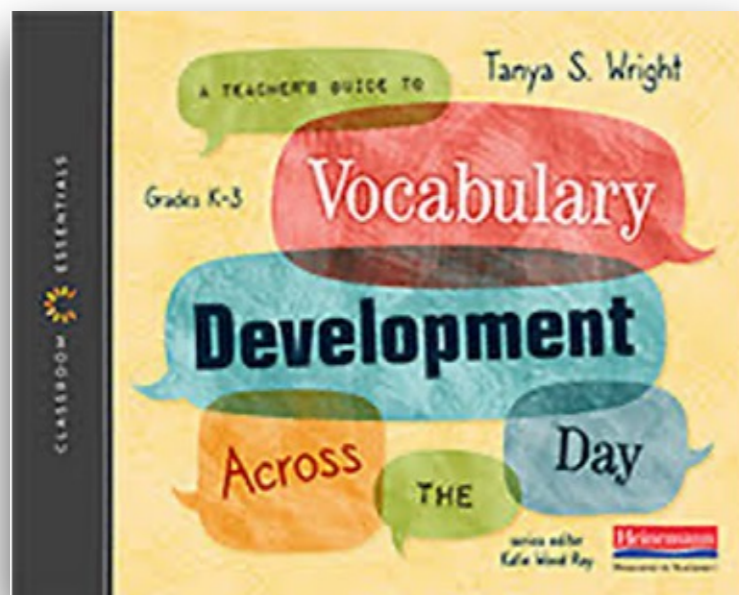
#### synonyms for NICE

pleasant  
fine  
neat  
enjoyable  
lovely  
delightful  
acceptable  
satisfying



# Empowering Strategic Word Solvers

The more **information** children have about how words and language work, the more **powerful** they will feel as strategic word-solvers.



*Tanya S. Wright*



## From this morning...

- Reading comprehension is complex and is not a single 'skill' or just a set of strategies
- Instead, we can think of reading comprehension as an **OUTCOME**

Reading comprehension is a combination of:

- The **READER**
  - ★ each reader brings their own knowledge and interests
- The **TEXT**
  - ★ texts vary in genre, topic, and difficulty
- The **ACTIVITY**
  - ★ the activity varies depending on the purpose for reading





# Working Memory vs. Long-Term Memory

- **Working Memory**

- ★ has limits

- **Long-Term Memory**

- ★ no limits







# Cognitive Load Theory

“the amount of information the working memory can hold”

–Sweller, 1988

## Intrinsic Cognitive Load

- ★ the difficulty of any task compared to the background knowledge of the learner



## Extraneous Cognitive Load

- ★ anything that makes it harder for a student to learn

When **INTRINSIC & EXTRANEIOUS** factors > working memory capacity  
= **LEARNING ISSUES**

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**Our teaching goal is to help move info from working memory into long term memory.**



# Increasing Comprehension

By using explicit instruction methods, we can decrease students' extraneous cognitive load.

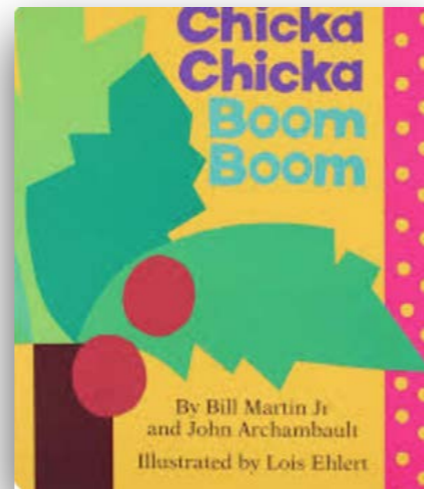
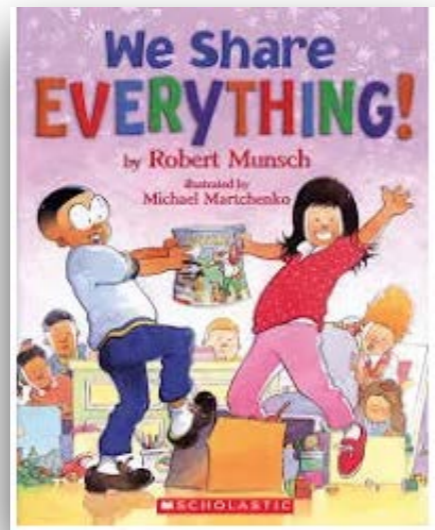
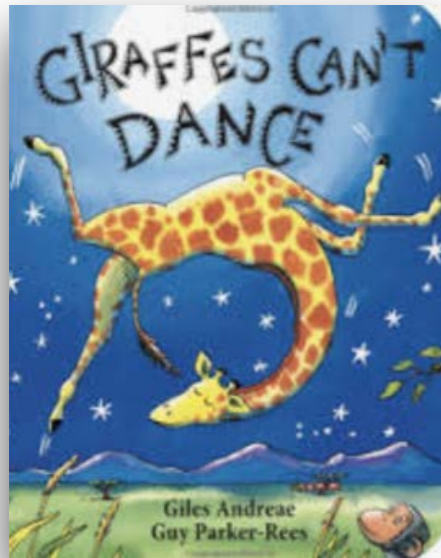
Explicit instruction is:

