Diving into Oral Language, Vocabulary and Comprehension
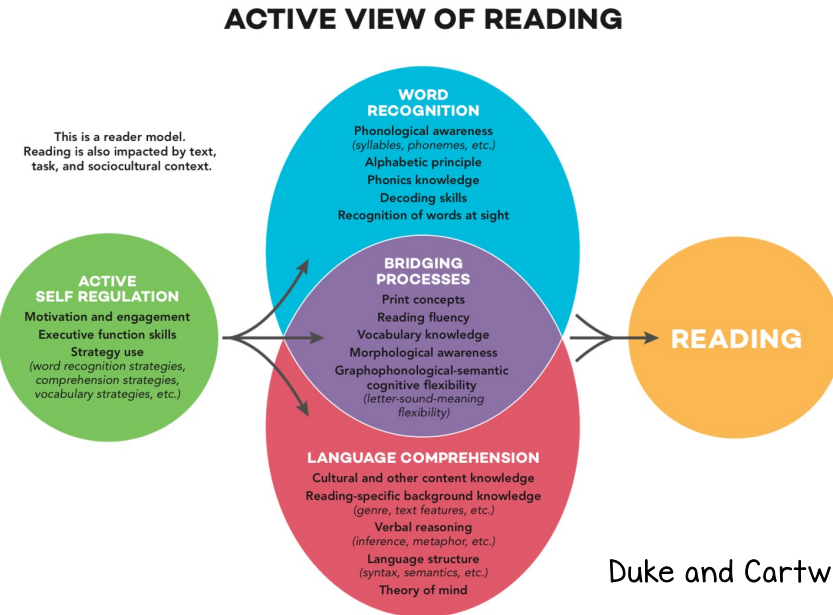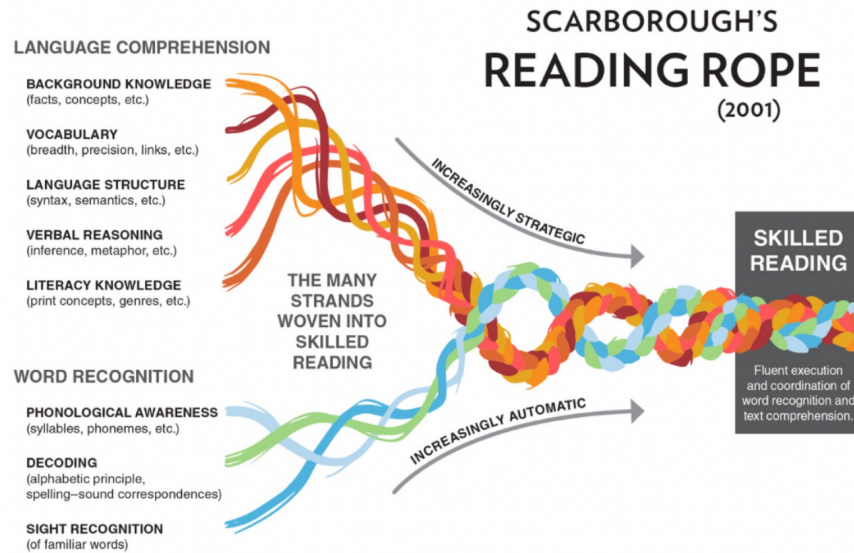
April 30, 2025

Presenter:

Jacquie Anderson

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

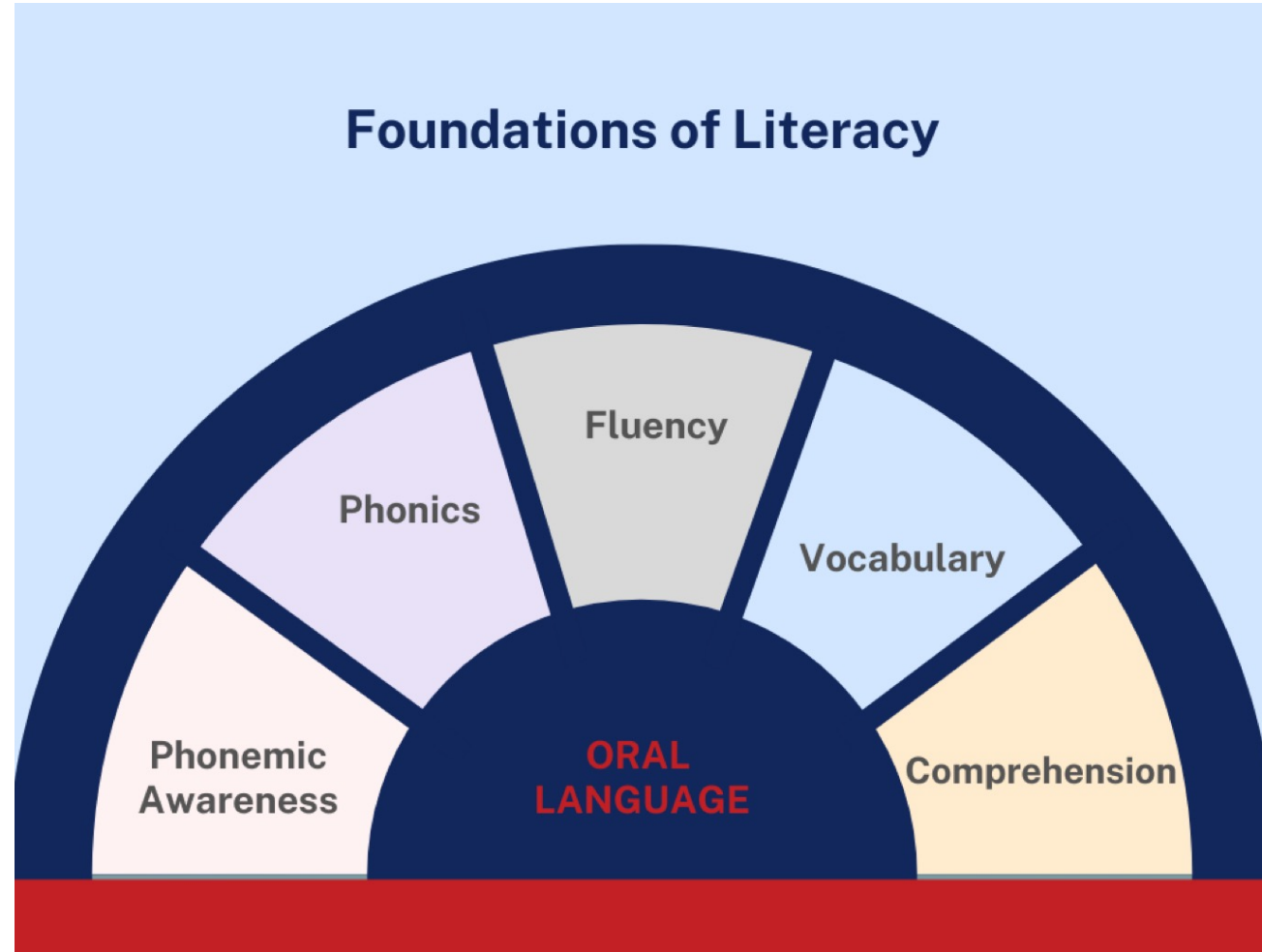SCARBOROUGH'S **READING ROPE** (2001)

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)

INCREASINGLY STRATEGIC

INCREASINGLY AUTOMATIC

THE MANY STRANDS WOVEN INTO SKILLED READING

SKILLED READING

Fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

ACTIVE VIEW OF READING

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

WORD RECOGNITION
Phonological awareness *(syllables, phonemes, etc.)*
Alphabetic principle
Phonics knowledge
Decoding skills
Recognition of words at sight

BRIDGING PROCESSES
Print concepts
Reading fluency
Vocabulary knowledge
Morphological awareness
Graphophonological-semantic cognitive flexibility *(letter-sound-meaning flexibility)*

ACTIVE SELF REGULATION
Motivation and engagement
Executive function skills
Strategy use
(word recognition strategies, comprehension strategies, vocabulary strategies, etc.)

