



Provincial Outreach
Program for the Early
Years

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Oral Language & Vocabulary: Systematic Instruction to Support Reading Comprehension

April 29, 2025

8:30-2:30

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Presenter:
Traci Baillie

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POPEY  Provincial Outreach Program
for the Early Years



Our learning objectives

Today we will explore some 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





Quick 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



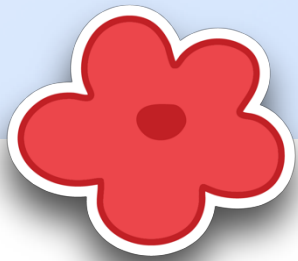


Remembering - it doesn't need to be either/or

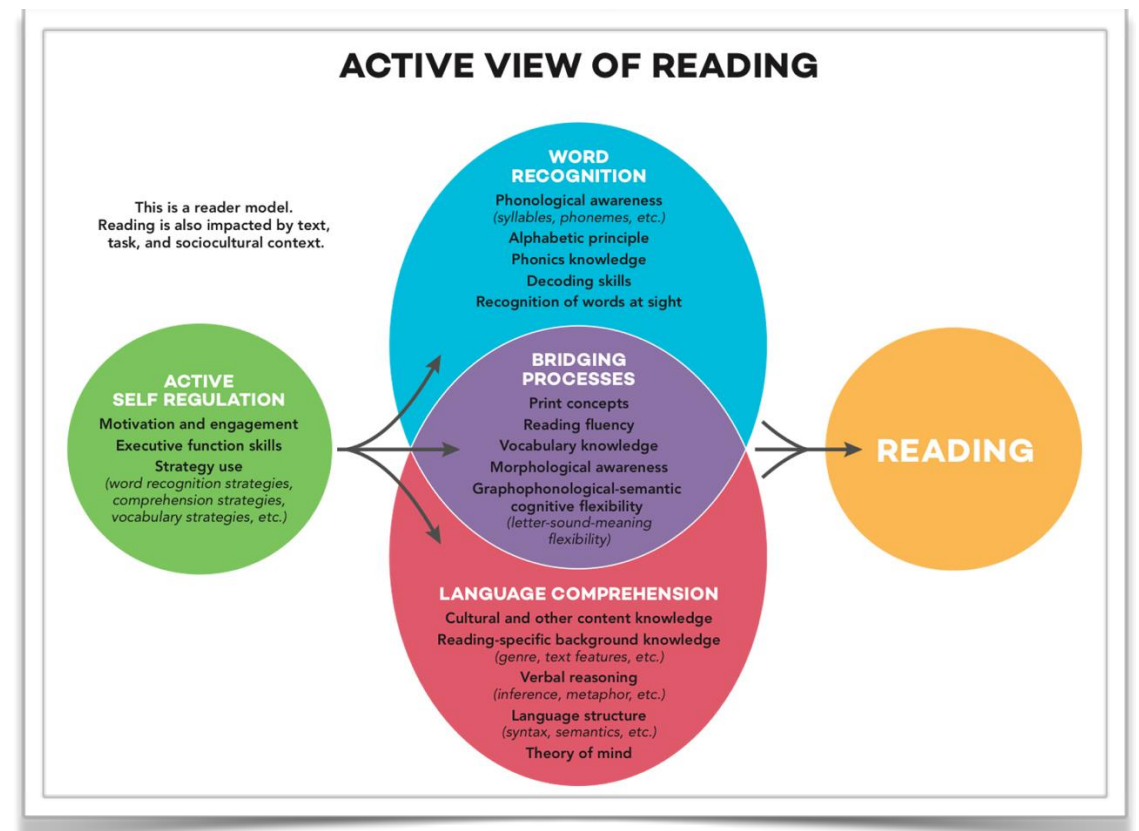
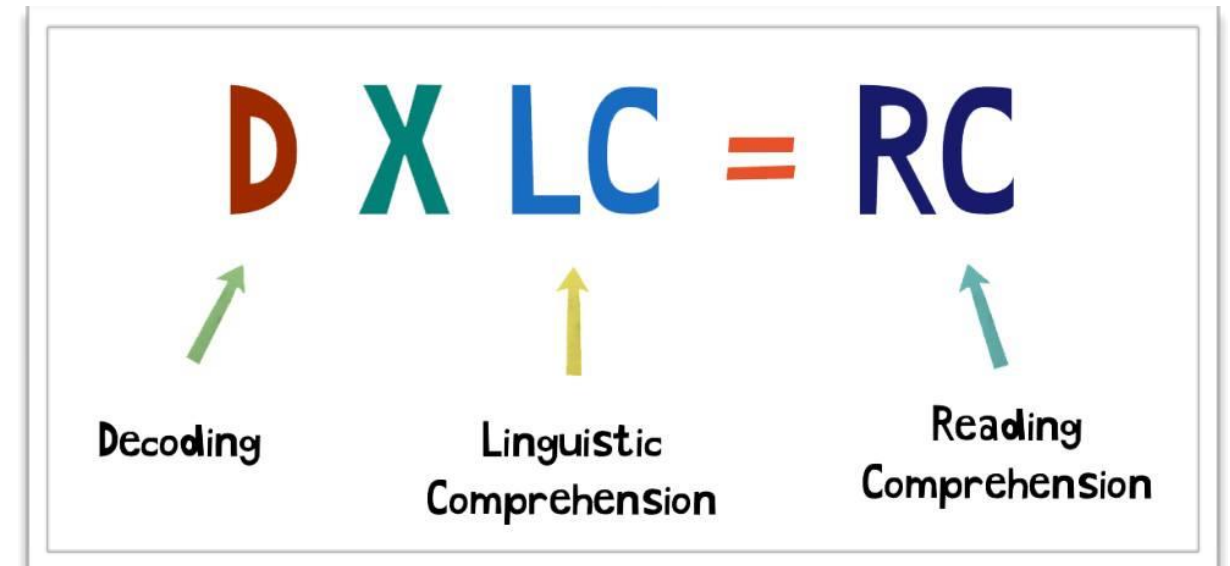
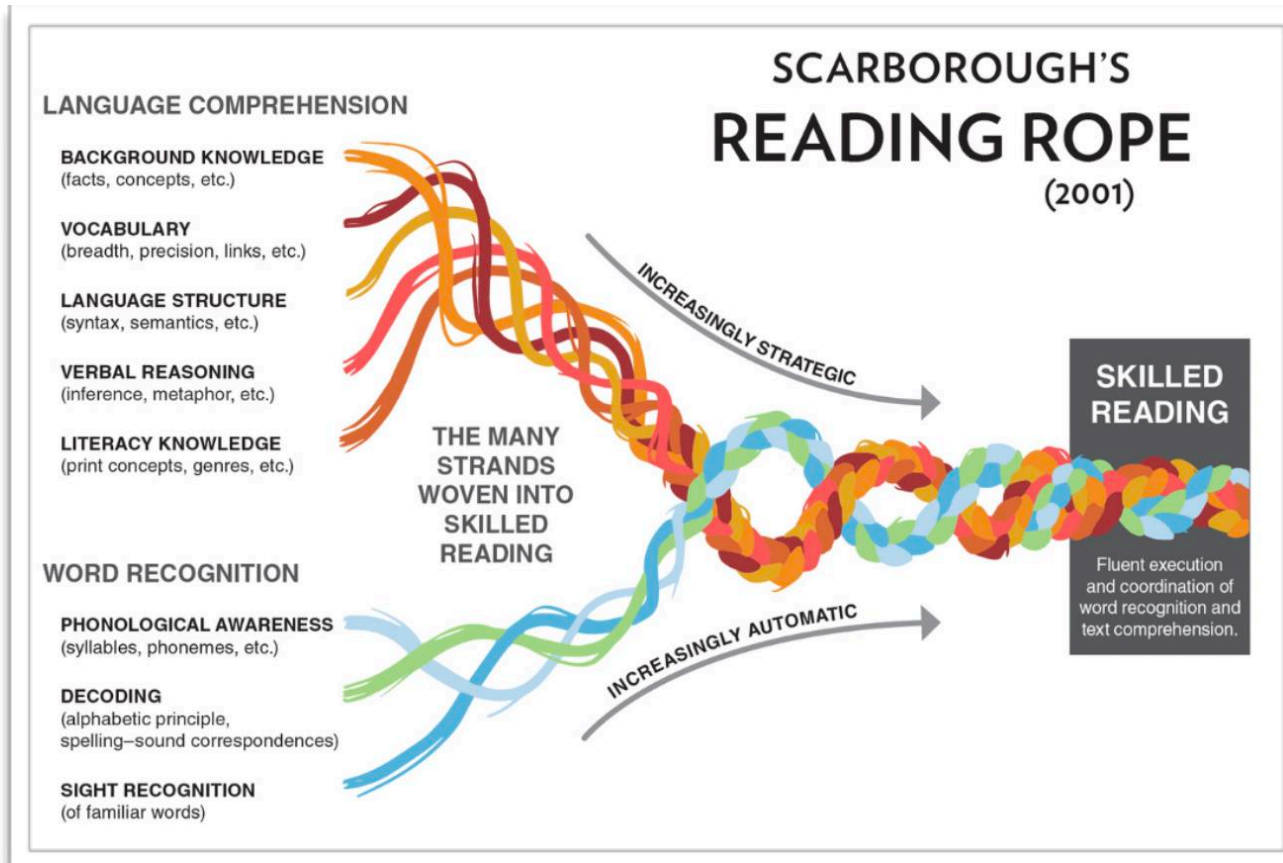
→ and, and, and...

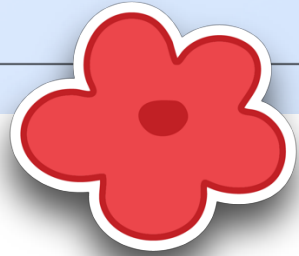
Decodable texts	vs.	Authentic literature
Research	vs.	Classroom Practice
The art of teaching	vs.	The science of reading
Individual student needs	vs.	Whole class efficiency
Direct instruction	vs.	Discovery learning
Practice in isolation	vs.	Practice in context
Mastery of skills	vs.	Joy of reading
Structure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

Comprehensive = complete; including all elements or aspects of something



Revisiting these models of reading...