- systematic
- direct
- engaging
- success-oriented

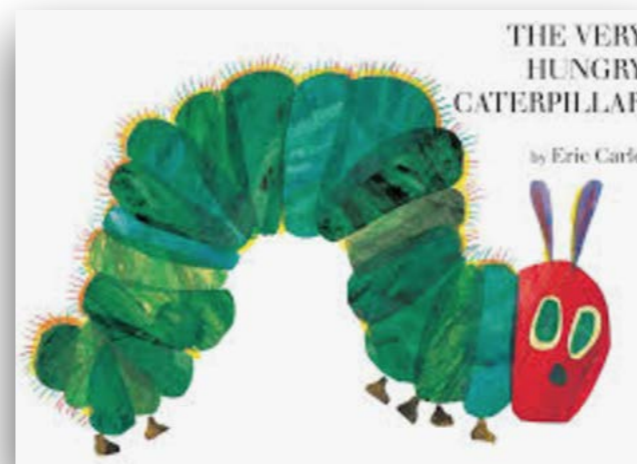
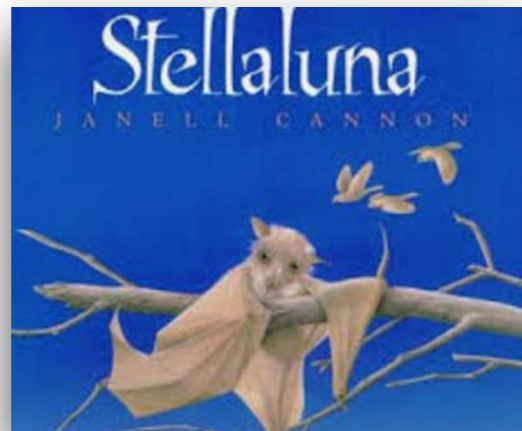
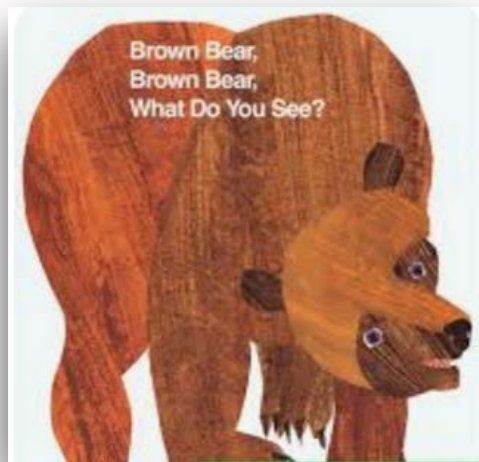




# Mental Model / Situational Model



“ Think of one of your favourite books that you have read many times. ”



