Reading Comprehension in the Content Areas

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Engaging with the Text

According to the 2015 Annual Reading Report of the Condition of College and Career Readiness, only 42% of those who took the ACT in Florida met the state’s Reading Benchmarks.

What is reading comprehension?

The RAND Reading Research Group (2002) stated that reading comprehension was the “process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (p. 11).

The NRP (2000) stated that reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that engages students through their interaction with a text.

Pardo (2004) included prior knowledge, previous experience, and the stance of the reader in her definition.

In other words, comprehension is the process in which readers must think, relate, apply, and connect to the text they are reading.

What are the skills that a student needs in order to be successful in literacy?

Research demonstrates that the following are key elements to teaching literacy. (This list is not all inclusive, but it is a representation of the most common elements among the literacy experts.)

- Cite textual evidence.
- Identify text structure.
- Summarize and synthesize.
- Engage in vocabulary.
- Analyze primary and secondary sources.
- Identify and analyze point of view/bias.
- Distinguish among fact, opinion, and judgment.

Spiritual Application?

Students today have memorized scripture and answered questions on a test, but their ability to reason and research biblical truths is sometimes lacking. Their comprehension skills are weak because they hear the Word, but they don’t read it. Also, they lack discernment and are easily influenced by reading and studying material that may not align with Scripture. 1 Peter 3:15 states that we should always be ready to offer a defense for our faith. When faced with opposition, students need to have the tools needed to offer that defense. Interacting with texts by analyzing, critiquing, justifying, finding text evidence, providing support for arguments, refuting positions with researched evidence, and having the ability to present one’s findings is critical, both in the classroom setting and the spiritual setting. Our goal should be to teach our students to comprehend their reading of the Bible and to think so they can defend their faith and give an answer to those whose beliefs do not align with Scripture. The key to strengthening one’s apologetics is to transfer these literacy skills to reading and studying the Bible (II Timothy 2:15).
How do we teach these skills that are needed?

Get In and Out of Your Textbook

- Have your students read their books.
- Use related articles to enhance and deepen learning.
- Apply skills in both readings.

Close Reading

“Close analytic reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining meaning thoroughly and methodically” (PARCC, 2011). This includes rereading, understanding central ideas and identifying supporting details, reflecting on word meaning, seeing sentence structure, etc.

“A significant body of research links the close reading of complex text…to significant gains in reading proficiency…key component of college and career readiness.” (PARCC, 2011)

The following are examples of activities that can be used in close reading of a text.

- Anticipation Guide or Prediction Guide
- Text Annotation
- Text Structures
- Graphic Organizers
  - Compare and Contrast Guide*
  - T-Chart*
  - Guiding Questions w/argument and supporting text evidence
  - Note-Taking Guide for vocabulary, text evidence, example, or non-example. Consider using the words they circled in their annotations as your vocabulary words. Have the student categorize the words, if applicable.

*Be sure to ask a follow up question or series of questions that require the students to apply, synthesize, or analyze what their graphic organizer reveals. For example: If you compare/contrast two countries, ask the students which country would be better to live in if you had asthma. Then, they must defend their position.

GIST

Use the GIST Template. The “Where” could also be from what perspective the author was writing. Is there bias? (Generating Interactions between Schemata and Texts) [Cunningham, 1982]

Text-Dependent Questions


- Gain a general understanding of the whole text. Identify the key understandings and insights you want students to learn from the text. Example question: What is the point
or claim the author is trying to make? What evidence does the author use to support his/her claim?

- **Build understanding of the meaning.** Use the what, where, why, and how to help build understanding of the meaning of the passage. Focus on the important details. What are the problems associated with using spider venom as a pesticide? What are the potential benefits of using spider venom as a pesticide?

- **Target vocabulary and text structure.** Identify the powerful and unique vocabulary words. Determine the text structure (cause/effect, compare/contrast, etc.). How does this vocabulary strengthen the author's position? Why did the author use such harsh words in this sentence?

- **Identify the author’s purpose and point of view.** Look for multiple perspectives. Who is the author’s targeted audience? The author is presenting two sides to the issue. Which side do you think the author supports? Use text evidence to support your stance.

- **Tackle Tough Sections Head-on.** Find the sections of the text that will present the greatest difficulty and craft questions that support students in mastering these sections (these could be sections with difficult syntax, particularly dense information, and tricky transitions or places that offer a variety of possible inferences). Could people on Earth live if there were no sun? Why or why not? Use evidence from the text to support your answer. How would the article be different if the author had not been aware of the latest technology available?