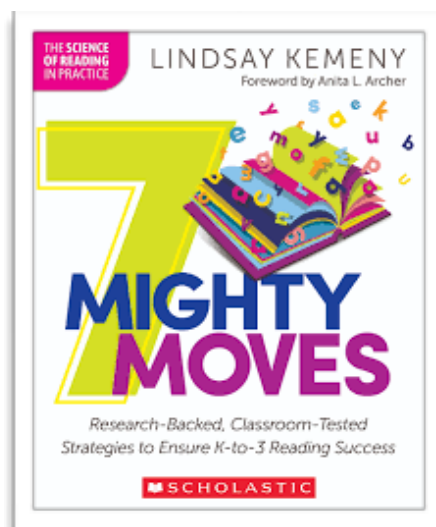




Phonemic Awareness Instruction

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



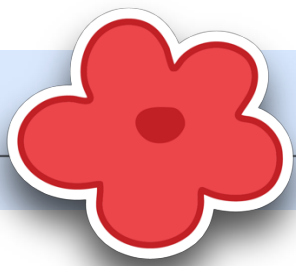
Ideas for instructional strategies:

Use manipulatives to keep it playful

- ★ Elkonin boxes + bingo chips
- ★ Pop It fidget toys
- ★ Race cars + tracks
- ★ Unifix cubes
- ★ Word chains

• Encourage gestures

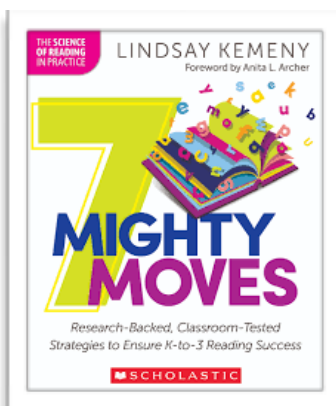
- ★ Hand choppers
- ★ Tap down arm
- ★ Finger/thumb tap



Phonics Instruction

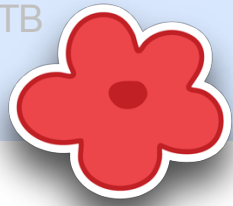
Keep in mind:

- Systematic: Move from simple to complex
 - Following a scope and sequence
 - Consider using a systematic and explicit phonics program
 - Understand “the code” yourself
- Explicit: “Today I want to teach you...”
- Keep students engaged by inviting all student responses

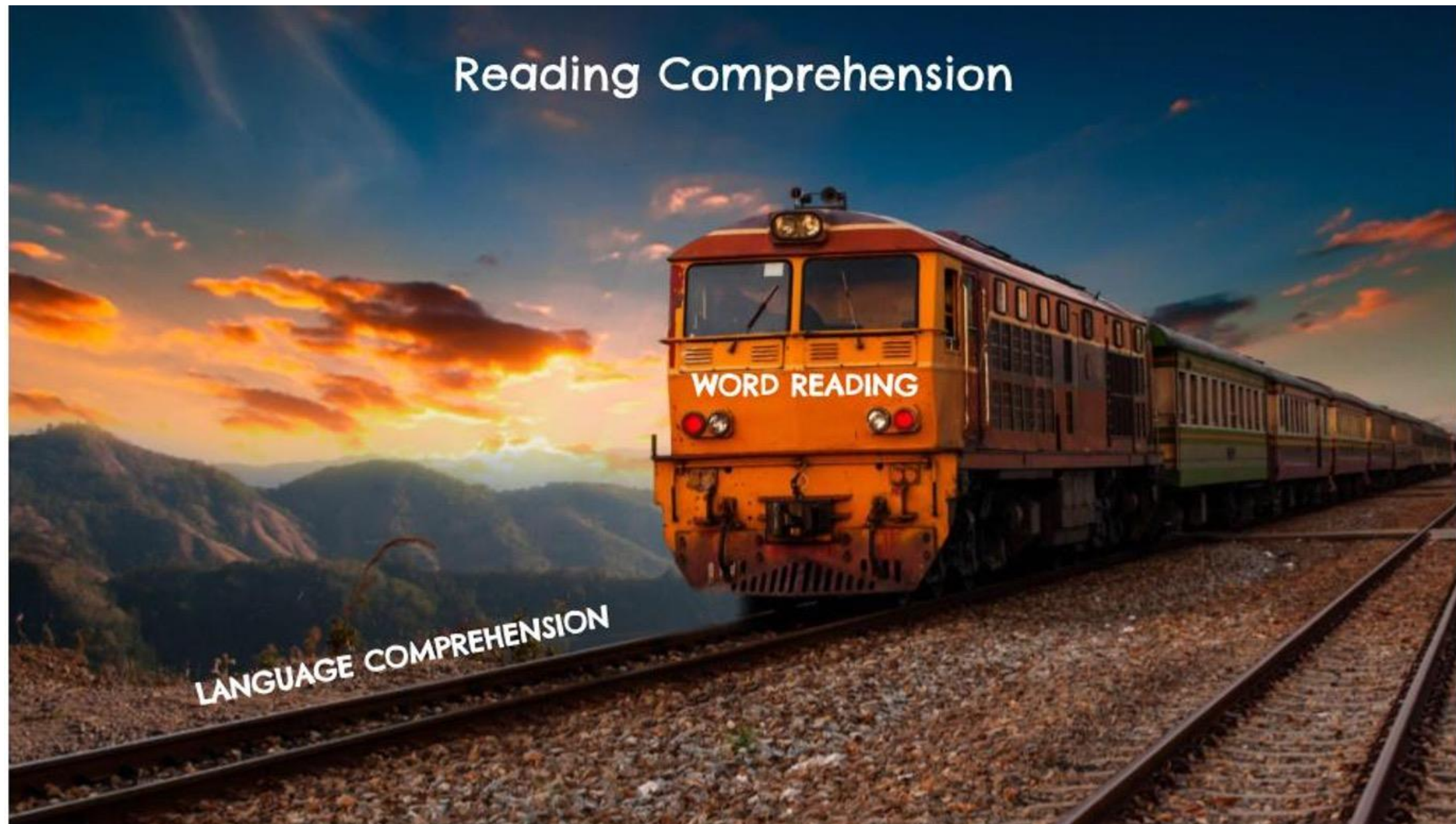


Ideas for instructional Strategies:

- Keep lessons lively and routine times
- Word sorts
- Word chains
- Try multi-sensory methods (play)
- Use Elkonin (sound) boxes to support encoding
- White boards will be your best friend
- Weekly progress monitoring is critical!
- Phonics instruction involves observation and tons of application to authentic reading and writing experiences



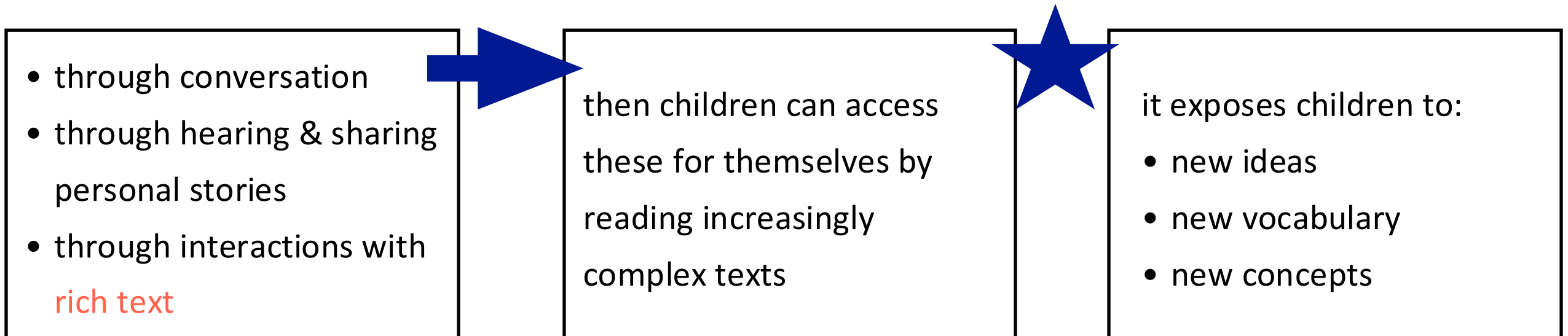
Laying the Language Track for the Word Reading Train





The Role of Oral Language in Comprehension

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



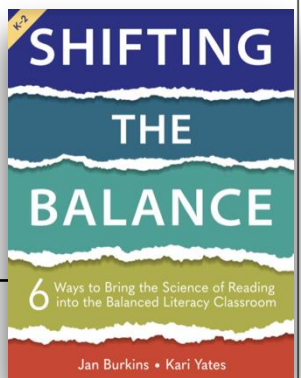
Treat oral language development as an. essential ingredient for comprehension.