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION
Cultural and other content knowledge
Reading-specific background knowledge *(genre, text features, etc.)*
Verbal reasoning *(inference, metaphor, etc.)*
Language structure *(syntax, semantics, etc.)*
Theory of mind

READING

Duke and Cartwright, 2021

D X LC = RC

Decoding

Linguistic Comprehension

Reading Comprehension

Let's review

Foundations of Literacy

Phonics

Fluency

Vocabulary

Phonemic Awareness

ORAL LANGUAGE

Comprehension

Laying the Language Track for the Word Reading Train

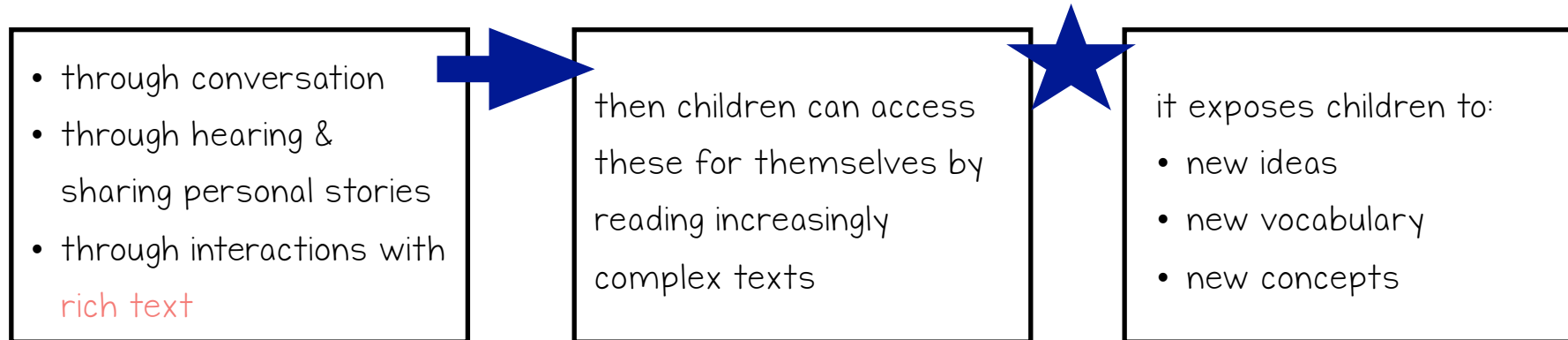Reading Comprehension

WORD READING
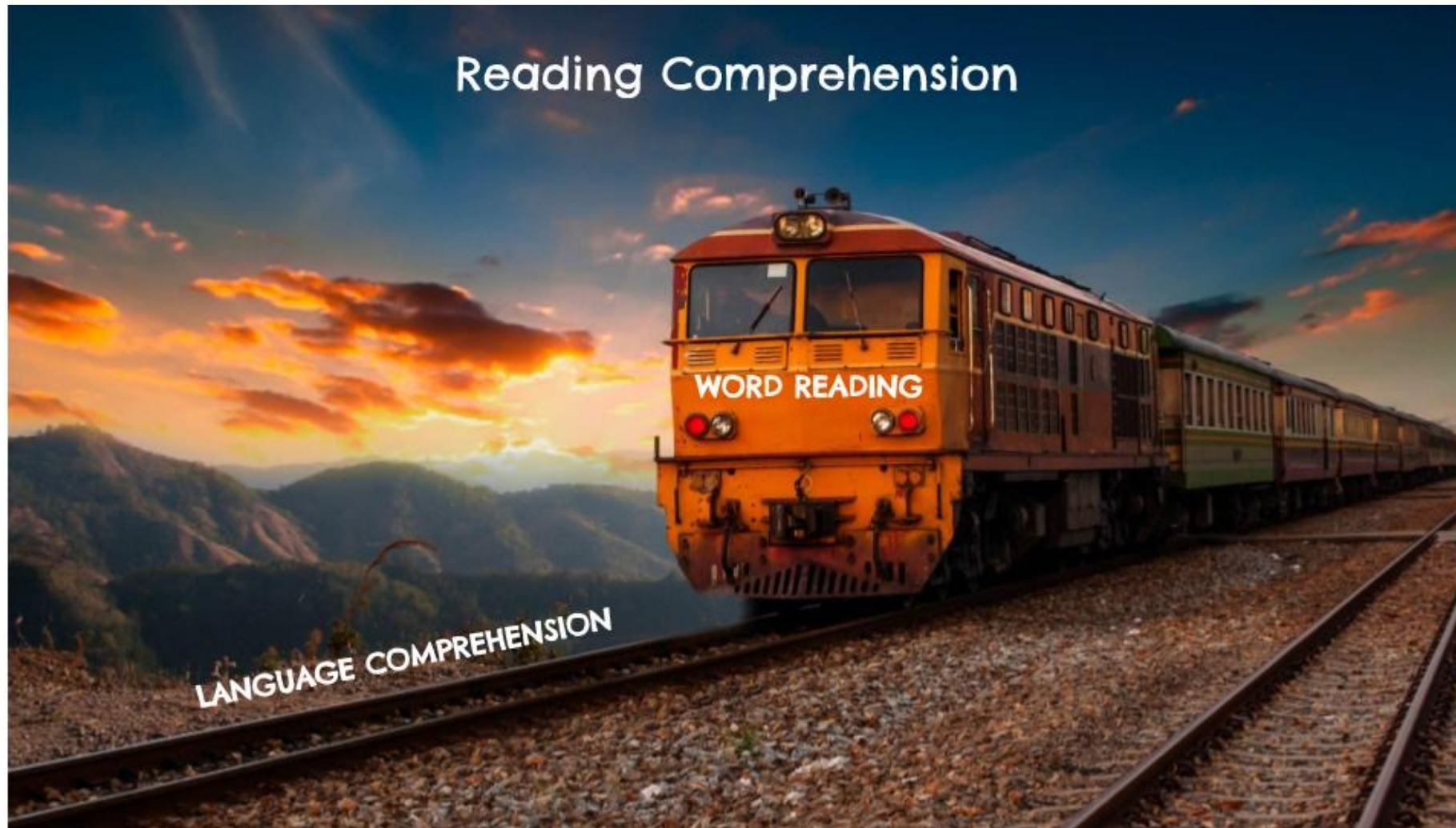
LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

What the Research Says:

- Oral language and reading are related

- Early oral language abilities help predict reading skills
  - Kindergarten oral language scores are highly predictable of later (gr. 4 and 7) reading comprehension and vocabulary scores.
  - Comprehension builds comprehension….

