



When Kids Don't Understand What They Read

What is comprehension?

(Adapted from <http://www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/comprehension>)

Comprehension is the understanding and interpretation of what is read. Accurately understanding a text involves being able to decode the written, think deeply about what has been read, and create a deeper meaning from the text. Vocabulary knowledge affects comprehension. Strong independent readers and comprehenders are able to draw conclusions about what they read, to adapt their thinking about text, and to know when and why a text might be difficult. Strong independent readers are able to use strategies to help them understand a text. Comprehension combines reading with thinking and reasoning.

Why do young adolescents struggle with comprehension?

- The text is too difficult, but the reader does not know it is too difficult or how to make the text easier to understand.
- Readers do not know how to use strategies to help them understand what they are reading—questioning, predicting, summarizing, visualizing, etc.
- Young adolescents don't have enough practice at reading text they enjoy and that are about their interests.

How do I help at home?

- Engaging your child with the text and providing time to read, think, respond, and talk.
- Providing guidance with the thinkmarks attached. These thinkmarks will help your child focus on what he or she is thinking while reading a text and how to keep track of his or her understanding of the text.
- Engaging your child in setting purposes for reading and in thinking about text to be read before, during, and after reading.
- Engaging your child in reading about their interests and discussing new knowledge your child has gained about these topics.
- Promoting a retelling of the important details and events from the text.
- Promoting discussion between your child and yourself about all of the things you are reading on a daily basis (including newspapers, magazines, email, menus, etc.).

Questions that encourage personal response to text

(Adapted from Kylee Beers' *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*)

1. What are your first thoughts about this text? What in the text caused you to think this way?
2. What emotions or feelings did you have while reading the text? What parts of the text caused you to feel this way?
3. What parts of the text remind you of anything in your own life?
4. What confused you or surprised you in this text?
5. Did this remind you of any other texts? Movies? Plays?
6. How do you feel about this text as you read?

Questions that encourage reflection about the plot, character, setting, theme, author's purpose, point of view and style

(Adapted from Kylee Beers' *When Kids Can't Read: What Teachers Can Do*)

1. What parts of the plot did you find most significant?
2. What was the most important word in this text? Why?
3. What idea or situation meant the most to you as you read this text? Why?
4. How would you change the ending if you could?
5. If the story would continue, what do you think would happen next?
6. Which character or characters did you think learned the hardest or most important lessons in this text?
7. If you could take on the qualities of any of the characters in this text, what qualities would those be?
8. Was the setting important to the text? Why or why not?
9. How did the author let you know what the setting was?

Please see the attached thinkmarks for use with your child.

References:

Beers, K. (2003). *When kids can't read: What teachers can do*. Portsmouth, NH:

Heinemann.

Target the problem: Comprehension. Retrieved January 2, 2008 from

<http://www.readingrockets.org/helping/target/comprehension>.