Oral Language and Language 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 in everyday activities
- ✓ Read aloud texts to provide exposure to rich ideas, wide vocabulary, background knowledge, and novel language structures
- ✓ Use text sets to build content area acquire language structures, and expand vocabulary around key topics





Strategy: Dialogic Conversations

1. Engage

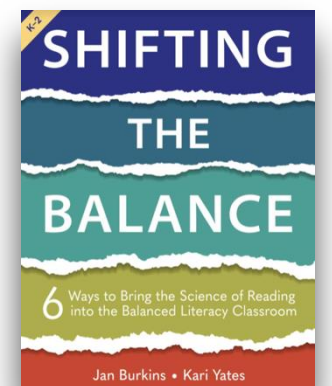
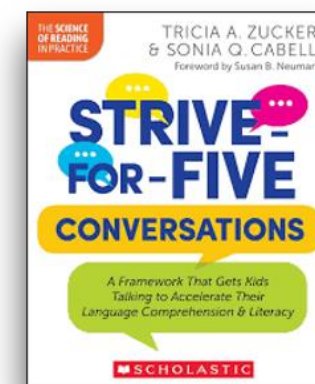
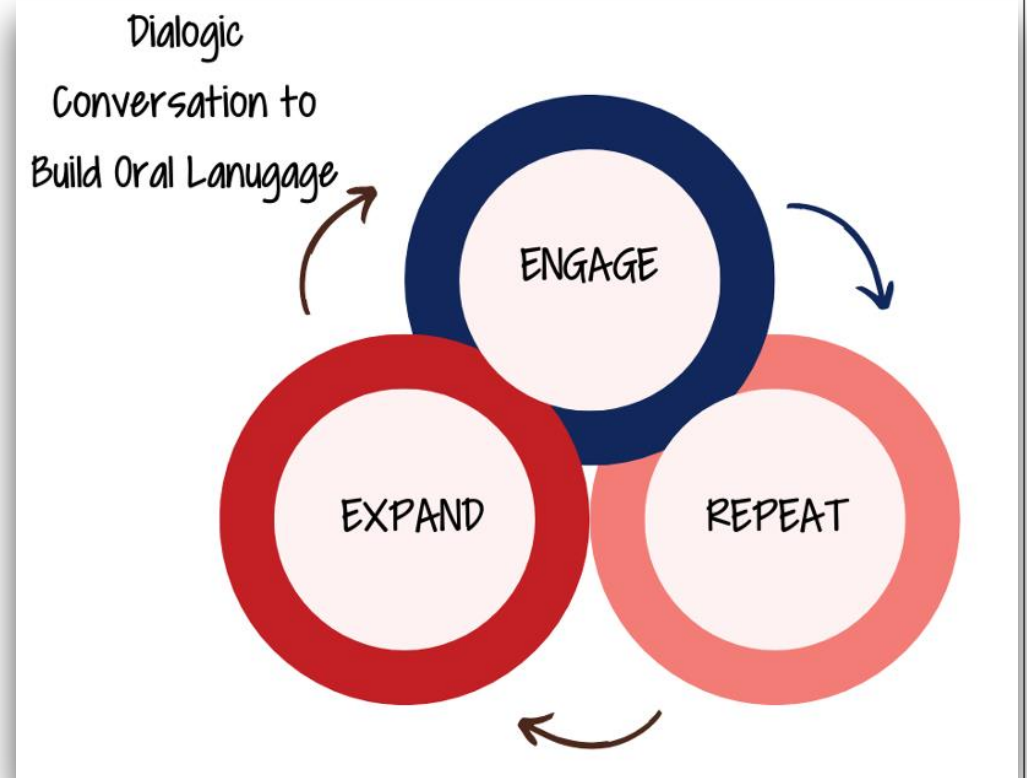
- verbal interaction around a text or general conversation
- may involve asking children's opinion, to name or recall something from a text, or to make a connection

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 Conversation

Try it with a partner,
repeating and expanding on
what they say.

Then switch so you each get
a turn. *You can play a
student and teacher role if
you choose.*

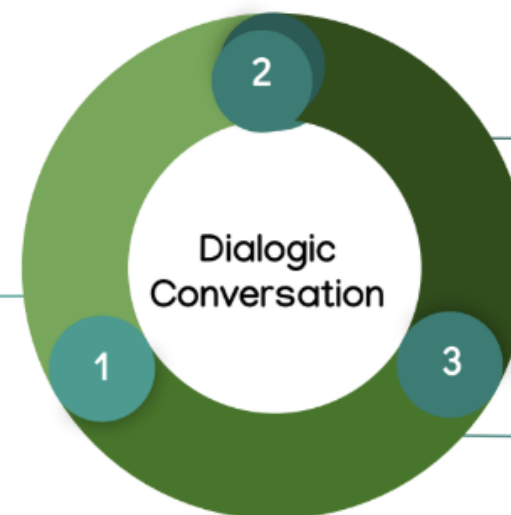
Sample Prompts:

- What did you do last night?
- What's your favourite book?

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?



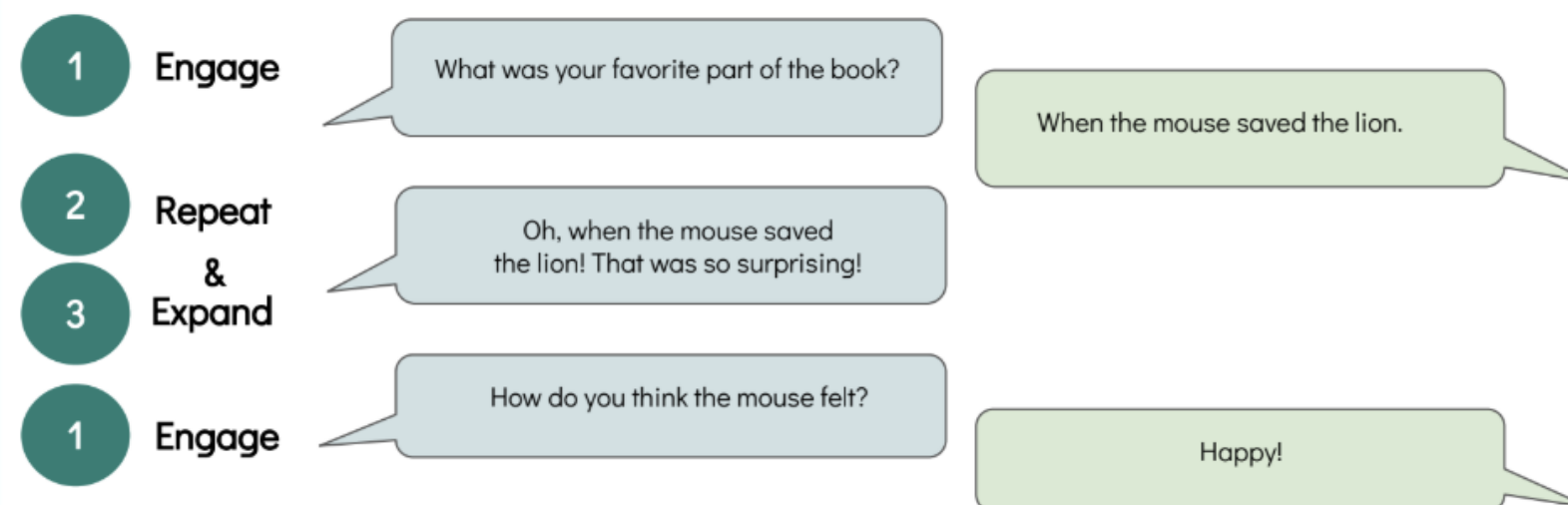
2. Repeat

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



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.



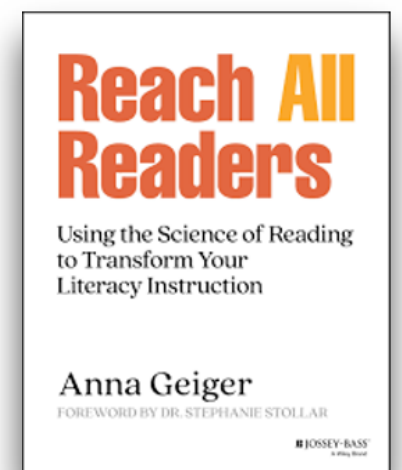
Rethinking Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is complex and is **not a single “skill” or set of strategies**

Instead, we can think of it as an **outcome**

Reading Comprehension is a combination of:

- **The Reader**: brings their own knowledge and interests
- **The Text**: vary in genre, topic and difficulty
- **The Activity**: varies depending on the purpose for reading

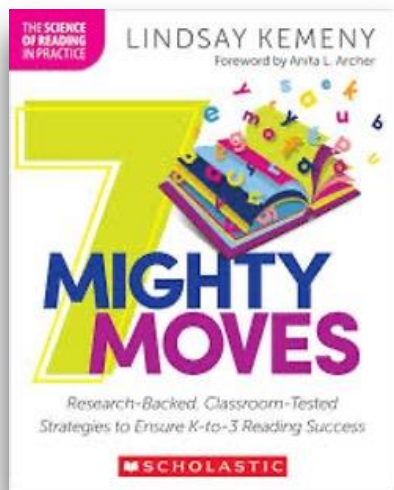




Rethinking Reading Comprehension

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.
- ★ Listening comprehension exceeds reading comprehension for young readers.



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

-Archer, 2001

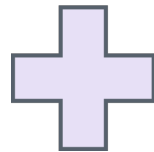


Rethinking Reading Comprehension

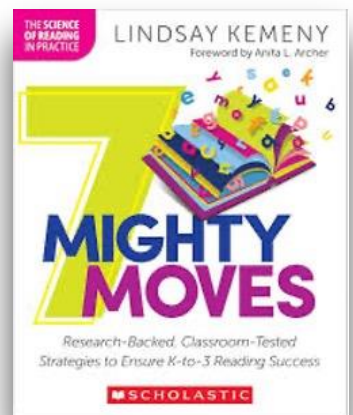
word recognition + language comprehension



monitoring + questioning + summarizing (focus on text content)



inferring + knowledge of text structure
(construct a representation of meaning)



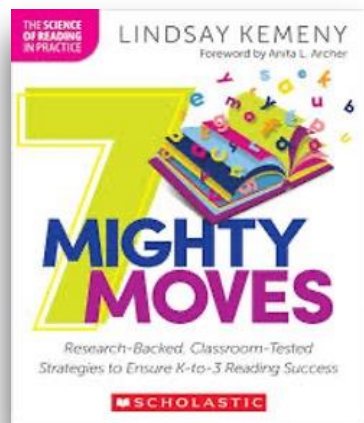


Rethinking Reading Comprehension

We know that reading comprehension is a complex process and many factors contribute to it, but...

Vocabulary & Background Knowledge are especially critical.

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



Partner share: How does this apply to what you read?