- We can improve oral language skills

The Role of Oral Language in Comprehension

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

- through conversation
- through hearing & sharing personal stories
- through interactions with rich text

then children can access these for themselves by reading increasingly complex texts

it exposes children to:
- new ideas
- new vocabulary
- new concepts

Treat oral language development as an essential ingredient for comprehension.

Strategy: Interactive Read-alouds

Interactive Read–Alouds

- Engage thinking: stopping points to discuss both high–level and low–level questions
- *Focus more on high–level to encourage development of big ideas*

Think left and think right and think low and think high. Oh, the thinks you can think up if only you try!

Dr. Seuss

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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.
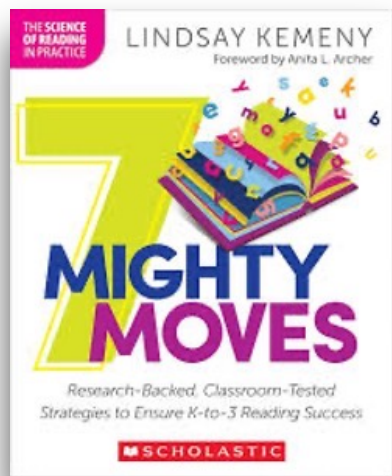
"There is no comprehension strategy powerful enough to compensate for the fact that you can't read the words."
–Archer, 2001

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
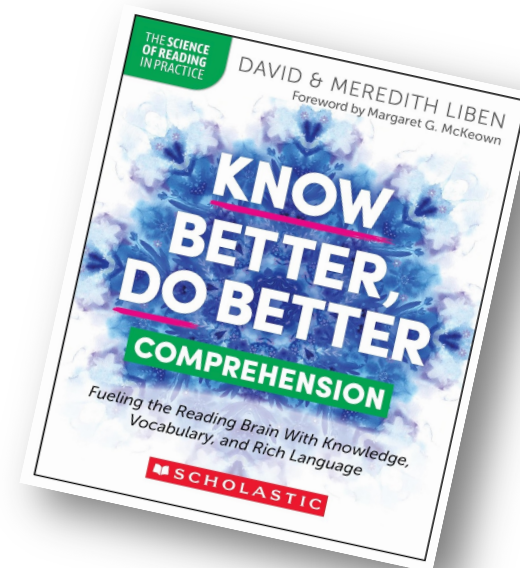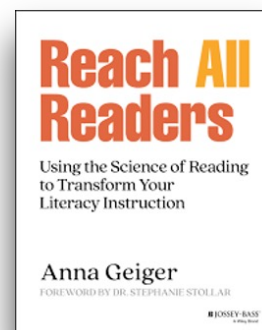
The Surface Level of Comprehension

Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths ougrabe.
      "Jabberwocky",
      Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll

Fluency can only take you so far!

Excerpt from Stephen Hawking's obituary in The Guardian:

Hawking established a number of important results about black holes, such as an argument for its event horizon (its bounding surface) having to have the topology of a sphere. In collaboration with Carter and James Bardeen, in work published in 1973, he established some remarkable analogies between the behaviour of black holes and the basic laws of thermodynamics, where the horizon's surface area and its surface gravity were shown to be analogous, respectively, to the thermodynamic quantities of entropy and temperature. It would be fair to say that in his highly active period leading up to this work, Hawking's research in classical general relativity was the best anywhere in the world at that time.

Vocabulary knowledge is strongly 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?

"The goal of vocabulary instruction is not to learn words for their own sake. The goals 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."
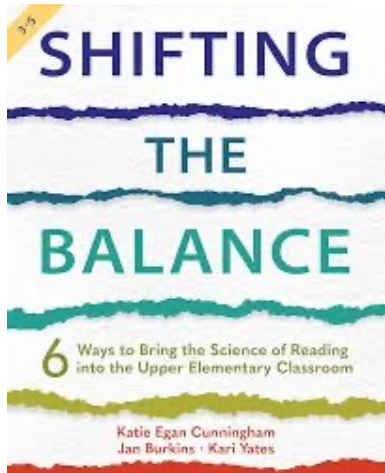
...when we are engaged in conversation

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.

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

Dialogic Conversation to Build Oral Lanugage

ENGAGE
EXPAND
REPEAT
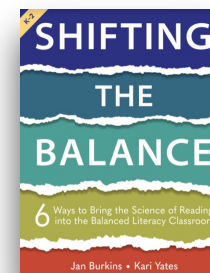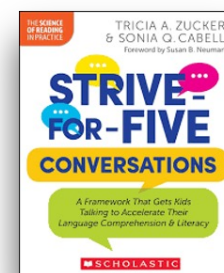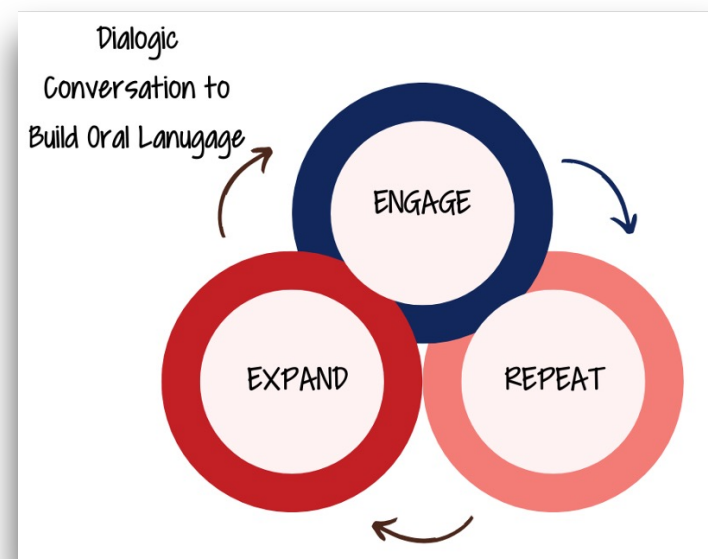
Your turn: Dialogic Conversation

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?

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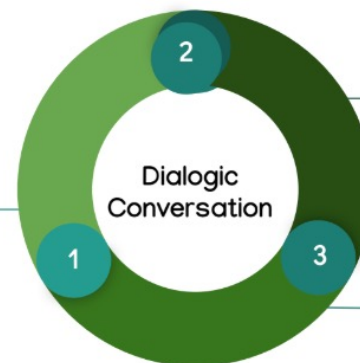
2. Repeat
Repeat what children say, embedding this in your response in a natural way. If the student's response includes a mistake, only repeat the correct part or integrate a correction into this step.

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

1 Engage — What was your favorite part of the book?
When the mouse saved the lion.

2 Repeat & 3 Expand — Oh, when the mouse saved the lion! That was so surprising!

1 Engage — How do you think the mouse felt?
Happy!

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.

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

Tiered Vocabulary

- **Tier 1 words:**

everyday speech, familiar to most students

- **Tier 2 words:**

robust high-utility words used in multiple contexts

- **Tier 3 words:**

low frequency words, subject specific

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
- 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
- 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.

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

…when we learn new things!

What can this look like in the classroom?

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

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

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.