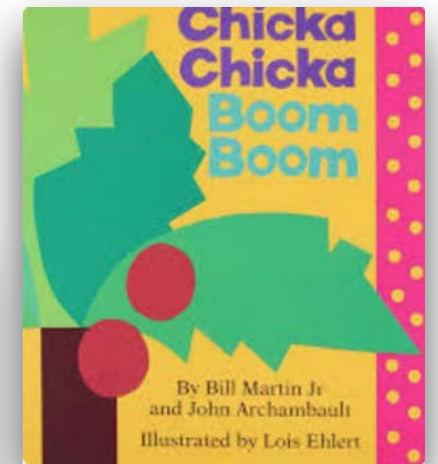
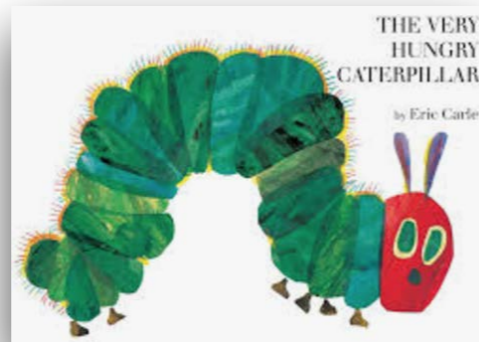
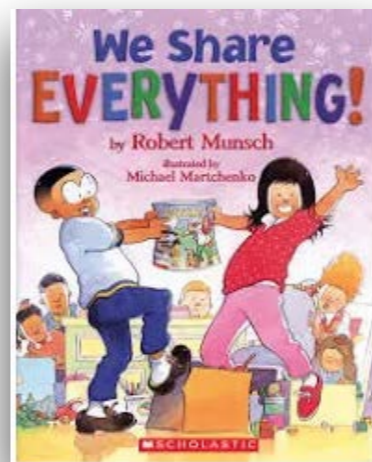
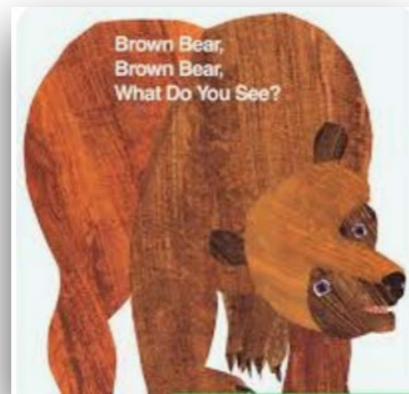
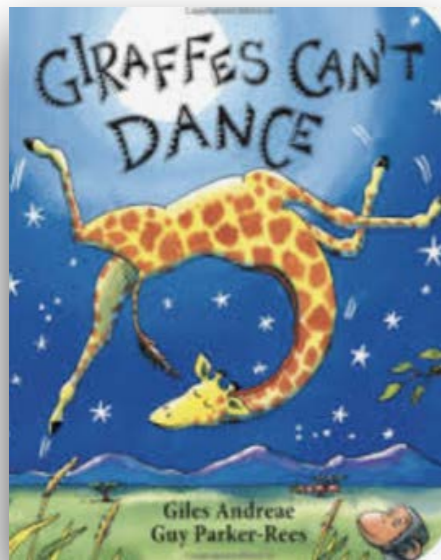
Think/Pair/Share what the book is about.



# Mental Model / Situational Model

Mental Model =  
a literal representation of text + background knowledge

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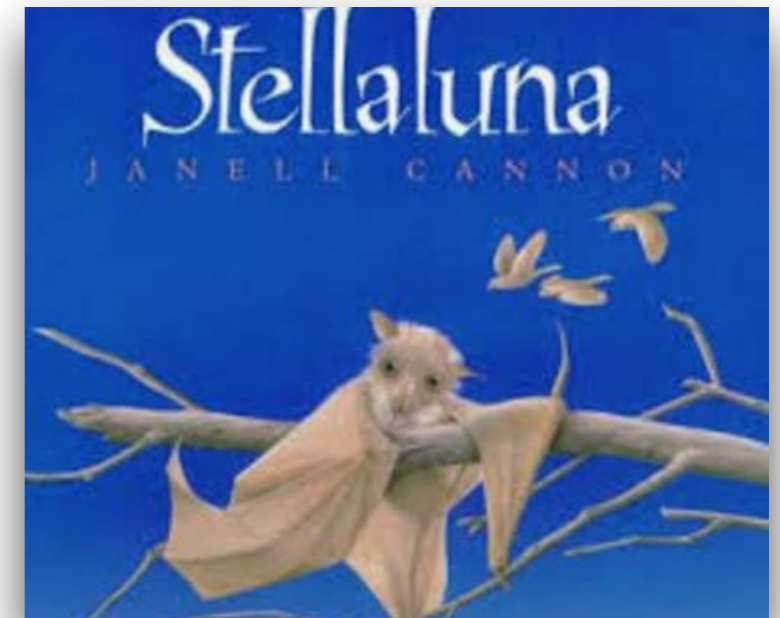
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As a good reader, you are constantly creating  
a **mental model** while you are reading.



# Increasing Background Knowledge

The richer the knowledge base,  
the faster and more automatic  
the inferences, freeing up  
working memory, which supports  
comprehension & learning.





# Increasing Background Knowledge

3–5 minute strategy to enrich background knowledge:

- State the big idea
- Connect new ideas to prior learning
- Select tools to build background knowledge (videos, books, photos)
- Explain new information
- Ask questions to prompt discussion or highlight info