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



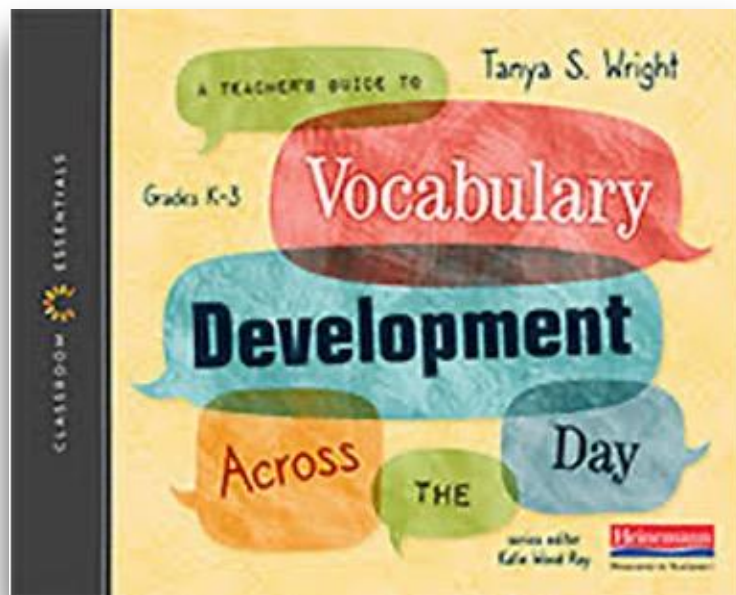
Vocabulary can be developed:

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



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





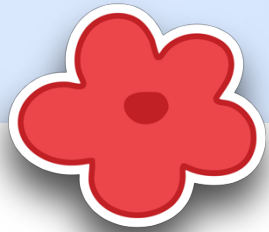
How do we learn new words...?

...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

...when we learn new things

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





Oral Language and Language Comprehension

How can you intentionally support oral language development to maximize language comprehension in your classrooms and/or with your small groups?



Individual.... Small Group Share.. Large Group Share



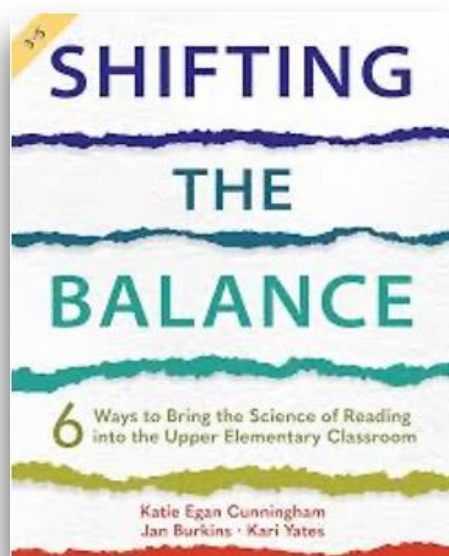
Video: Planning for student-friendly definitions





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



Video: Active processing in action





Active Processing & Engagement with 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.

- ✓ 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



Tiered Vocabulary

- **Tier 1 words:**
everyday speech, familiar to most students

Tier 1

- baby
- house
- run

- These are the most basic words. They make up the vast majority of words we use in conversation.
- These words rarely need to be taught to native English speakers because they are familiar to most students. English as an additional language learners may benefit from explicit instruction of tier 1 words.

- **Tier 2 words:**
robust high-utility words used in multiple contexts

Tier 2

- fortunate
- maintain
- analyze
- absurd

- These words are commonly used in quality children's literature or across domains in academic texts.
- These words are more sophisticated than the basic tier 1 words. It is less likely that students will already know the meanings of tier 2 words.
- Focusing intentional instruction on tier 2 words will improve students' overall language knowledge and reading comprehension.

- **Tier 3 words:**
low frequency words, subject specific

Tier 3

- isotope
- lathe
- peninsula

- These are specific technical words. These words are much less frequent than tier 1 and tier 2 words, and are likely related to specific academic content areas.
- Instruction of tier 3 words will be based on specific grade level curriculum outcomes in other subject areas.



Strategy: Learning new words (content area Learning)

What can this look like in the classroom?

- ★ 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

Consider the tiers





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.

↓

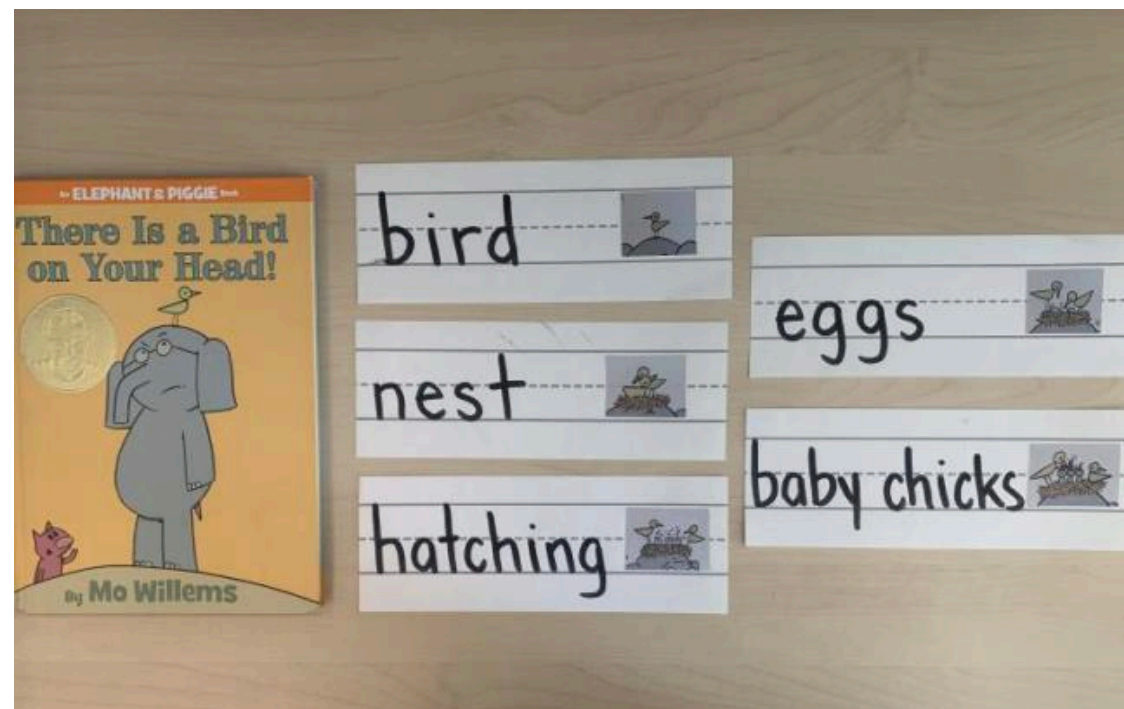
Questions to ask while children observe:
What do you observe about the weather conditions?
How did you observe this?
What data are you recording about the weather conditions?



Strategy: Content Area Learning

What can this look like in the classroom?

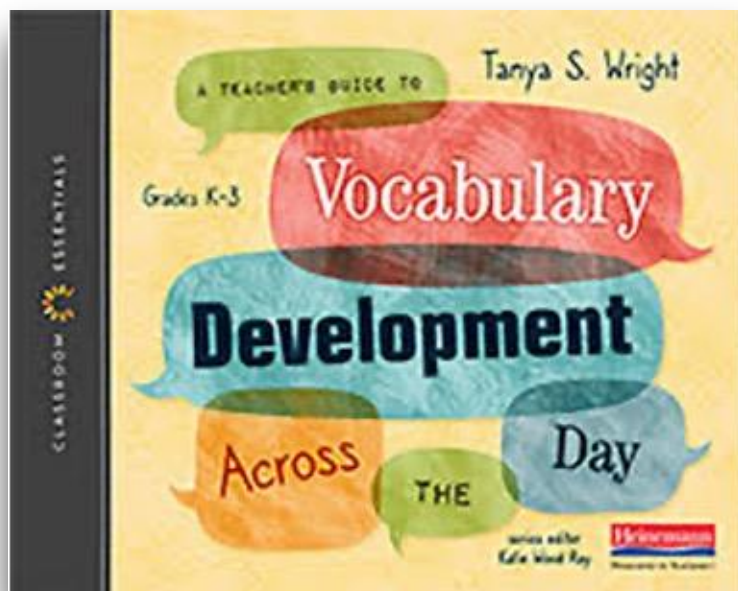
Identify the words to teach from your stories in advance





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



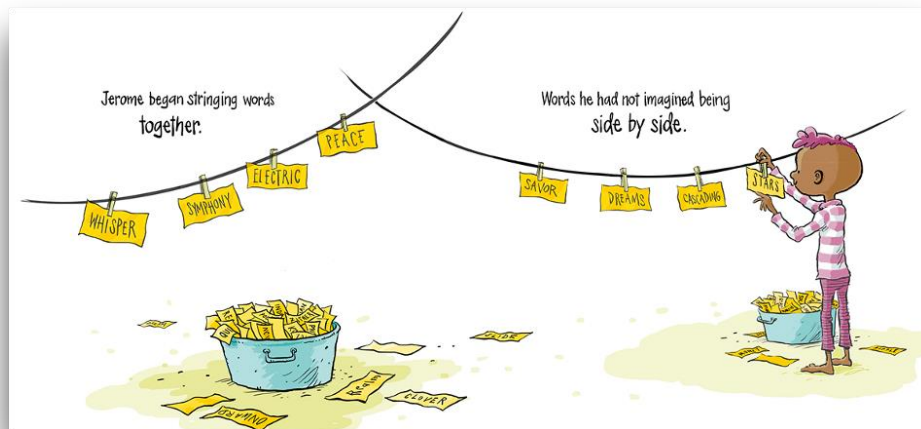
Strategy: Word Collection Notebooks or Walls

To inspire

CONTENT AREA READING

Build Background Knowledge
&

Vocabulary



ReadWorks Article-A-Day™

Build knowledge, vocabulary, and stamina with a routine that students love.