Books that **teach** the life cycle of
BUTTERFLIES
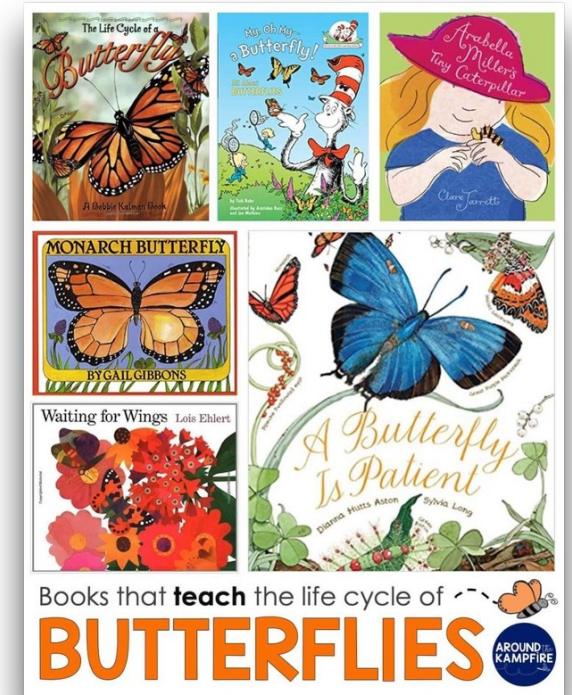
Vocabulary and Knowledge

"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
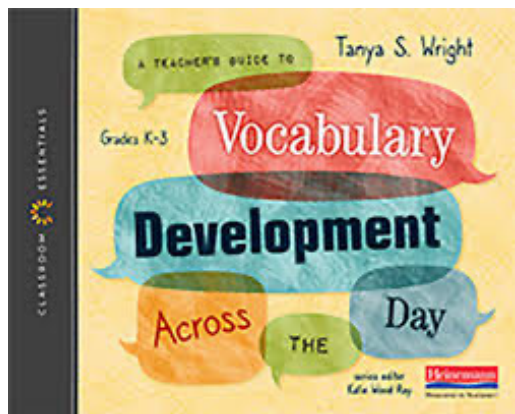
What can this look like in the classroom?

Identify the words to teach from your stories in advance

Strategy: Engage with the Page Type Activities

To inspire WORD STUDY
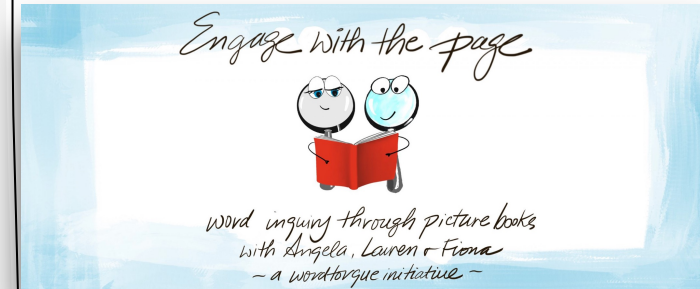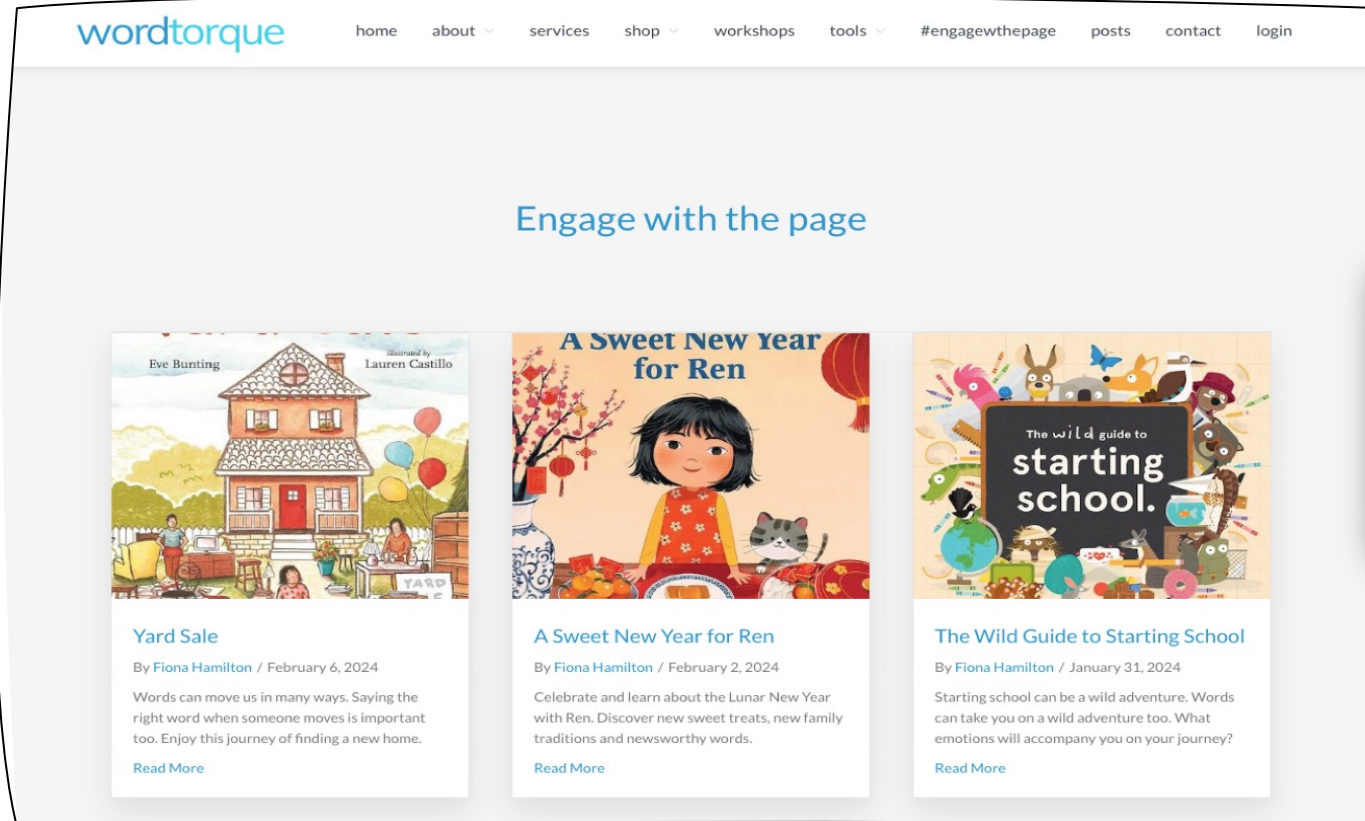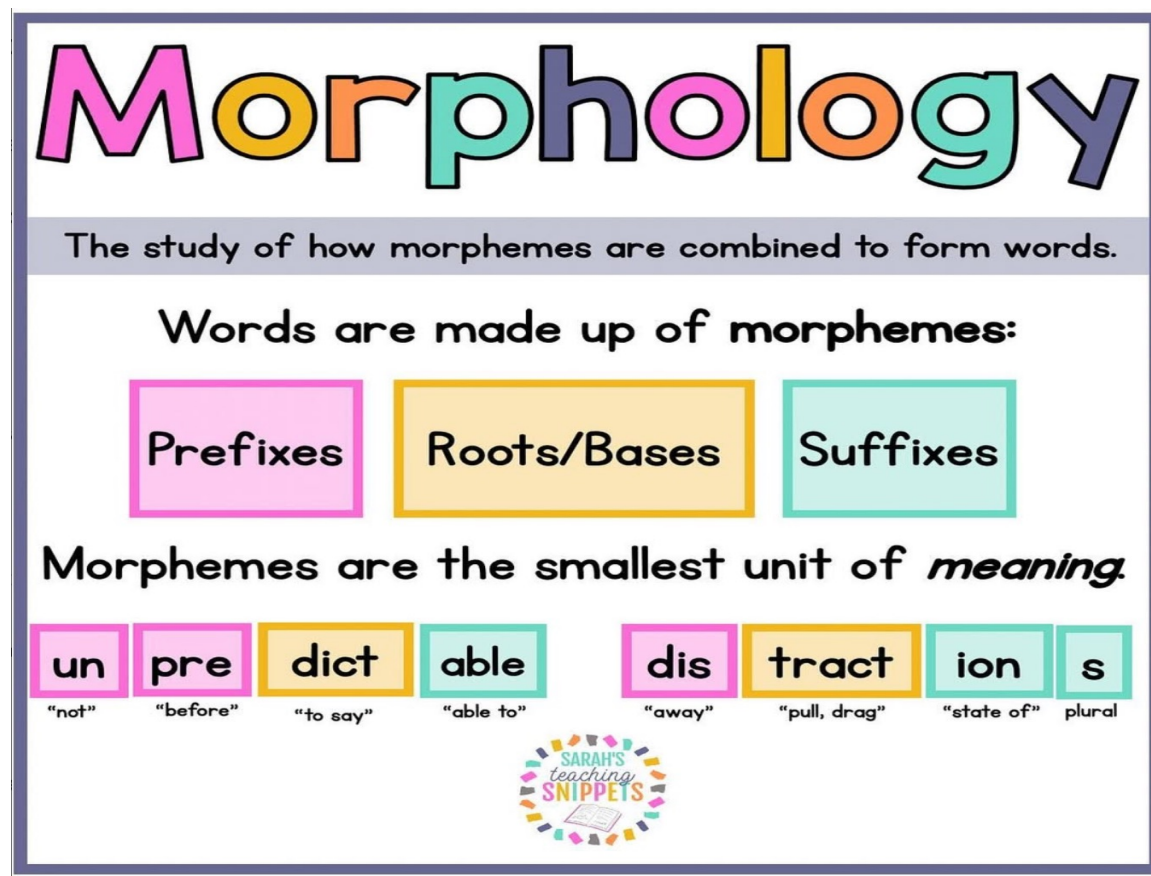
Explicit Morphology Instruction
- Teaching one new affix or root per week adds to their word solving toolkit

