



Session 5:
Reading Comprehension
*MS/HS Literacy Teacher Professional
Development Series*

Recap

In our last session, we spent time...

- examining what makes a student a fluent reader.
- discussing how to improve fluency in the MS/HS classroom.

Today's Objective

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- define reading comprehension and why it is a complex process.
- describe the skills that make up reading comprehension and what is required to be an effective comprehender of text.

Reading Comprehension

- Text comprehension is a dynamic and interactive process involving several sources of information and knowledge.
- “Successful comprehension of written text enables the reader to acquire and apply new knowledge, to experience other (fictional) worlds, to communicate successfully, and to attain academic success.”

Source: Cain, 2007



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.)

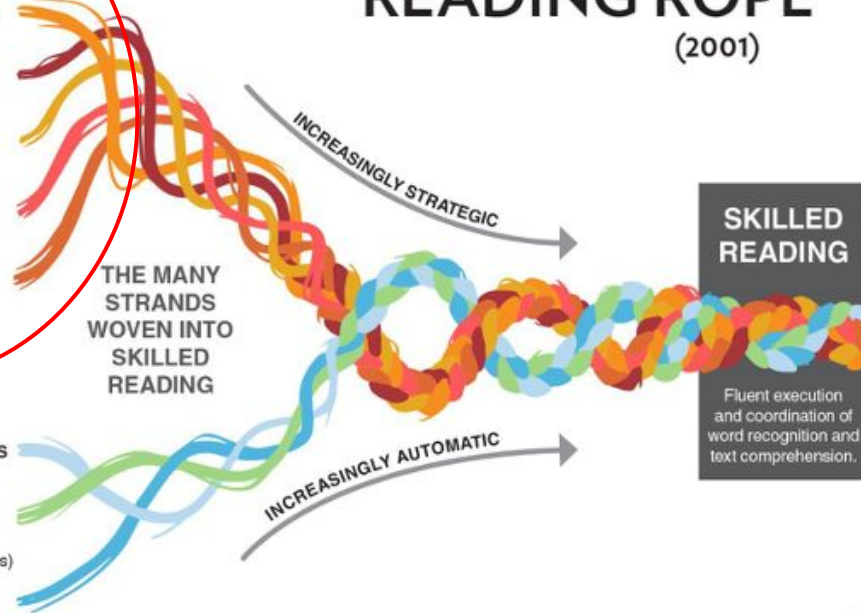
LITERACY KNOWLEDGE
(print concepts, genres, etc.)

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.



Background Knowledge

- Studies have consistently shown that students with a greater amount of background knowledge tend to be stronger at reading comprehension than those with more limited background knowledge.
- Building a broad base of knowledge with your students is a crucial component of good reading instruction.
- As you build their knowledge base, they are able to think, speak about, and write about many different topics.
- Many of our widely used curricula have a focus on building a wide knowledge base among students.
- SOURCE: [Snow, Serry, and Hammond, 2021](#)

Vocabulary

- Vocabulary is essential to reading and comprehending.
- The average student learns 3,000-4,000 new words a year and the majority of that is learned indirectly. Some vocabulary needs to be explicitly taught, however.
- Vocabulary is also acquired through conversations, read-alouds, and independent reading.
- There are multiple opportunities to build Tier 2 vocabulary for students to interact on a deeper level within the secondary grades.

Language Structure

- Good language comprehension also requires an awareness of and skill with syntax - the rules that determine how sentences are structured.
- *Syntactic awareness* refers to the ability to monitor the relationships among the words in a sentence in order to understand while reading or composing orally or in writing.
- Poor syntactic awareness will also negatively impact reading comprehension - this is often a particularly challenging area for English language learners whose home language may have different syntactic patterns.

Source: Joan Sedita - Keys to Literacy

Verbal Reasoning

- *Verbal reasoning* refers to understanding what you read by
 - making connections to what you already know
 - inferencing
 - understanding metaphors
 - being able to draw conclusions from text.
- Verbal reasoning is a dominant component in secondary text and curriculum.
- Verbal reasoning tests are often part of applying for a job and entrance exams to get into colleges.

Literacy Knowledge

- Literacy knowledge consists of
 - print concepts such as the message being delivered in the text (menu vs. book)
 - directionality of print
 - distinction between words, phrases, and sentences.
- Literacy knowledge also consists of different genres of writing and the author's purpose.

Characteristics of Strong Reading Comprehenders



- Good comprehenders are able to perform
 - integration and inference.
 - comprehension monitoring.
 - knowledge and use of text structure.
 - memory.

SOURCE: Cain, 2007

Consequences of Weak Comprehension

- lifelong difficulties with reading
- lack of motivation for leisurely reading
- less practice in word reading and comprehension, fewer opportunities to acquire new vocabulary and knowledge
- may impair the ability to learn more generally
- generally lower scores

SOURCE: Cain, 2009



Spotting a Weak Comprehender

- students may read fluently and accurately
- struggle to answer questions based on the text, especially questions that are beyond basic recall
- produce poorly structured written and oral narratives



SOURCE: Cain, 2009

Building Strong Comprehenders

- There is no one “magical” strategy, but there are ways to help build comprehension skills in students.
- Summarizing what has been read.
- Generating questions to monitor comprehension (done by students).
- Using context clues to make inferences.
- Combining lexical inference and question generation.
- Offering several opportunities to communicate to build background knowledge or oral comprehension.