Sets of 6 to 9
articles that are
related by topic



Nonfiction topics
to build
knowledge



For grades
Kindergarten to 8th



Research-based
classroom routine with
writing & oral sharing

All you need is 10 minutes each day for the routine. Students will gain the most by reading **4 or more articles** from an Article-A-Day set each week and doing the routine for **15 or more weeks** in the school year. Article-A-Day can be done digitally, printed, or projected!

Plan an entire year with our K-6 Scope & Sequences: <https://www.readworks.org/scope-and-sequence>

Step 1: Set the purpose for the routine

- "Words are where humans store knowledge. So we will build our knowledge by reading these articles. We will also increase our vocabulary, improve our reading stamina, and enjoy reading every day."

Step 2: Students read or listen to an article

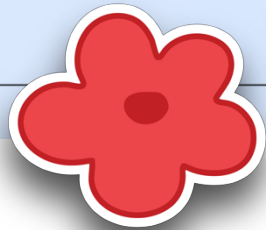
- If students cannot read independently, they can listen to the audio, or you can read the article aloud.

Step 3: The "Book of Knowledge"

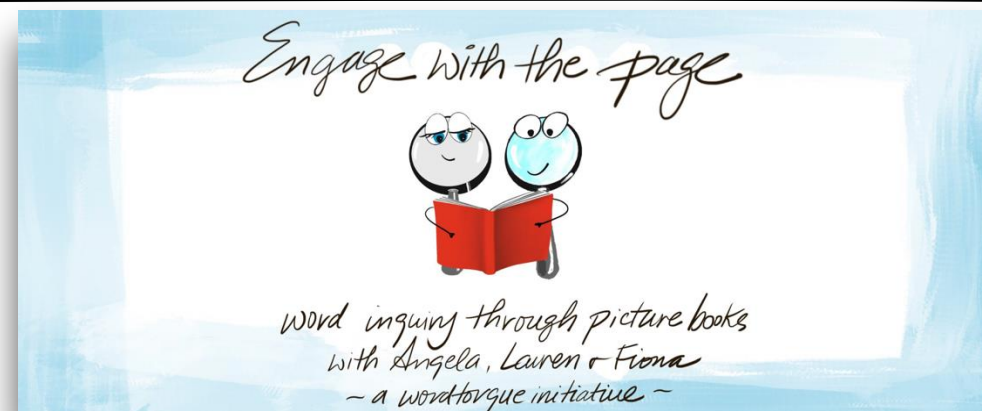
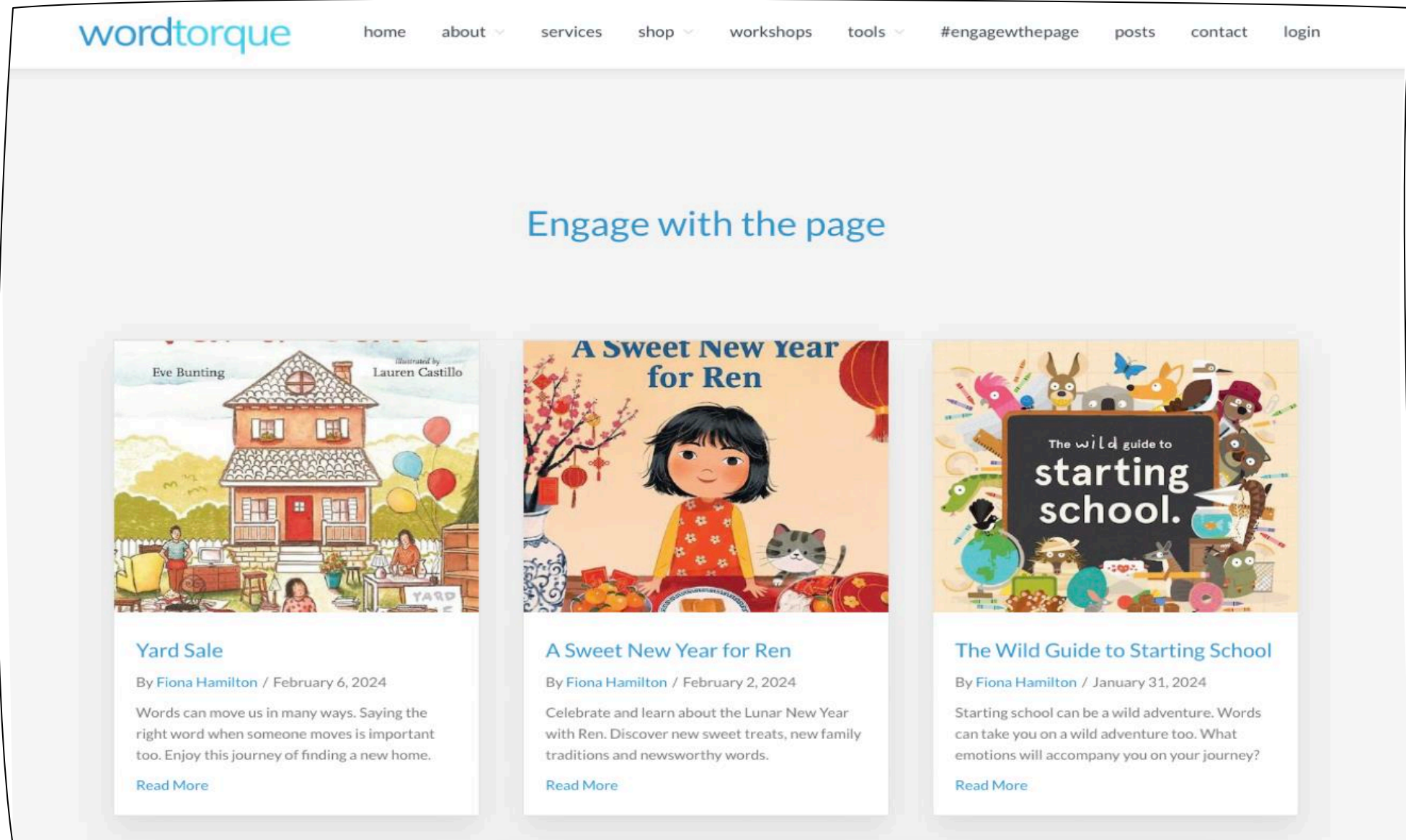
- Students write or type two or three things that they learned from the article and would like to remember in their Books of Knowledge.
- If students cannot write yet, they can draw their responses.

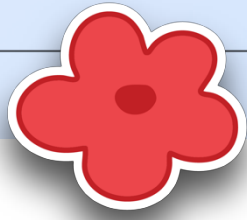
Step 4: Share Knowledge!

- Ask a few students to share with the class what they learned from reading.
- Create a "Class Book of Knowledge" where you record this information. You can do this in Assignments & Progress or on chart paper.



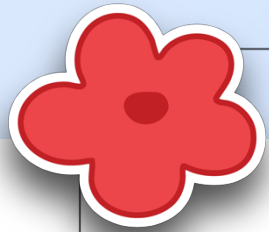
Strategy: Engage with the Page Type Activities





Strategy: Word of the Day - at school or at home





Strategy: Text Sets

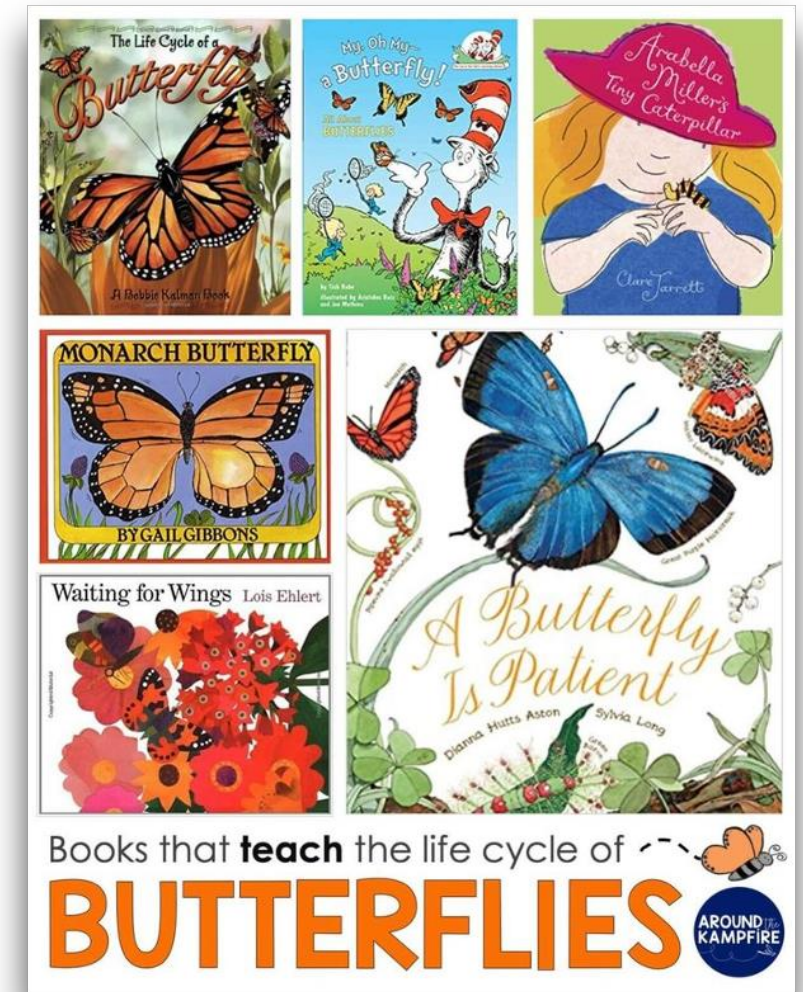
A text set is a collection of sources that support a common theme, issue or topic.

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.

Displaying the themed sets with student access is important.