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

Explicit Morphology Instruction

One of the easiest ways to do this is through a read aloud.
Choose words from the book to demonstrate the concept of "base".
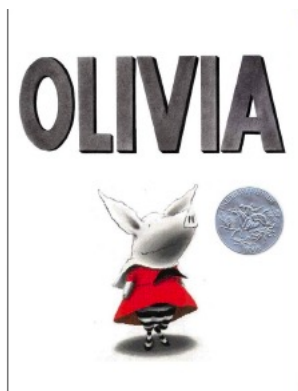
OLIVIA

As you read the book, choose words to demonstrate the concept of base. Use a fist to represent the base, and have your students do the same.

•Olivia
•good
•skip
•brother
•painting

Introducing bases:

Make the learning concrete

Morphology Big Ideas--Affixes

Affixes are morphemes that are attached before or after a base. As morphemes, they carry meaning.

- Prefix: attached before a base
    - re-, un-, in-
- Suffix: attached after a base.
    - -ed, -s, -ful
- There can be more than one of each in a word!

- It helps to spell the affixes as we don't know how the affix will be pronounced until it is in a word.
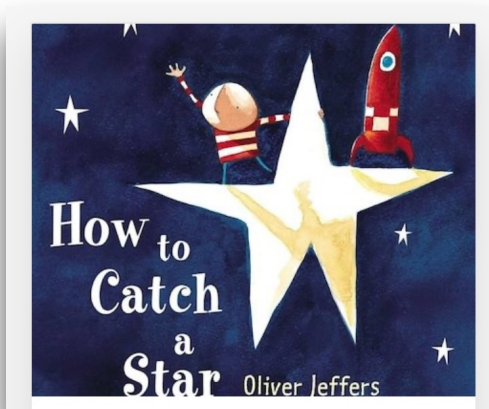
Word Inquiry can support students as they study the structure of words.

