

TPRI

# newsletter

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## A Focus on Comprehension

The TPRI assesses comprehension through story reading at each grade level. After reading or listening to a story, students answer a series of questions to demonstrate understanding. TPRI comprehension questions are divided into four types — Recalling Details, Linking Details, Inferring Meaning and Inferring Word Meaning. In this newsletter, Dr. Solari highlights important skills and instructional practices that support good comprehension.

Comprehension, one of the five key components of early reading instruction is a cognitive process in which meaning is constructed through interactions between the text and the reader (Durkin, 1978). By definition, comprehension is an active process. The reader must engage with text in order to understand the message the author is trying to convey. Comprehension is often seen as the end product of reading. To be able to instruct comprehension effectively, it is important to understand the underlying skills necessary for successful comprehension development. To help guide instruction, teachers may use the data gathered from administering the TPRI.



In this final newsletter of the 2012-2013 school year, TPRI spotlights **comprehension** as the last of the five key components of early

reading instruction. This month's guest author, **Emily Solari, Ph.D.**, is widely recognized for her work in comprehension instruction. Dr. Solari is an assistant professor of education at the University of California, Davis. Her research focuses on language and literacy development in students considered at-risk for reading failure and Spanish-speaking English learners.



## Comprehension in the Early Grades

When we talk about reading development, we often refer to word level and text level skills (these are sometimes referred to as code-related skills and meaning related skills). Word level skills are necessary to fluently read words. These skills include phonemic awareness, phonics, alphabet knowledge and decoding. Text level or meaning related skills, are the more complex skills necessary for comprehension of text such as vocabulary, oral language and listening comprehension.

While a lot of instructional time in the early grades is spent on word level skills so that students read fluently, it is important to remember that instruction on text level skills is essential for reading comprehension. Often, teachers are concerned about the best way to teach comprehension related skills to children who are not yet reading, or are reading very simple sentences that may not provide enough substance for comprehension instruction. There are several ways to teach these skills orally, and when the time is right, students can apply the skills to written text for successful reading comprehension. One obvious place to teach text level skills to young students is to embed the teaching of comprehension into meaningful read-alouds with children's literature. We will discuss three important early comprehension skills that can be modeled and practiced during read-alouds in the sections that follow. It is important to remember that these skills must be directly taught to students. This is done through teacher modeling and by providing students opportunities to practice the skills on their own, with corrective feedback from the teacher.



## Experts Say ...

*"...good comprehension instruction includes both explicit instruction in specific comprehension strategies and a great deal of time and opportunity for actual reading, writing, and discussion of text."*

Duke & Pearson, 2002, p. 207

*"...the comprehension strategies used by good comprehenders can be taught, beginning with teacher explanations and modeling of the strategies followed by scaffolded student practice of comprehension strategies during reading."*

Pressley, 2002, p. 306





## Direct Recall

Direct recall of facts from text is the basis for all comprehension. Direct recall is when a reader is able to recall facts that are directly stated in the text, often in response to literal questions. This skill must be developed before students are able to determine main idea of text, summarize, draw conclusion and make inferences. While direct recall may be an easy task, some students need to be directly taught how to identify the important details from a story or passage. As we have all experienced, some students have difficulty discriminating between important and unimportant details presented in a story which can interfere with overall comprehension of a text. Asking students direct recall or literal questions is an important step in developing this skill, however, it is only one part of direct recall. Students must also learn to determine the important facts in the text, or those that aid in the comprehension of the text. Setting a thoughtful guiding question prior to reading can help students pay attention to details which are most important.



## Main Idea

Determining the main idea of a text is often a difficult task for young students. To be able to find the main idea, students must be able to pick out the most relevant facts from a story and ignore the details that aren't as important. One can see how this links back to developing direct recall skills in young students. One simple way to start main idea instruction is to ask students to provide the main idea for just one paragraph or one page of a read-aloud book. Often, determining the main idea from the entire text is overwhelming for beginning readers. Allowing students to engage in smaller increments of text in the beginning allows for productive practice and mastery of skills at a smaller scale.



## Making Inferences

Making inferences is a more complex comprehension skill that requires students to draw conclusions about text by “reading between the lines” or inferring meaning from something that is not directly stated in the text. When we make inferences, we combine our background knowledge with clues from the text to fill in information the author is not directly telling us.

Inferential questioning should begin in the early grades so that young students have time to practice the skill before they are required to do it on their own with written text. Teachers can model making inferences by thinking aloud answers to inferential questions during read-alouds.

As an instructional practice, TPRI suggests explicit instruction on the difference between information that is inferred from the text and information the author states directly. [Click here](#) for a sample activity.



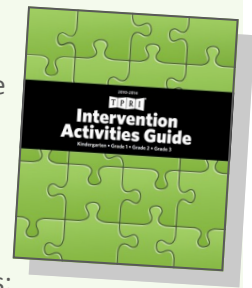
## A Final Word

It is important to engage in comprehension activities in the early elementary years. Often, we assume that once students know how to fluently read text, they will automatically be able to comprehend what they are reading. The leap between fluent reading and comprehension of text is large. Comprehension is a complex cognitive process that intertwines fluent reading, language skills, and comprehension skills, and requires students to be actively engaged in text. Comprehension specific skills development must be instructed from an early age to bridge the gap between fluency and reading comprehension.



## Check it Out!

The TPRI Intervention Activities Guide (IAG) has a collection of more than thirty comprehension activities to support classroom instruction. The IAG activities are divided into three areas: Read-Alouds, Reading Comprehension Strategies, and Story Elements.



Many activities have Blackline Masters available for download.

Click [here](#) to access these resources.

### References

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