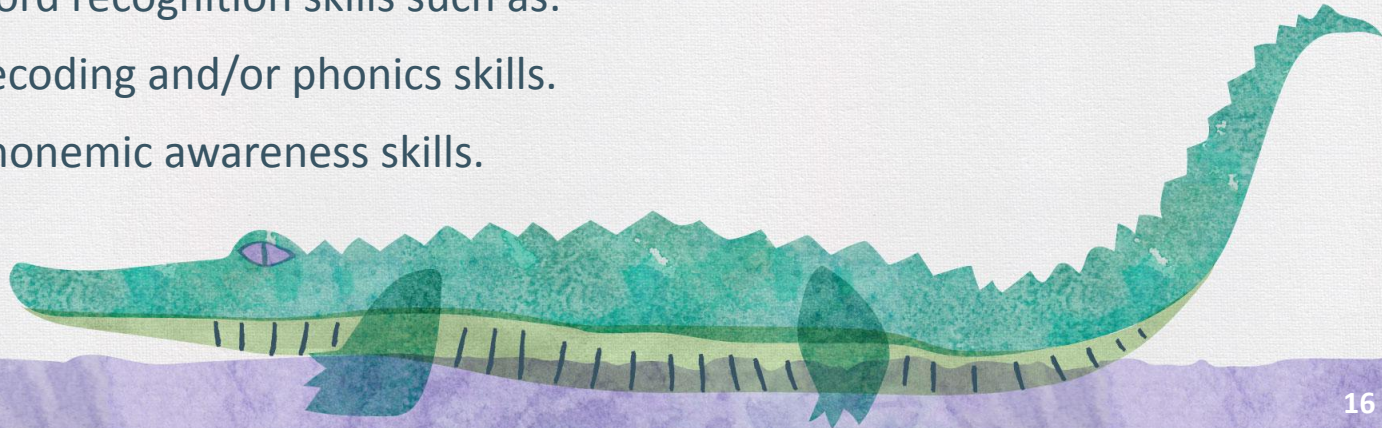
SOURCE: Cain, 2009

Reading Comprehension Instruction

- There are several things that can be done as a whole class through the curriculum.
 - summarizing
 - close read strategy (build questions in the margins to guide)
 - building knowledge of context clues
 - discussion techniques
- Students who need additional support may need small group instruction on these strategies. Instruction should be
 - direct.
 - explicit.

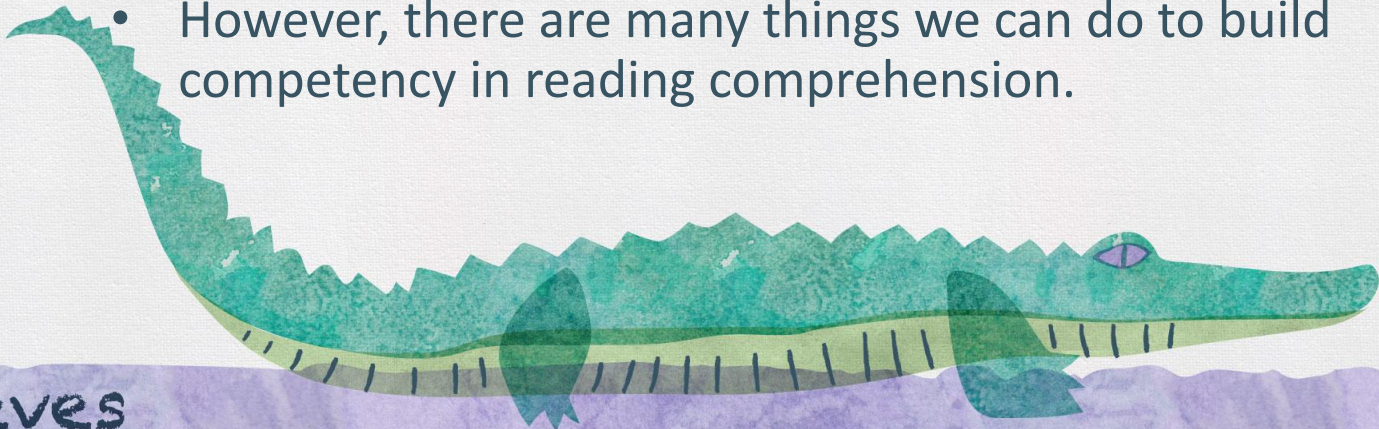
Next Steps if Not Progressing

- If students are still not progressing with the small group instruction for reading comprehension, then they may need to be referred to the school's administration or SBLC team for next steps.
- Very little or no progress could indicate that student needs help with word recognition skills such as:
 - decoding and/or phonics skills.
 - phonemic awareness skills.



Final Thoughts

- Reading comprehension is a very complex process that requires a lot from our cognitive load.
- There is no “one size fits all” approach that will build reading comprehension in all students.
- However, there are many things we can do to build competency in reading comprehension.



Engage



- Think about an upcoming lesson. What can you do whole-class through the curriculum that will enhance students' reading comprehension?
- Now consider any time you may have for small groups. What skill do you want to focus on to build reading comprehension for those that need additional support? What materials might you still need?

Question or Suggestions?

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