# Recognizing Types of Text Structures

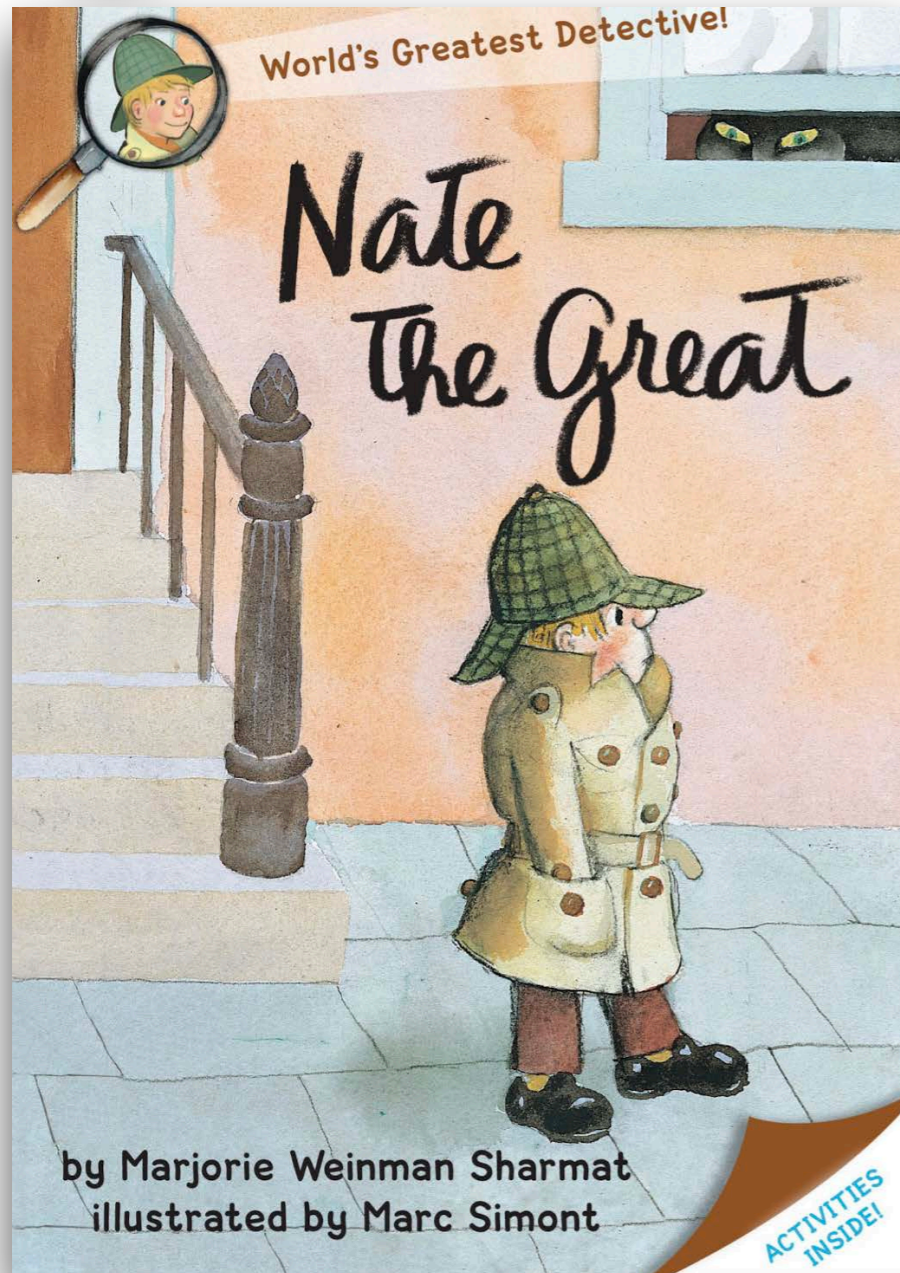
If readers can **anticipate** that a text will contain certain **types** of information, and that information will be presented in a certain way, they will be able to make a mental model more easily.



- ★ **NARRATIVE TEXT** – tells a story or describes a series of events
- ★ **EXPOSITORY TEXT** – gives information