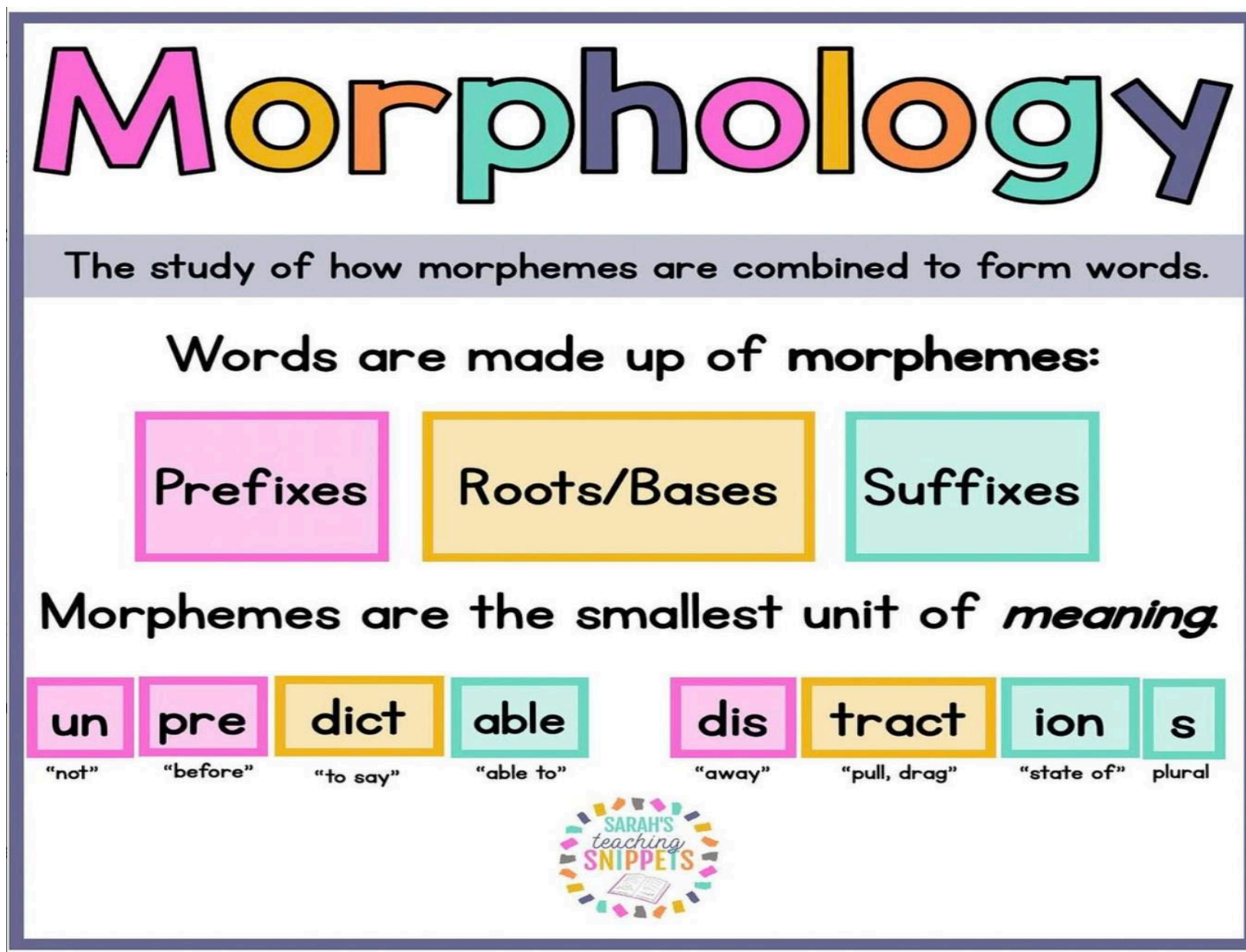




Strategy: Word Solving (and spelling)

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
un	dict	able
pre	tract	ion
s		

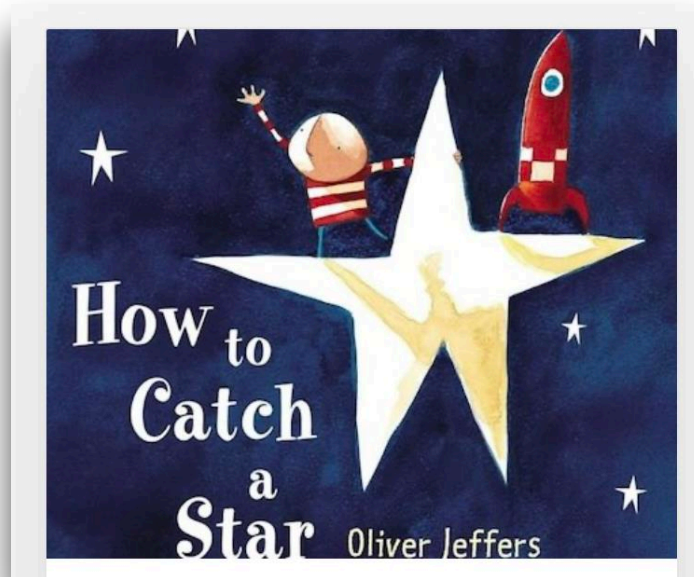
Morphemes are the smallest unit of *meaning*.

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.

super	star	sing ed y less	
		dom let	
		dust light struck fish	
		gaze	ing



Exploring words with a word matrix & word sums

re mis	read	s 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?

Try this out: with:

Play

form



How did you do?

in de re per trans	form SHAPE	s ed ing
		ant at
		ate ion ive
		er s

©themeasuredmom.com

re dis un	play	s ing ed
		er pen off room list
		ful
		s ly ness

Additional learning: <https://logicofenglish.com/pages/vocabulary>

<https://logicofenglish.com/pages/spelling-rules>



Strategy: Word Study to Build 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



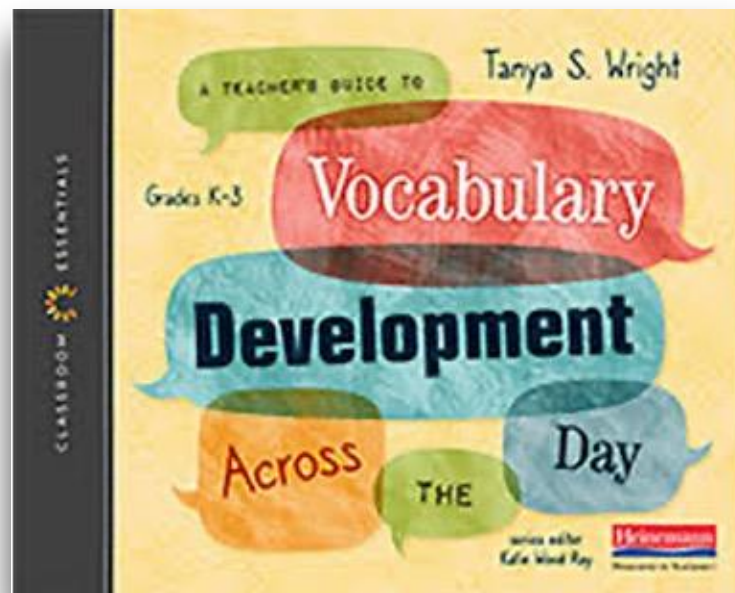
synonyms for nice

pleasant
fine
neat
enjoyable
lovely
delightful
acceptable
satisfying



Strategy: Word solving Strategies in action

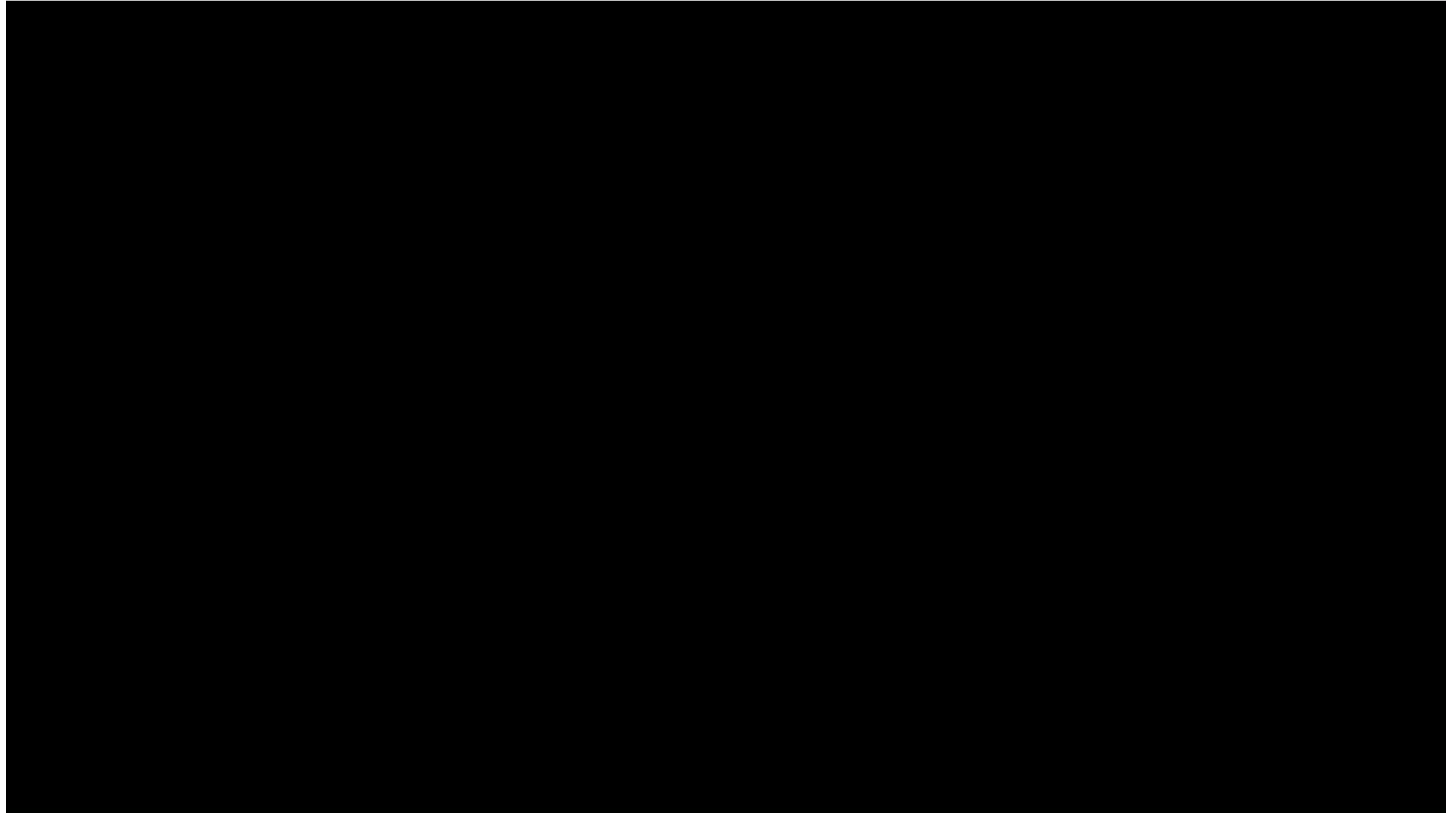
The more **information** children have about how words and language work, the more **powerful** they will feel as strategic word-solvers.