Just as it is beneficial to segment and blend phonemes orally (phonemic awareness) to support reading and spelling, it is beneficial to orally work with morphemes before children are able to read them. If children have a deep understanding of morphemes as a construct, when they come across them in written form, they will have an easier time reading and spelling them.
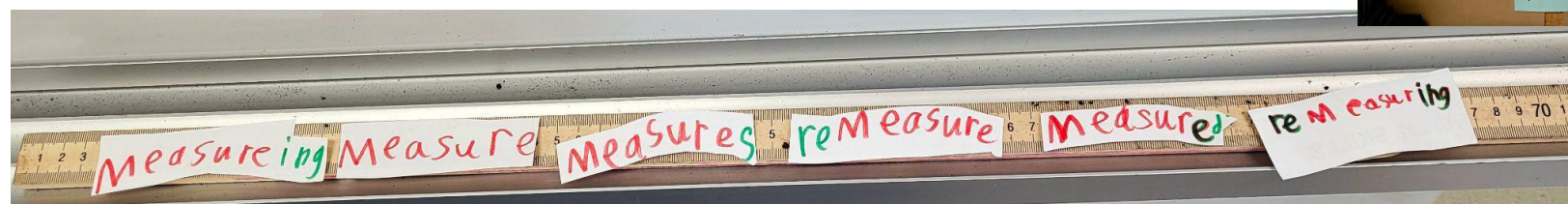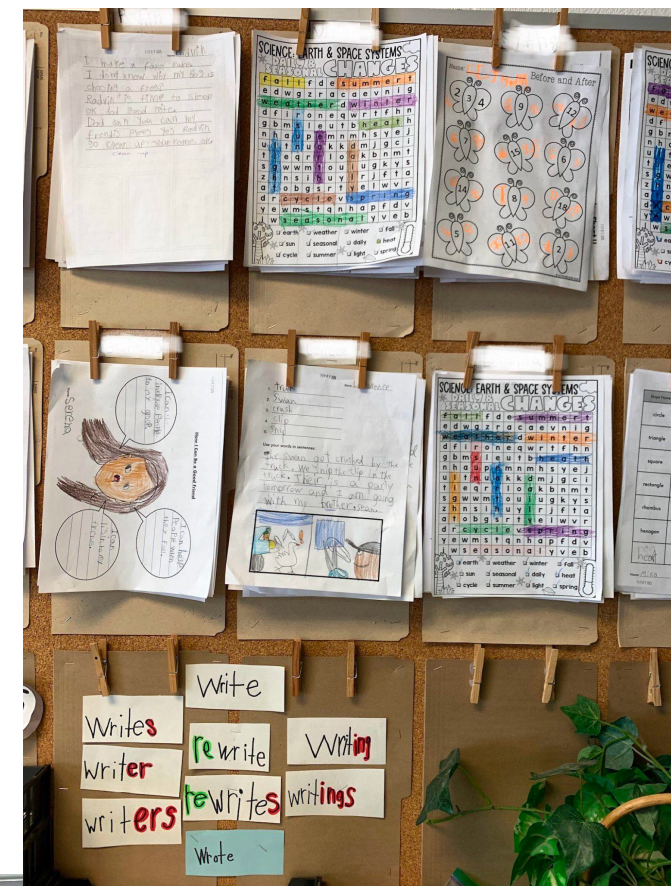
Memory game:
word families
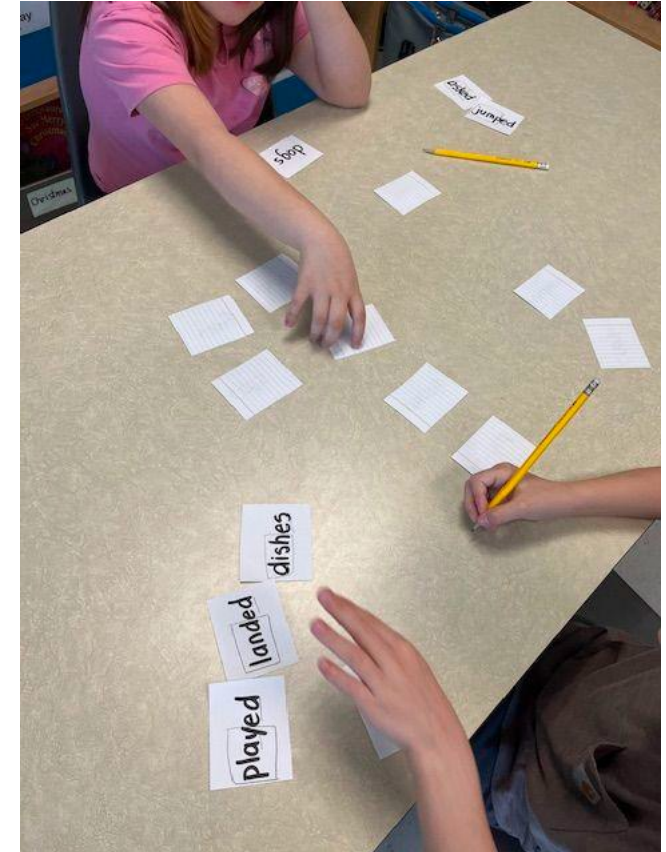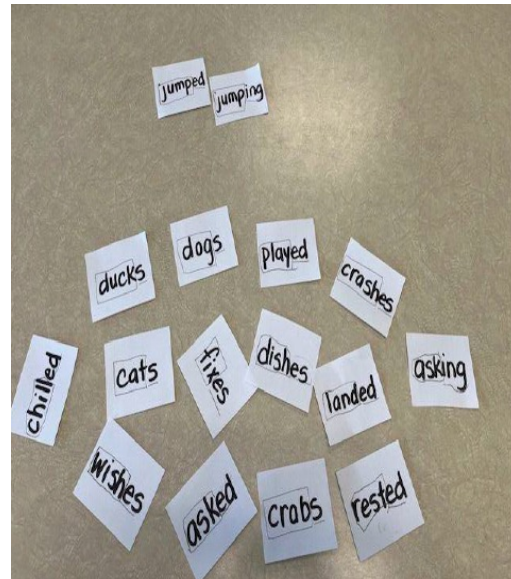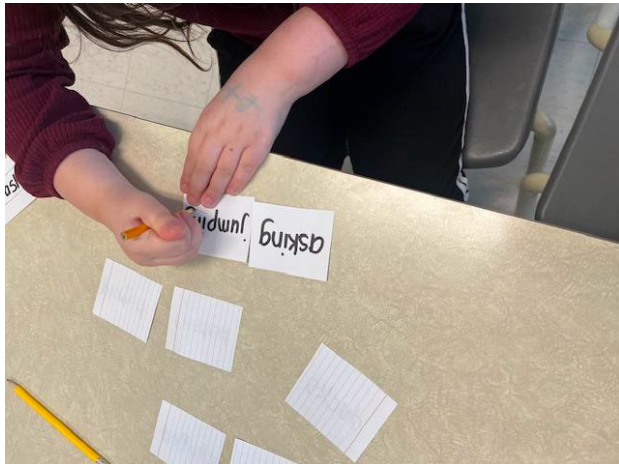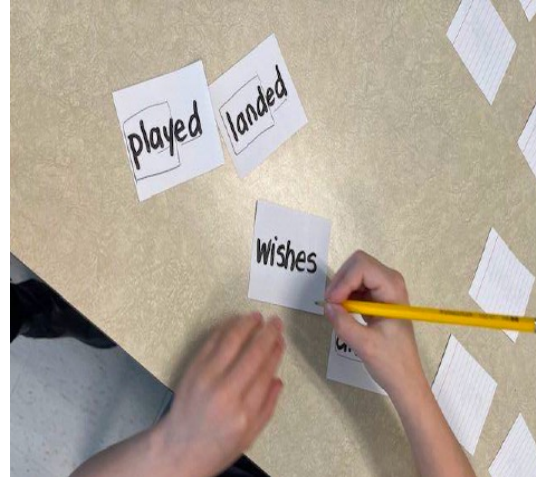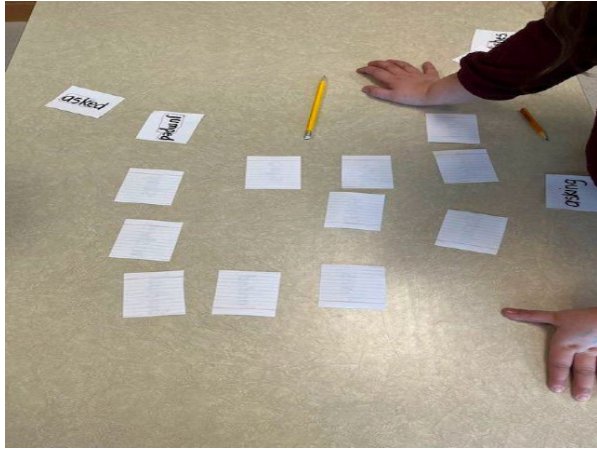
A daily morning message can be a very powerful way to scaffold literacy and integrate understanding across concepts. Our focus today is on morphology, but as you are watching, notice how many other literacy concepts are modelled.
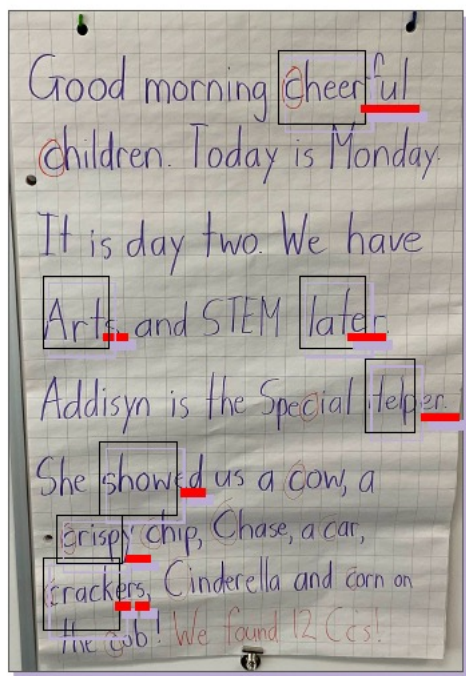
Further learning:

