

Reading Comprehension

Comprehension is the reason for reading. Good readers actively think as they read to build a big picture, mental model of a text — they use their decoding skills, background knowledge, vocabulary, language structure, and reading strategies to build this model and make sense of the text. Comprehension activities provide practice in reading texts for meaning.

Use these activities to reinforce and practice reading comprehension skills with your child.

Title	Suggested Grade(s)	Target Skill(s)	Activity
Show the Cover	K–3	Basic Reading; Inference	Show the cover of the book you are about to read together. Read the title aloud. Have your child say the title. Ask: “What do you think this book is about? Why do you think that?”
You are the Story	K–3	Cognitive Flexibility	After reading a book, ask your child: “Do you wish what happens in the story would happen to you? Why?”
Cover Your Bet	K–3	Inference	Show your child the cover of the book you are about to read together. Help read the title and have your child look at the illustration. Ask: “What do you think this book is about? Why?”
Guess the Picture	K–3	Inference	As you read a book together, after every few pages, stop before you turn the page and ask your child to guess what the new picture might show. After you turn the page and see the picture, discuss the accuracy of and the explanation behind your child’s guess.
What’s Next?	K–3	Inference, Cognitive Flexibility	Before reading a book together, read the title aloud. Then say: “Look at the cover of this book. What do you think it is about?” After reading the book, ask your child: “Were you right? Why or why not?”
Main Idea Man	K–3	Main Idea	After reading a book together, ask your child: “What is the main idea of this story? Point out some details that tell about the main idea.”

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What's It About?	K–3	Main Idea, Retell, and Supporting Details	After reading a book together, ask your child: “What is this story about? Show me some examples that helped you understand the main idea of this book.”
Draw a Scene	K–3	Retell and Sequence	After reading together, choose a favorite scene in the book and have your child draw a picture of it. Talk about why your child chose that scene.
Tell the Story	K–3	Retell and Sequence	After reading a book together, ask your child to retell the story.
What Did You Learn?	K–3	Retell and Sequence	After reading a book together, ask your child: “What is one thing you learned from this book that you didn’t know before reading it?”
What's Your Favorite?	K–3	Retell and Sequence	After reading a book together, ask your child: “What was your favorite part of the story? Tell me why.”
Order the Story	K–3	Retell and Sequence	After reading a book together, give your child three scenes from the book, out of order. Say, “Tell me which came first, second, and last in the story.”
Describe a Picture	K–3	Retell and Sequence, Inference	As you read a book together, have your child look at the illustrations and describe what is happening on each page.
Kid's Picks	K–3	Retell and Supporting Details	After reading a book together, ask if your child would recommend this book to a friend, and give reasons why or why not.
Are You Different?	K–3	Story Elements: Character	After reading a book together, choose a character in the story and talk about how this character is similar to and different from your child.
Choose a Friend	K–3	Story Elements: Character	After reading a book together, choose a character and ask your child: “Would you like this person to be your friend? Why or why not?”
Create a Character	K–3	Story Elements: Character	As you read a book together, have your child keep an ongoing list of words that describe characters' traits. Choose some of these words and create a new character. Your child can either draw a picture of or write about this character.

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Draw and Tell	K–3	Story Elements: Character	After reading together, choose a favorite character from the book and ask your child to draw it. Ask your child make up a new story about this character and to share this story with you.
Who's Like You?	K–3	Story Elements: Character	After reading a book together, ask your child: "Which character is most like you? Show me an example in the book."
Describe the Setting	K–3	Story Elements: Setting	After reading a book together, ask your child to describe the setting of the story — where and when the story takes place.
Name the Setting	K–3	Story Elements: Setting	After reading a book together, ask your child: "Where did this story take place? Would you like to visit this place? Why or why not?"
Draw a Timeline	K–3	Story Elements: Setting; Retell and Sequence	After reading a book together, ask your child: "Did this story take place in a day? A month? A year? More than one year? Where did this story take place?" Discuss this and help your child draw a timeline for this story.
Discuss the Ending	K–3	Story elements: Solution	After reading a book together, discuss the ending. Ask your child: "Did you like the way the author ended the book? Tell me why. If not, how would you end the story? Why?"
Guess the Ending	K–3	Supporting Inference with Evidence	Toward the end of reading a book together, stop reading and ask your child: "How do you think this book ends? Why?" When you finish the book, discuss how accurate your child's guess was.
Add to the Alphabet Book	K–3	Word Categories, Words in Context	As you read a book together, point to an object in the illustration and help your child find the word in the text that matches that object. Help make an ABC book so your child writes the word under the correct letter and adds a picture that goes with the word.
Alphabet Book	K–3	Word Categories, Words in Context, Reading, Transcribing, Drawing, Cutting	Make an alphabet book together, as you two come across new words in a book. Have your child write the new words in the alphabet book under the correct letter, and cut out photos or draw pictures to go with the new words.