- **Note and assess patterns of writing and what they achieve.** Why did the author continue to use the same phrase in paragraphs 2, 3, and 5?

- **Consider what the text leaves uncertain or unstated.** What are some questions you still have about this material?

- **Create Coherent Sequences of Text Dependent Questions.** The sequence of questions should not be random but should build toward more coherent understanding and analysis to ensure that students learn to stay focused on the text to bring them to a gradual understanding of its meaning.

**Other Strategies**

**Comparing Documents**—bias/different perspectives/primary and secondary sources

**Using pictures, satire, videos, etc.**
Read a poem from a particular time period. Analyze. (Maybe primary source) Watch a short video. Read the account from the book. Maybe even a scene from the same time period. Which points did each source emphasize? Why? Bias? Simply point of view?

**REAP** (Allen, 2004)
Create a box that is divided into 4 sections. Put one of each of the letters in each box. Students fill in each box using the information below.

**Read.** Note title and author.
**Encode.** Put down the main ideas in your own words.
**Annotate.** Write a statement for important points.
**Ponder.** Why written? What’s the purpose?
**Alphabet books or sheets:** As you teach a unit, the students have to fill in a concept, idea, event, or important fact under each letter of the alphabet. May even draw a picture. Shows prior knowledge and your own bias to a degree.

**Literature circles with content areas**

**FLIP** (Especially for younger students) (Allen, 2008)
- Flip through (science) book.
- Look at text features.
- Information can be hidden. Look at headings, TOC, bold words, etc.
- Predict what you will learn. What challenges?

**Text Features** (Especially for younger students)
To teach text features, have students draw a diagram of a page in their book. Each group could do a different section. Paste where the picture, headings, text, questions, and captions go.

**Reasoning Guide for Fact or Opinion** - Read Article—Provide statements on a chart before students read. Students write whether they think the statement is a fact or an opinion before they read. After they read, they will determine whether they are right or wrong. Then, they will provide text evidence to support their stance.

**Interactive Student Notebook**— [http://everybodyisageniusblog.blogspot.com/p/interactive-notebooks.html](http://everybodyisageniusblog.blogspot.com/p/interactive-notebooks.html) for interactive notebook
The purpose of the Interactive Student Notebook is to enable students to be creative, independent thinkers and writers. These notebooks are used for class notes and activities in which students are asked to display graphically their own ideas and to process the information presented in class.

**Bell Ringers**—Give students a short paragraph. Answer direct questions, and underline the evidence that supports their answers. Gradually use longer passages and more text-dependent questions. Students could read an essay and identify the flaws in logic.

**Exit Slips**—What conclusion from the text was supported or challenged by the lab that we completed?
References


Cunningham, 1982, GIST (Generating interactions between schemata and texts)


Websites

http://everybodyisageniusblog.blogspot.com/p/interactive-notebooks.html for interactive notebook

www.achievethecore.org Resource for meeting Florida standards

www.adlit.org Adolescent Literature. Resource for teachers and parents. Teaching strategies, articles with tips, etc.

www.cpalms.org This website is for the Common Core Standards. With each standard are lesson plans for how to reach that standard. Many also have videos for the students to watch so they can learn a particular concept. (Point of view, author's purpose)

www.dogonews.com This provides current events on grade level K-8, book and movie reviews for kids that are created by kids. With a free account, you can create a Dogo class page.

www.k12reader.com/common-core-standard/ccss/ Worksheets for all subjects

www.newsla.com Leveled articles on science, law, sports, and other topics. (Fee)

www.NOAA.gov National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration provides multiple sites for additional resources; graphs, charts, articles

www.ReadWorks.org This site provides reading passages for all grades, including questions and answers.

www.digitalreadworks.com For use with students. You can assign articles to them. They complete assignments online, and their data is collected for you.

www.readwritethink.org Classroom resources, professional development

www.sheg.stanford.edu/ Stanford History Education Group provides primary and secondary sources of historical events. Guided questions are included. Short assessments are also available.

www.teachthought.com Articles and teaching ideas. Professional Development section.

www.TEDtalks.com Provides presentations on various subjects including political, health, science, and more.

www.worksheeetworks.com Allows you to create all types of worksheets, including graphic organizers.