Tanya S. Wright



Strategy: Word solving Strategies in action





Vocabulary Take Away

What are some ways you can introduce new vocabulary in your classrooms?



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



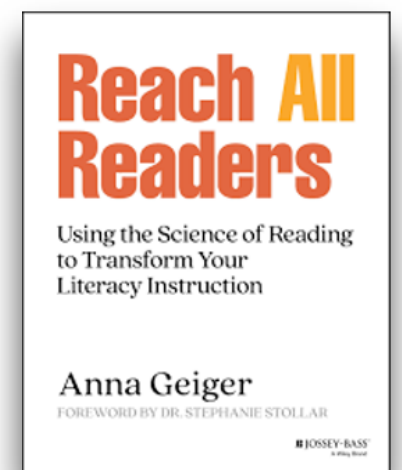
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Instead, we can think of it as an **outcome**

Reading Comprehension is a combination of:

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- **The Text**: vary in genre, topic and difficulty
- **The Activity**: varies depending on the purpose for reading





Working Memory vs. Long-Term Memory

- **Working Memory**

- ★ has limits

- **Long-Term Memory**

- ★ no limits



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



Cognitive Load Theory

“the amount of information the **working memory can hold”**

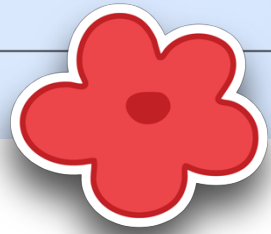
-Sweller, 1988

Intrinsic Cognitive Load

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

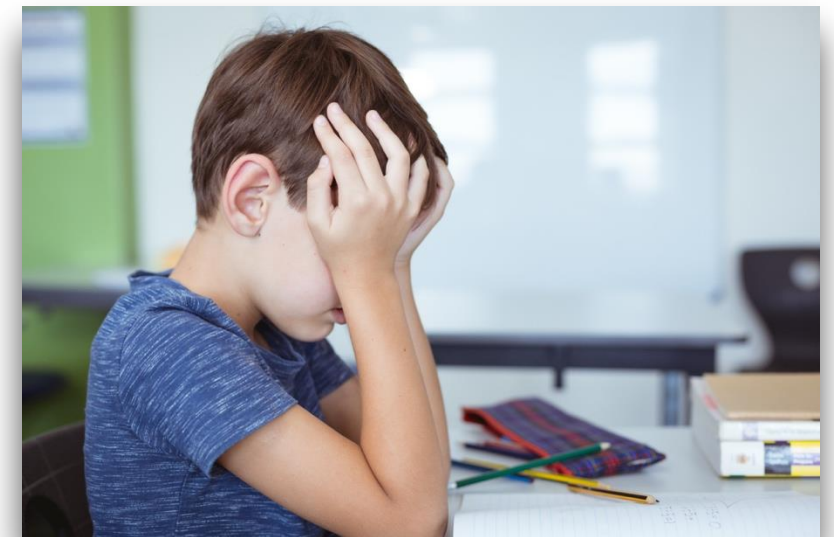
Extraneous Cognitive Load

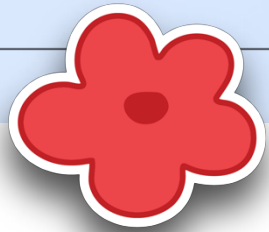
- ★ anything that makes it harder for a student to learn



Cognitive Load Theory

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





Increasing Comprehension through Explicit Instruction

By using explicit instruction methods, we can decrease students' extraneous cognitive load. This isn't just a strategy, but a necessary approach.

Explicit instruction is:

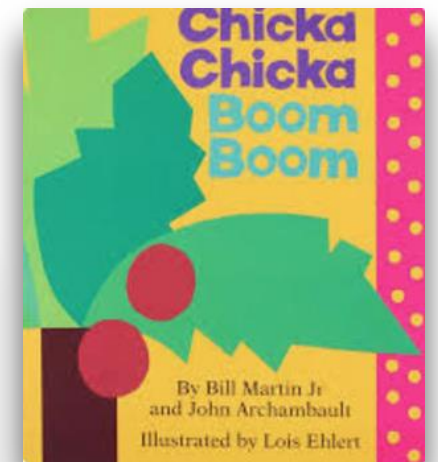
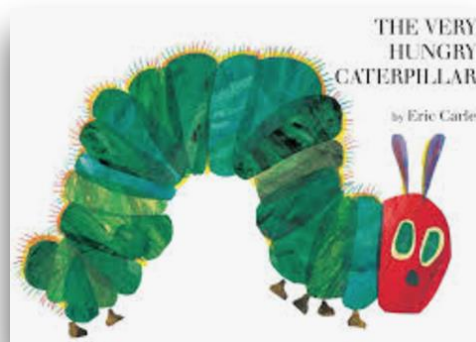
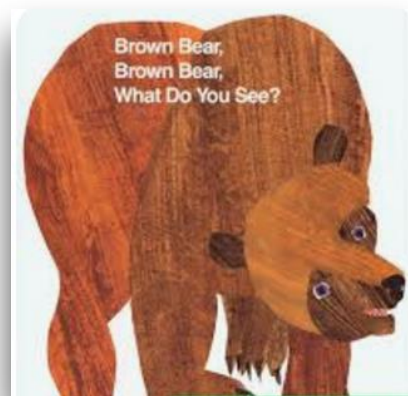
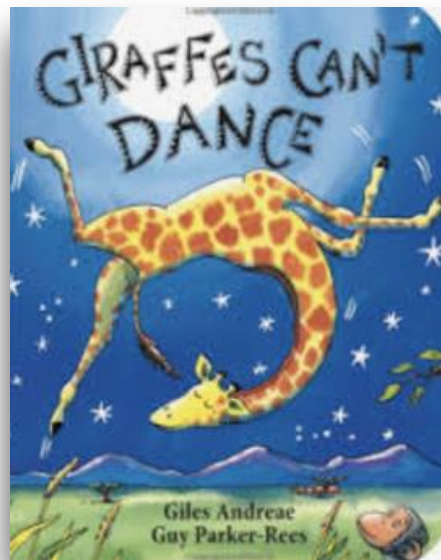
- **systematic**
- **direct**
- **engaging**
- **success-oriented**





Mental Model / Situational Model

Mental Model =
a literal representation of text + background knowledge



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



Increasing Comprehension through Increasing Background Knowledge

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





Strategy: Increasing Background Knowledge

3-5 minute strategy to enrich background knowledge:

- State big idea
- Connect 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





Strategy: Learning to Recognize 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 easier. It frees up working memory space.



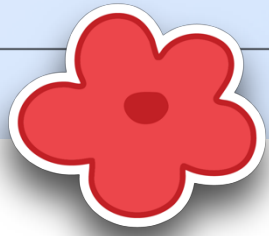
- ★ **NARRATIVE TEXT** – tells a story or describes a series of events
- ★ **EXPOSITORY TEXT** – gives information



What Good Readers Do- Nell Duke



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgSRH0EYvhU&t=13s>



Strategy: Teacher Comprehension Modelling:

Comprehension is fostered through teacher modelling of purposeful strategies.