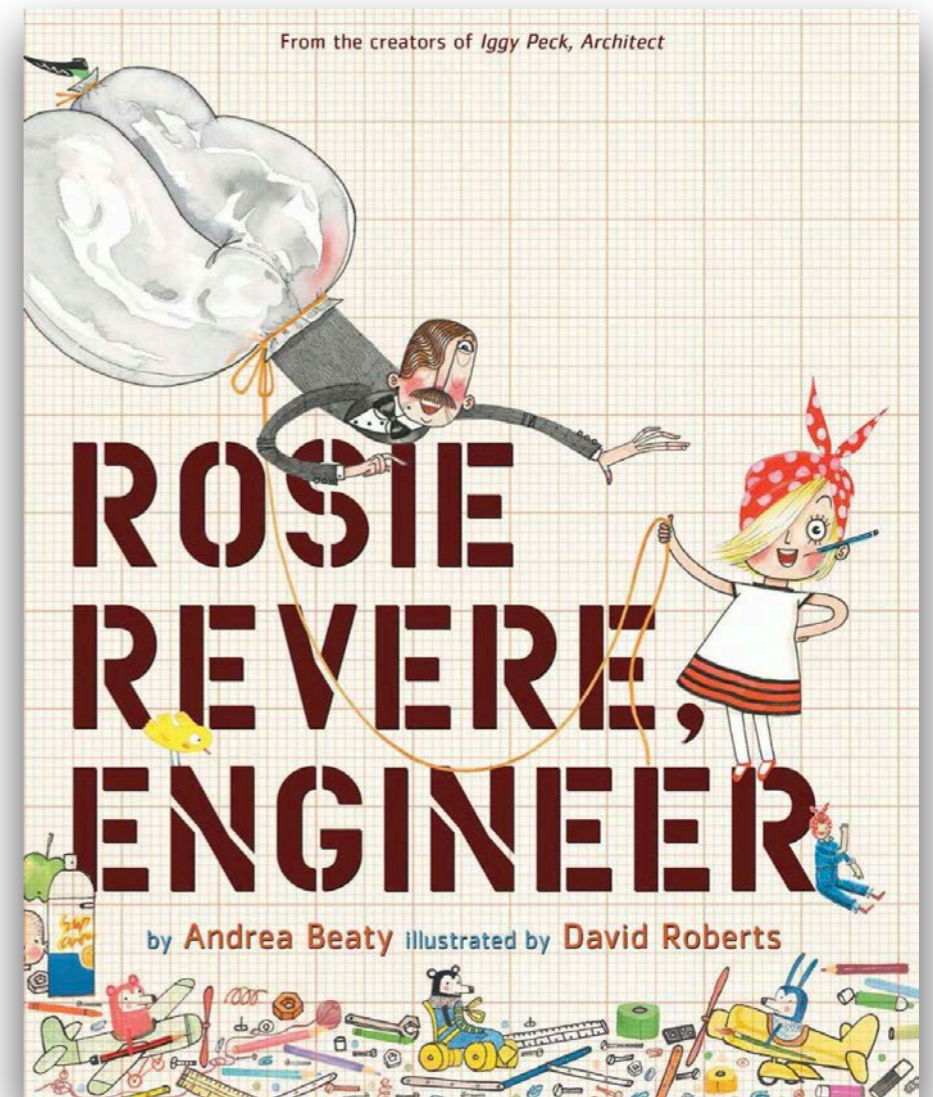


# Narrative / Fiction Text Sample

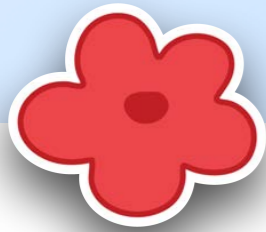


## STORY ELEMENTS

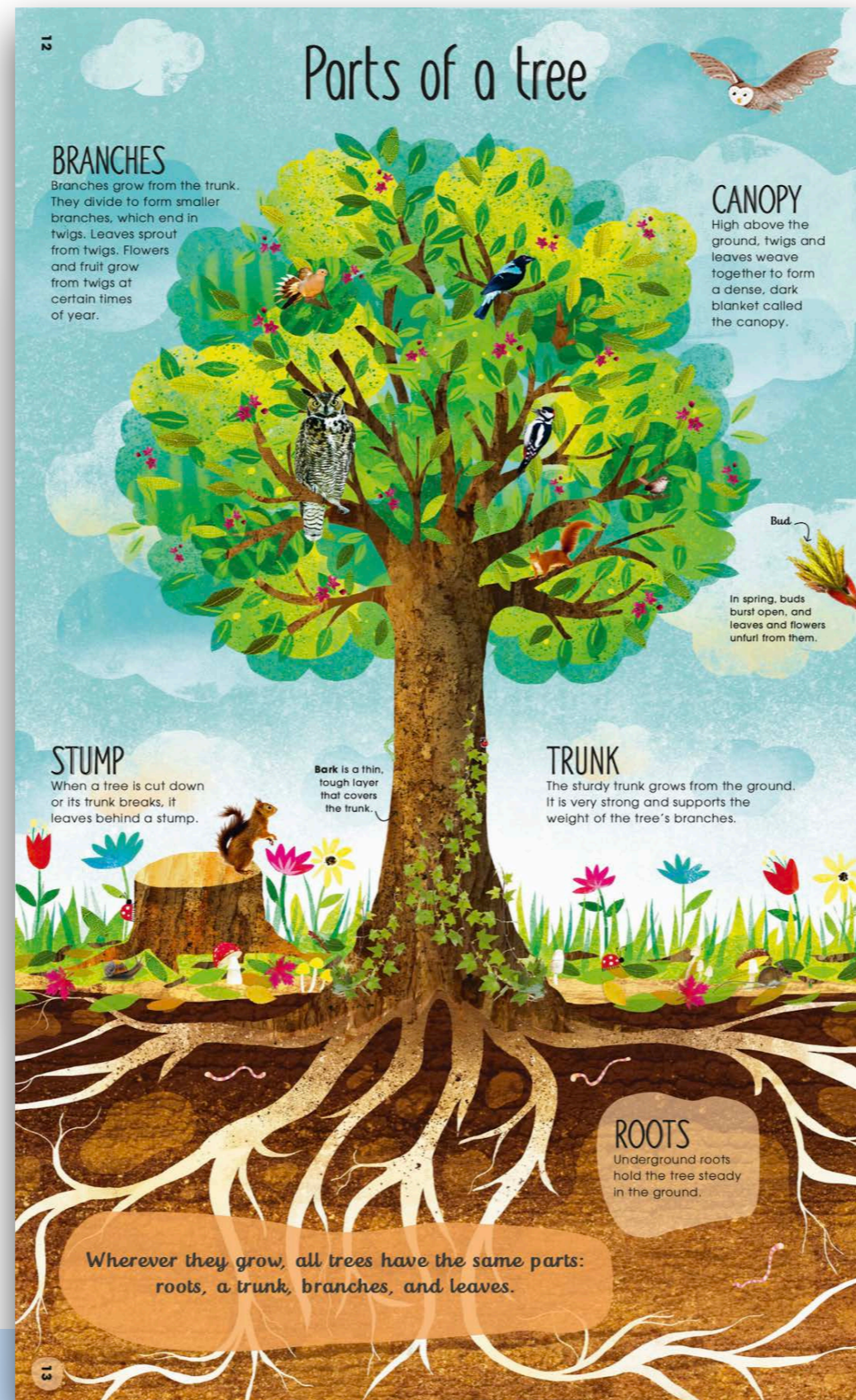
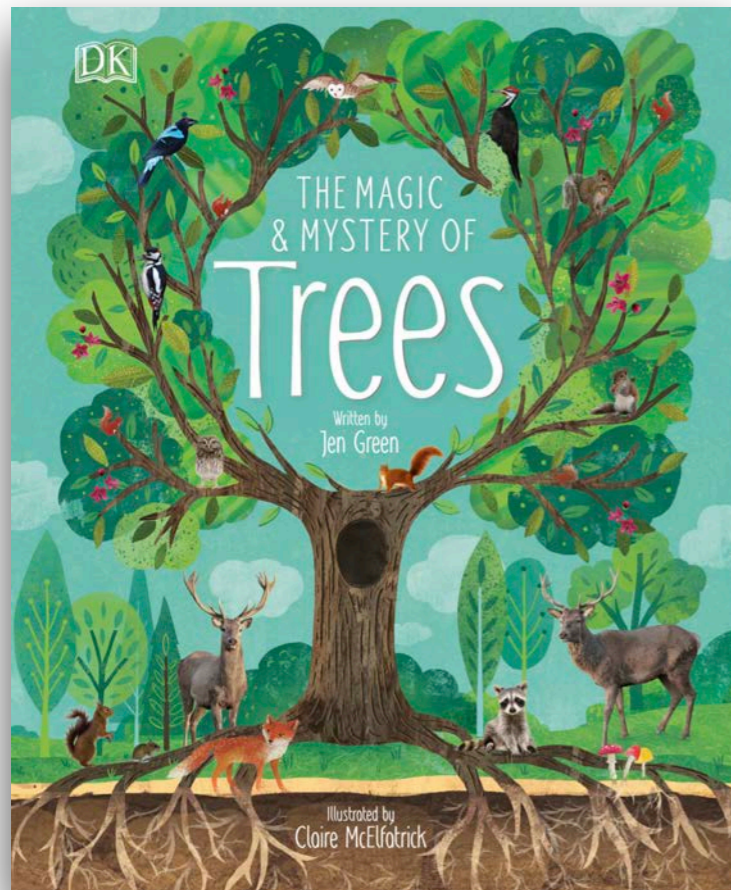
- ★ Setting
- ★ Characters
- ★ Problem
- ★ Plot / Action
- ★ Solution
- ★ Theme







# Expository / Nonfiction Text Sample



## TEXT FEATURES

- ★ Table of contents
- ★ Labels
- ★ Illustrations/photos
- ★ Diagrams/charts
- ★ Definitions
- ★ Headings
- ★ Glossary