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Naming Household Objects	K–3	Word Categories, Words in Context, Writing	As you read a book together, look for words that name household objects. Your child should write these words on index cards and place them around the house on top of or next to the object the word names. Add cards whenever you encounter a new household word together.
Guess the Word	K–3	Words in Context	Choose one new word your child learned from the story; ask your child to write the word down, read the sentence in which that word occurs, then guess what the word might mean using context clues. Together, look up the definition in a dictionary to check the accuracy of the guesses. Explain that one of the most fun parts of reading is learning new words. The more words we learn, the better we read, and the more we understand the story.
Draw a Cover	3–6	Main Idea	Ask your child draw a book cover for this story and describe it when finished. Does the picture illustrate one of the characters or tell part of the story? Explain that a book cover is a great way to catch a reader's attention. Like the title of a story, the drawings on a book cover can also work just like a clue. The drawings on a book cover can sometimes tell what the story might be about. Sometimes the cover might only show a picture of the main character(s), and sometimes it might show one of the important scenes from the story. The great book cover interests us in the story before we even open the book.
New Cover	3–6	Main Idea and Supporting Details	Ask your child draw a book cover for this story and describe it when finished. Does the picture illustrate one of the characters or tell part of the story? Does the picture showcase the beginning, middle, or end of the story? Explain to your child that a book cover is a great way to catch a reader's attention. Like the title of a story, the drawings on a book cover can also work just like a clue. The drawings on a book cover can sometimes tell what the story is about. Sometimes the cover might only show a picture of the main character(s), and sometimes, it might show one of the important scenes from the story. The great book cover interests us in the story before we even open the book.

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Title Talk	3–6	Main Idea, Retell, and Supporting Details	Ask your child to read the title of the story and to think about it. Is it a good title for this story? Why? Explain that the title is sometimes a clever and important way to let people know that the story might be about. Sometimes the title works like a short clue to give you hints what the story might be about. Sometimes the title is more mysterious. Does this title help tell what the story is about, or who it may be about?
Title Talk	3–6	Main Idea, Retell, and Supporting Details	Ask your child to read the title of the story, and to think about it. Ask: “Do you think it is a good title for this story? Why do you think the author chose this title? Can you think of a better title?” Explain that the title is sometimes a clever and important way to let people know that the story is about. Sometimes the title is a short clue that hints what the story is about. Does the title help tell who or what the story is about?
Title Talk	3–6	Main Idea, Retell, and Supporting Details	Ask your child to read the title of the story. Ask: “Do you think it is a good title for this story? Why? Do you think the author did a good job picking the title? Can you think of another great title for this story? What does your new title mean, and how does it relate to the story?” Explain that the title is sometimes a clever and important way to let people know that the story is about. Sometimes the title works like a short clue to hint what the story is about. Does this title help tell who or what the story is about?
Retell the Story	3–6	Retell and Sequence	Have your child read the story aloud, then retell it. Discuss the story together, recalling the who, what, when, where, and what of the story. Was it an interesting story? Explain that retelling the story means repeating the events of the story in your own words; retelling summarizes the major parts of the story, but it can also include details that explain more about the characters and what happened. After your child retells the story, ask what the main idea of the story might be.

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Story About the Story	3–6	Retell and Sequence	Have your child read the story aloud, and retell it. Discuss the story together, recalling details such as the who, what, when, where, and how of the story. Was it an interesting story? Why or why not? How could the story have been better or more interesting? Explain that retelling the story means repeating the events of the story in your own words. Retelling summarizes the major parts of the story, but it can also include details that explain more about the characters and what happened. After your child reads the story, discuss what the main idea might be.
Tell the Story	3–6	Retell and Sequence	Have your child read the story aloud, then retell it. Discuss the story together, and recall the who, what, when, where, and what of the story. Was it an interesting story? Explain that retelling means repeating the events of the story in your own words; retelling summarizes the major parts of the story, but it can also include details that explain more about the characters and what happened. After retelling the story, ask your child to think about what the main idea of the story might be.
Story Comic	3–6	Retell and Sequence, Drawing	Help your child create a short comic strip about this story, starting with drawing nine boxes, going from left to right. Use the first three boxes to illustrate what happened in the beginning, the next four boxes to describe what happened in the middle, and the last two boxes to describe what happened in the end.
Book Broadcast	3–6	Retell and Sequence, Main Idea	Have your child pretend to be a news reporter: dress up like a reporter, sit behind a desk, use a spoon as a microphone, and provide an oral broadcast of the story you just read together. Explain that news reporters start out by giving a quick main idea (if it is nonfiction) and theme (if it is fiction) of the story, followed by a summary of the news, followed by details. Sometimes, two news reporters might talk back and forth about a news topic. In the same way, have your child give a summary of what happened, and then you may discuss back and forth the different details of the story.