- ★ 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



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

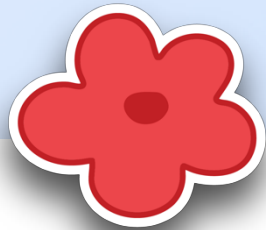
MAKING INFERENCES

integrate bits of
info and fill in the
gaps

SUMMARIZING

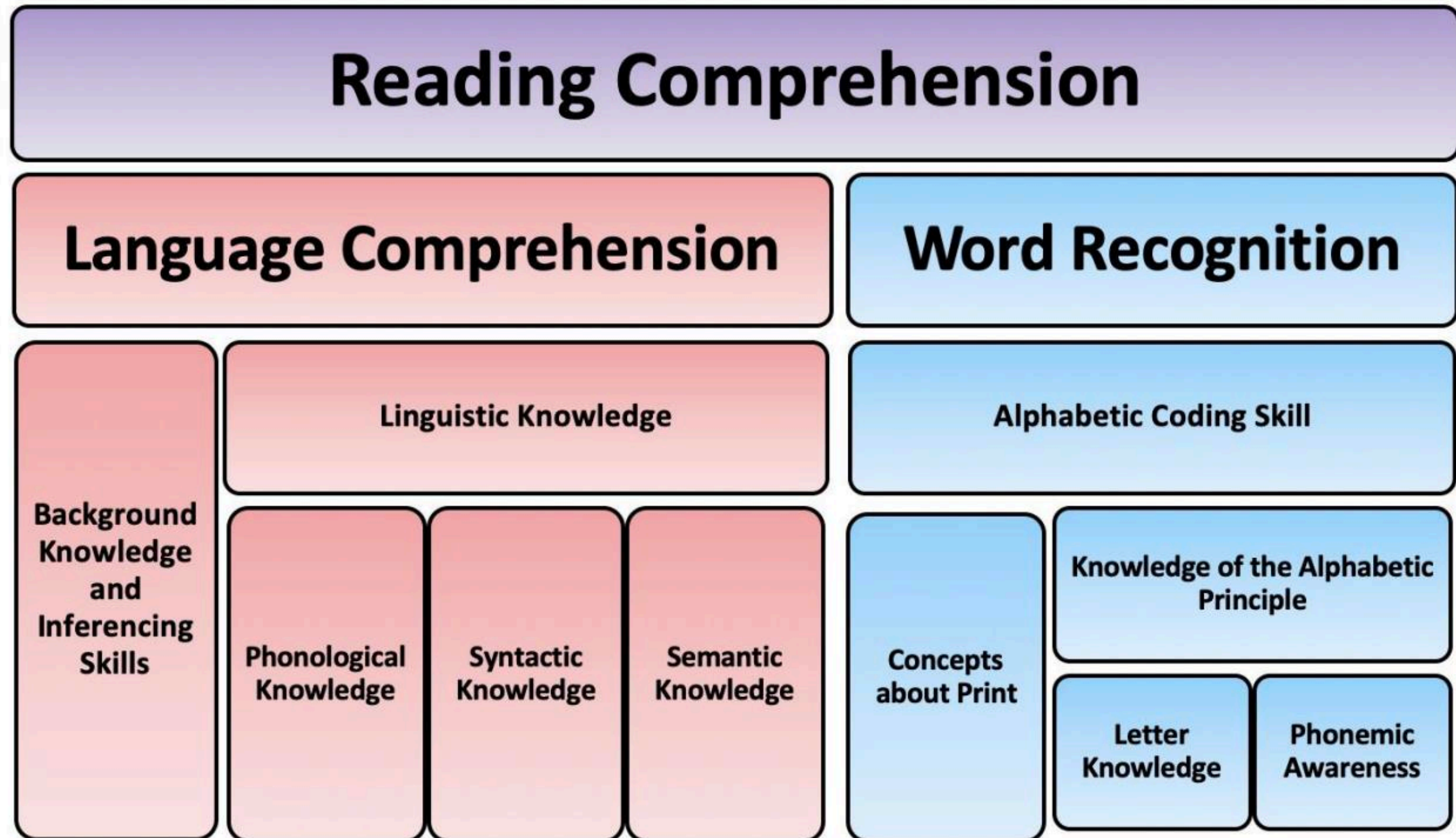
prioritize the
importance of
info to get the
'gist'

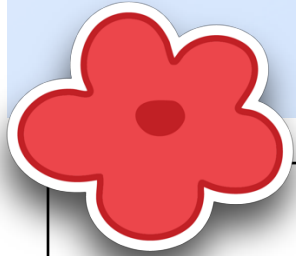
We can explicitly model these comprehension skills and engage students in conversations that allow them to practice comprehension.



What we know about comprehension

Comprehension is an **OUTCOME**

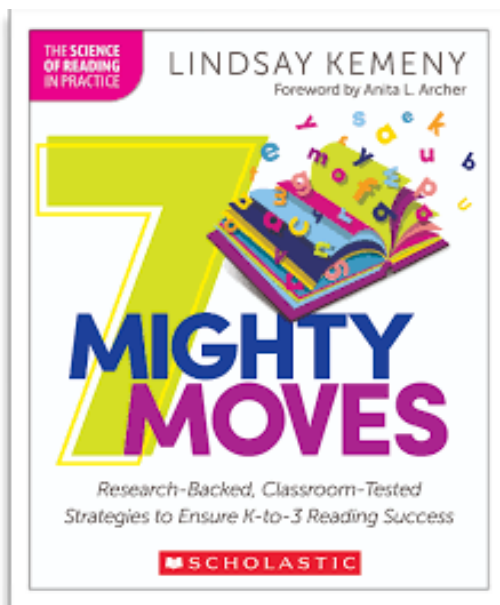




Building Fluency

Keep in mind:

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



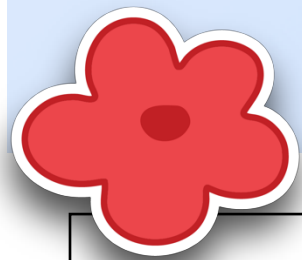
Lack of fluency=

lack of motivation to read=

fewer words read=

smaller vocabulary=

limited comprehension



Building Fluency in Reading

Levels of Support for Scaffolding Text

Echo Read- provides greatest amount of support and /or models an aspect of fluency

Choral Read- requires more fluency

Whisper Read- provides least amount of support

Ideas for Instructional Strategies:

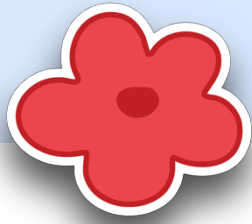
- Remember...fluency is not an isolated skill
 - subskills: phonemic awareness, sound-symbol knowledge, automaticity at letter or word level
- Small Group instruction affords specific, immediate feedback
- Model, model, model!!!
- Read Alouds
- Partner Reading
- Reader's Theatre
- Beat the Clock Timed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



Strategy: Think alouds

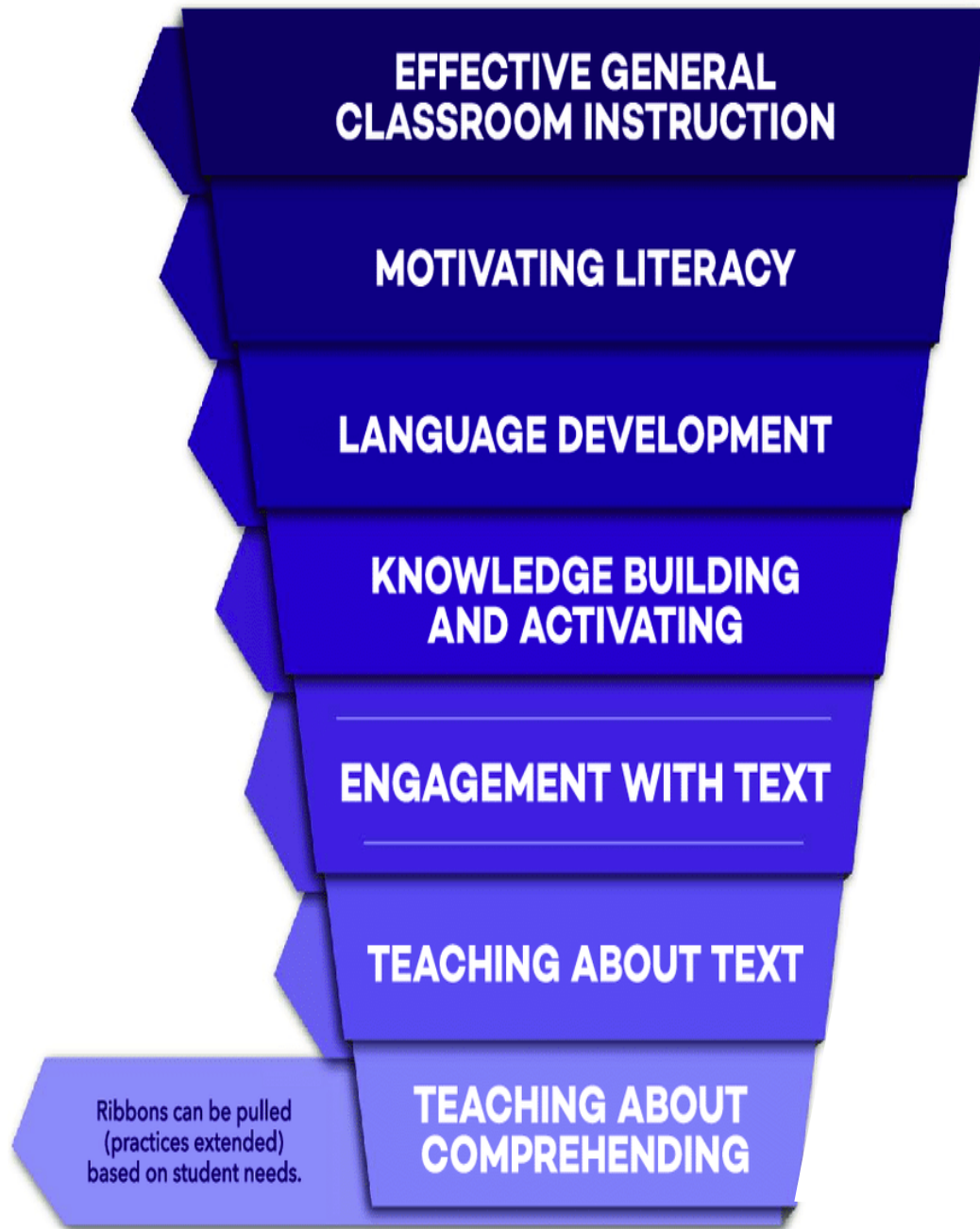
Think alouds are a key foundation to modelling and building comprehension
- a proficient young reader models their thinking out loud as they interact with the text.

How do your students complete “independent reading”?



The upward spiral of reading success

Our teaching

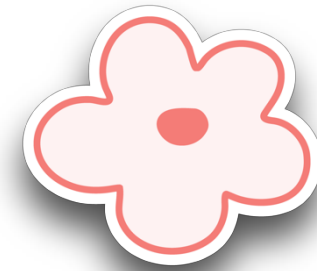


Their learning experience



Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years

www.popey.ca



Please complete our POPEY survey



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Connect with us online!



@popeybc

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



[Reading Science Academy](#)

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

[TheSixShifts.com](#)

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

[Word Torque](#)

[Can Do Kids Academy](#)

[Word of the Day - YouTube](#)

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

[Logic of English](#)

[What Good Readers Do- Dr. Nell Duke](#)