# A Layered Model of Effective Comprehension Instruction





## When Young Readers Get Stuck – by Nell Duke

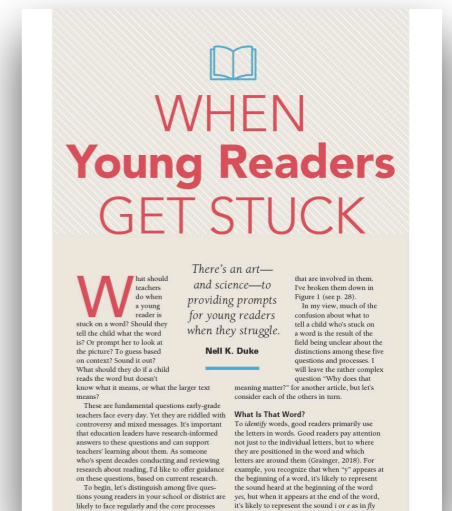


- \* Five types of questions young readers ask, and
- \* The core processes they involve (and prompts for):
  1. Decoding and word identification
  2. Comprehension monitoring and fix-up
  3. Application of vocabulary knowledge / strategies
  4. Comprehension
  5. Motivation



## When Young Readers Get Stuck – by Nell Duke

- Read the article **on your own** (20 minutes)
- Find a partner and discuss your reflections, connections, and **wonderings** in pairs of 2 (10 minutes)
  - a meaningful sentence
  - a powerful phrase
  - words that caught your attention
- Join another pair to **make a quadrant** and share and compare your **biggest takeaways** from the article (10 minutes)



Reflect & Share: What are your mirrors? Windows? Next steps?



# Five Questions Young Readers Face...

FIGURE 1. Five Questions Young Readers Face and Processes Involved

Questions in the mind of a young reader	Core process	This core process involves . . .
What is that word?	Decoding and word identification	Determining the <b>pronunciation</b> of written words by either (a) connecting letters to sounds (technically, graphemes to phonemes) and then blending or manipulating the sounds to say the word, or (b) having done so in the past, thus now recognizing the word automatically from memory.
Did I read that word/ those words right?	Comprehension monitoring and fix-up	Paying attention to whether what is read makes sense and sounds right and, if it doesn't, doing something, such as rereading, to fix the situation.
What does that word mean?	Application of vocabulary knowledge and strategies	Determining the <b>meaning</b> of an unfamiliar word from past experience with the word or from context, resources, or the word's meaningful parts (morphemes).
What does the text mean?	Comprehension	Determining the basic meaning of sentences as well as constructing an elaborated model of the meaning of the larger text, both written and graphical.
Why does that meaning matter?	Motivation	Thinking about the value of the text's meaning ("How will reading this help me?") and the likelihood of success in constructing it.



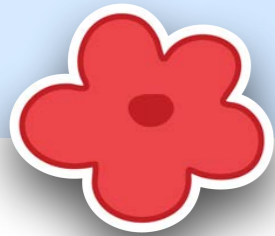
# What we know about comprehension

Comprehension is fostered through teacher modelling of purposeful strategies

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- ★ comprehension monitoring:  
noticing when you don't understand and going back to figure out why
  - ★ stopping and summarizing while reading
  - ★ asking questions of the text while reading
  - ★ using text structure as an aid
- 

Think alouds are a key foundation to modelling and building comprehension – a proficient reader models their thinking out loud as they interact with the text



# Skilled comprehenders use these strategies

## **CONNECTING**

to prior knowledge (schemas)

## **SELF-QUESTIONING**

ask themselves questions about the text; plan to understand

## **PREDICTING**

using prior knowledge & clues from text to make hypotheses

## **TEXT STRUCTURE**

use & organize text information to make meaning

## **VISUALIZING**

mental imagery to remember information from texts

## **MAKING INFERENCES**

integrate bits of info and fill in the gaps

## **SUMMARIZING**

prioritize the importance of info to get the 'gist'