Our special helper's job is to circle the featured grapheme during free choice time.
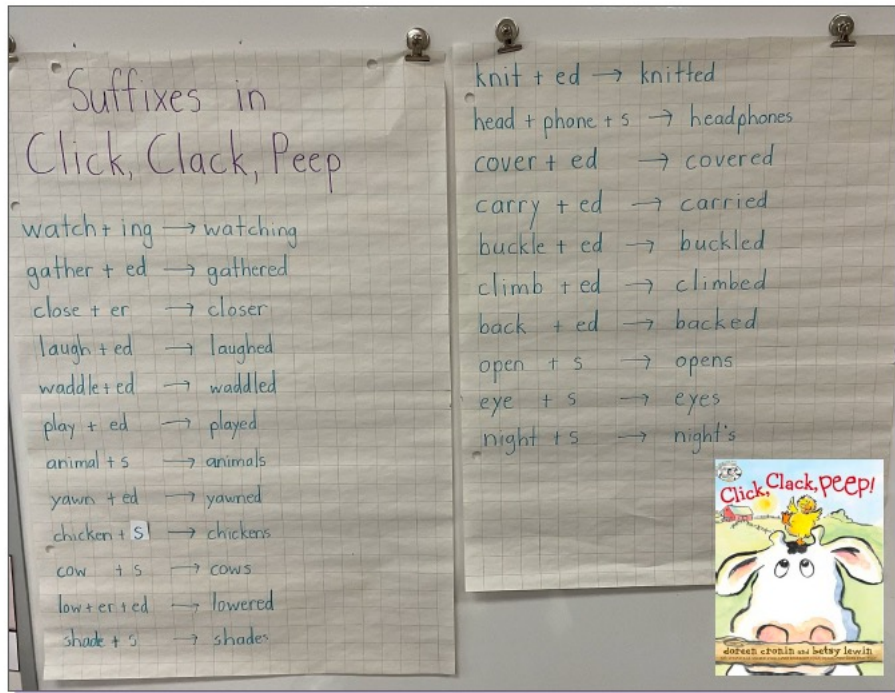As a group, you can box the bases and underline the affixes at the end of the lesson or revisit it at another time.
We then count the letters circled or the affixes and use the numbers in our daily math work.

Ground morphology in stories you read…

Identifying affixes:

✓ Read the story without interruption for pleasure and comprehension

✓ Reread, asking students to put the thumb up when they hear a word with an affix

✓ Record the sums of words

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 nice

synonyms for wild

fierce
untamed
ferocious
rough
rugged

pleasant
fine
neat
enjoyable
lovely
delightful
acceptable
satisfying

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 <u>background knowledge</u> of the learner

Extraneous Cognitive Load

★ anything that makes it harder for a student to learn

Cognitive Load Theory

"the amount of information the working memory can hold"

—Sweller, 1988

When **INTRINSIC & EXTRANEOUS** factors

>

working memory capacity = **LEARNING ISSUES**

By using explicit instruction methods, we can decrease students' extraneous cognitive load. This isn't just a strategy, but a necessary approach.
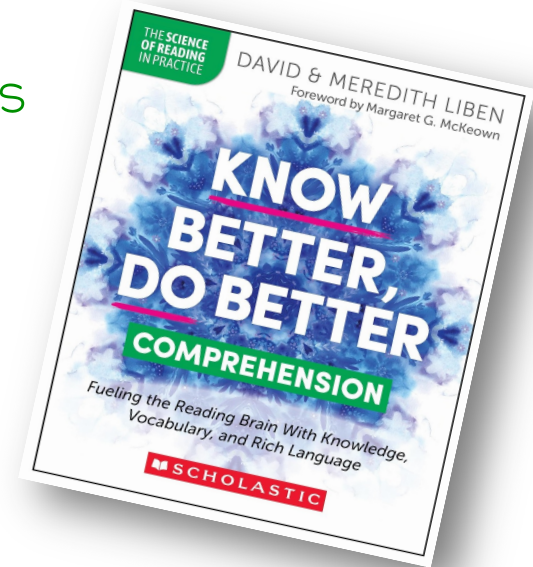
Textbase understanding:
"macrostructure and microstructure"

Macrostructure: important ideas and author's purpose
Text features; genre; story elements

Microstructure: propositions and connectives

How children are able to make connections between ideas within the same sentence. Often there are nuanced aphorisms or culturally specific ideas

What Good Readers Do- Nell Duke

@POPEYBC

POPEY

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.

Strategy: *Pause, Look, Think*

For building stamina, engagement and self-regulation (AVR)

Research Link

A series of studies revealed that when an adult uses thoughtful verbal and gestural supports to help young children maintain their attention as they share and talk about books, children comprehend better and acquire more language (Landry & Smith, 2006).

Pause

Look

Think

I see...
I wonder...
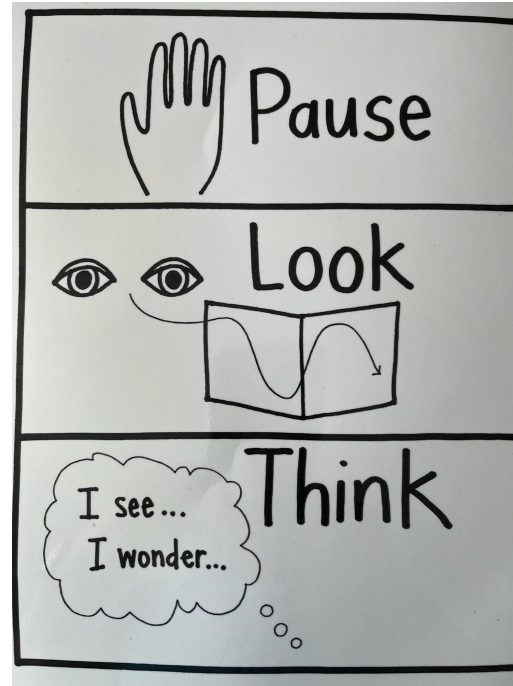
As you look at the book with the child, model these skills:
- Move your finger around the page: "what do you see?"
- Say, "not so fast! Stay on the page and look around."
- What can you say about it?