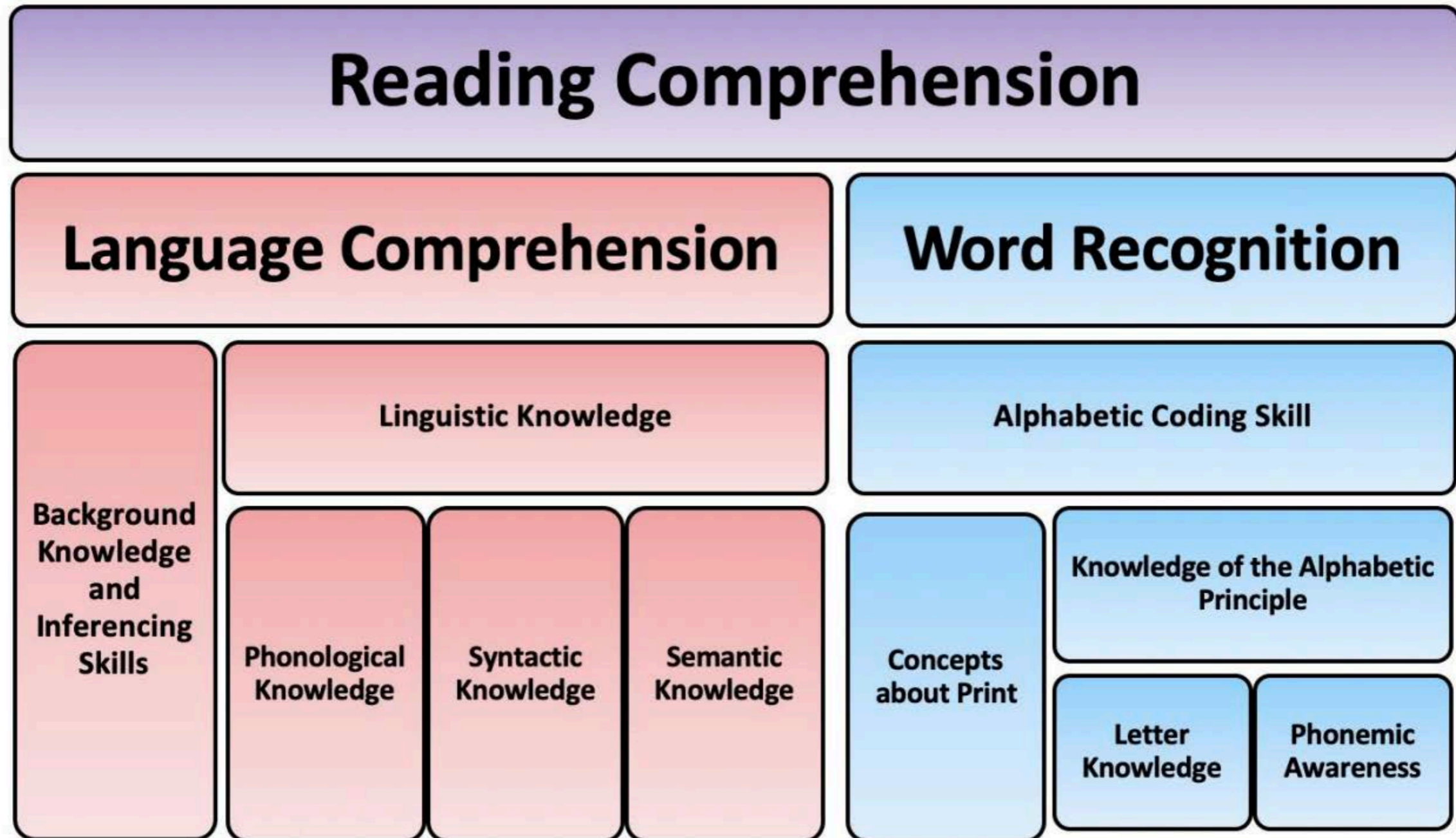
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*We can explicitly model these comprehension skills and engage students in conversations that allow them to practice comprehension.*



# What we know about comprehension

Comprehension is an **OUTCOME**







# The upward spiral of reading success

## Our teaching



## Their learning experience





“The more words he knew, the more clearly he could share with the world what he was thinking, feeling and dreaming”



# Books



Bringing Words to Life: Beck, McKeown, & Kucan

Differentiating Phonics Instruction for Maximum Impact: Blevins

Shifting the Balance K-2: Burkins & Yates

Shifting the Balance 3-5: Burkins, Cunningham & Yates

Reach All Readers: Geiger

7 Mighty Moves: Kemeny

Presentation: The More You Read, The More You Know – Best Practices for Comprehension Instruction: Dr. Molly Ness

A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day: Wright

Strive for Five Conversations: Zucker & Bell



## Online Resources

[TheSixShifts.com](http://TheSixShifts.com)

[Keys to Literacy – Effective Vocabulary Instruction](#)

[ReadWriteThink.org – Creating Text Sets for Your Classroom](#)

[Milne Library at SUNY Geneseo – Text Sets](#)

[Word Torque](#)

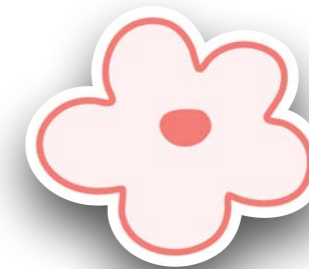
[Can Do Kids Academy](#)

[Word of the Day – YouTube](#)

[ASCD Article – When Young Readers Get Stuck – Nell Duke](#)

# Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years

[www.popey.ca](http://www.popey.ca)



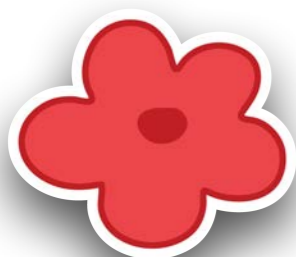
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