Tip: start by modeling this with the whole class during booktime or a read-aloud

Situation (Mental) Model =

a literal representation of text + background knowledge
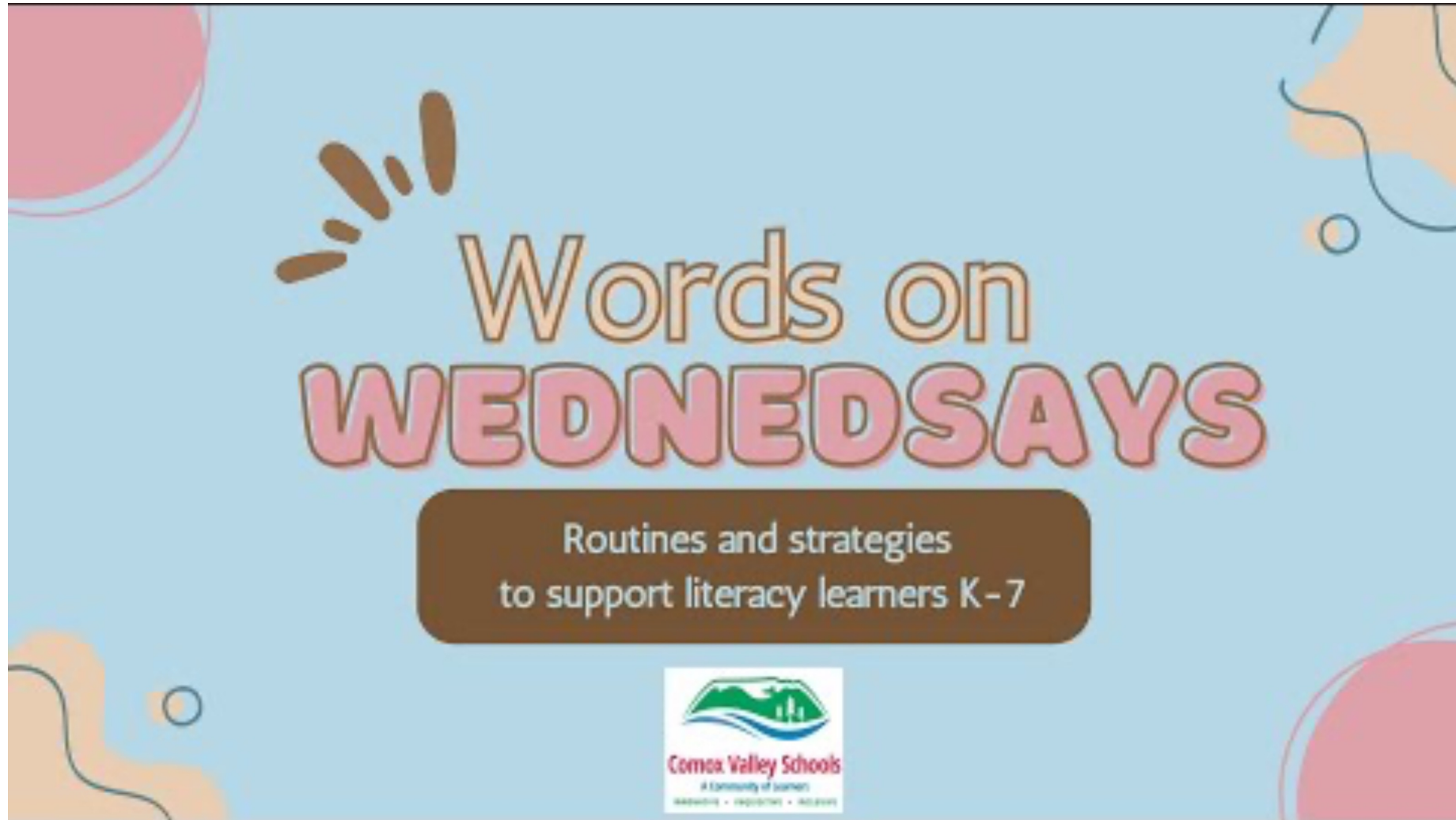

As a good reader, you are constantly creating a mental model while you are reading.

Strategy: Close Reading

Multiple readings of the same text:

1. **Prepare** ahead of time: what will this text require students to know ahead of time?

2. **First read**: What was the gist of this story? Any connections? Questions?

3. **Second read:** Pose mighty questions. Have children explain their thinking. Stay in the text and build common understanding.

4. **Third read:** Select a meaty part to focus on (vocabulary; characters; authors purpose, etc.)
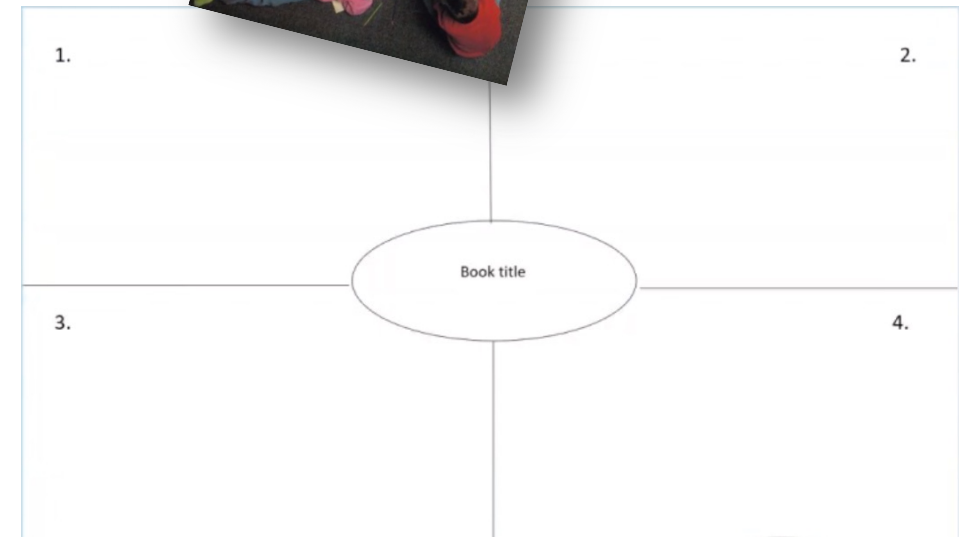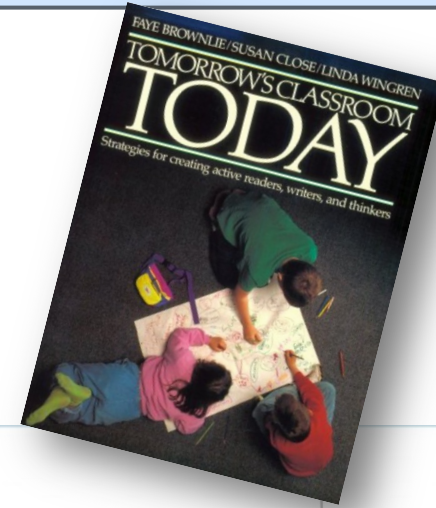
Strategy: Read, Think, Write

AKA "four squares":

1. **Prepare** ahead of time the places you want to stop in the book

2. **Discuss**: what did we learn in this part? What was interesting to you? What was the main idea? Turn and Talk

3. **Quick draw/write**: *No colouring—not a best drawing! 4 mins max.*

4. Return to the carpet for more reading. **Repeat.**

5. At the end, **share** their papers with a neighbour.

Comprehension is fostered through

teacher modelling of purposeful strategies.

★ 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

The More You Read, The More You Know: Best Practices for Comprehension Instruction
Dr. Molly Ness; Presentation at the 2024 Reading League Conference in Charlotte, NC

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Books

Bringing Words to Life: Beck, McKeown, & Kucan

Differentiating Phonics Instruction for Maximum Impact: Blevins

Tomorrow's Classrooms Today—Faye Brownlie, Susan Close

Shifting the Balance K–2: Burkins & Yates

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

Reach All Readers: Geiger

7 Mighty Moves: Kemeny

Know Better, Do Better: Comprehension—Liben and Liben

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

The Reading Strategies Book 2.0—Jennifer Serravallo

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

Strive for Five Conversations: Zucker & Bell

Unless otherwise stated, all pictures sourced from Pixabay.com

Online Resources

Reading Science Academy

Reading Rockets

Keys to Literacy – Effective Vocabulary Instruction
TheSixShifts.com

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