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Story Broadcast	3–6	Retell and Sequence, Main Idea	Have your child pretend to be a news reporter and provide an oral broadcast of the story you just read together. Ask three questions about the story as a “reporter’s test.” Explain that news reporters start out by giving a quick main idea (if it is nonfiction) and theme (if it is fiction) of the story, followed by a summary of the news, followed by details. Sometimes, two news reporters might talk back and forth about a news topic. In the same way, have your child give a summary of what happened, and then you may discuss back and forth the different details of the story.
Story News	3–6	Retell and Sequence, Main Idea	Have your child pretend to be a news reporter and provide an oral broadcast of the story you just read together. Ask four questions about the story as a “reporter’s test.” Explain that news reporters start out by giving a quick main idea (if it is nonfiction) and theme (if it is fiction) of the story, followed by a summary of the news, followed by details. Sometimes, two news reporters might talk back and forth about a news topic. In the same way, have your child give a summary of what happened, and then you may discuss back and forth the different details of the story.
Map the Story	3–6	Retell and Sequence, Story Elements: Character	Have your child create a story map. Story maps help children organize a story, and are a great comprehension tool. For the story map, draw five boxes. Each box deals with a different element of the story, such as title, setting, main event in the story, list of characters, your child’s favorite part and favorite character. Explain that story maps are a fun way to organize the story.
Five Questions	3–6	Retell and Supporting Details	Help your child think of and write five questions about the story. Write the questions in a way so that somebody who read the story could answer them. Use these questions to test your child’s memory of the story.
Four Questions	3–6	Retell and Supporting Details	Help your child think of and write four questions about the story. Write the questions in a way so that somebody who read the story could answer them. Use these questions to test your child’s memory of the story.

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Just the Good Parts	3–6	Retell and Supporting Details	Ask your child to name two favorite parts of the story. Ask: “Were there two specific parts of the story you found the most fun or the most exciting and interesting to read? Why did you like those parts? If you could change or add something to make those parts even more exciting, what would you add?” Explain that sometimes stories have different levels of excitement. A story may start out slow, and then build to the exciting part. Sometimes, all the exciting parts happen right at the end. Some people like the exciting parts the most, but some people like might like the very beginning when the characters and story line is first introduced. Ask: “What part got your attention?”
Six Questions	3–6	Retell and Supporting Details	Help your child think of and write six questions about the story. Write the questions in a way so that somebody who read the story could answer them. Use these questions to test your child’s memory of the story.
The Best Parts	3–6	Retell and Supporting Details	Ask your child to name two favorite parts of the story. Ask: “Why did you like those parts? If you could make those two parts even better, what would you add to it? More action? More suspense? More drama? More characters?” Explain that sometimes stories have different levels of excitement. A story may start out slow, and then build up to the exciting part. Sometimes, all the exciting parts happen right at the end. Some people like the exciting parts most, but some people like the very beginning when the characters and story line is first introduced.
Three Questions	3–6	Retell and Supporting Details	Help your child think of and write three questions about the story. Write the questions in a way so that somebody who read the story could answer them. Use these questions to test your child’s memory of the story.

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What's Exciting?	3–6	Retell and Supporting Details	Ask your child to name a favorite part of the story, and to think about the story. Was there a certain part that was the most fun to read or the most exciting and interesting? Explain that sometimes stories have different levels of excitement. A story may start out slow, and then build up to the exciting part. Sometimes, all the exciting parts happen right at the end. Some people find the exciting parts their most favorite, but some people like might like the very beginning when the characters and story is first introduced. What part got your child's attention?
Character Chart	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Help your child make a list or a chart comparing two characters in the story. Ask: "What are their differences and similarities? Do you think the two characters are alike or different from yourself?" Help your child create a chart, and show how to list the traits in a comparative format.
Character Talk	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Help your child pick a favorite character. Ask: "Why is this character your favorite? Are you similar to your favorite character or different? Why?" Explain that characters are the different people that are part of a story. Different characters make the story more fun and interesting. In fictional stories, characters can also be talking animals. Fictional stories are stories that are not based on real life. Nonfiction stories have characters that are real and based on historical evidence.
Chart the Characters	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Help your child make a list or a chart comparing two characters in a story. What are their names? What did they do in the story? Do they like the same things? Are they friends? Are they family? Are they animals? How are they the same and different? Explain that comparative lists help us better understand the personalities of the different characters within a story.

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Draw Some Characters	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Ask your child to make a picture of two of the characters in the story, cut it out, then write the characters' names on the back of the picture. Ask: "What do you think of these characters? Can you remember something these characters did in the story?" Explain that some books have drawings of the characters inside of it, or on the cover, but some books and stories have no illustrations. Sometimes, a story might tell us what a character looks like, or what age they are, or what color hair they have. But sometimes, a story might not give as many details about the character's appearance. In this case, the reader can have fun guessing what the character(s) look like. Did your story already have pictures?
Draw Three Characters	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Help your child make a picture of three of the characters in the story, cut it out, and then write the names and personality traits of those characters on the back.
Draw Two Characters	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Ask your child to make a picture of two of the characters in the story, cut it out, and write the names and personality traits of those characters on the back. Were the characters serious, funny, happy, or mad? Were those two characters adults, children, or animals? Recall what those two characters said or did in the story.
Pick a Character	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Help your child pick a favorite character. Why that specific character? What's likable about that character? Would they be friends? Ask your child to recall something that character said or did in the story. Explain that characters are the different people who take part in a story. Different characters make the story more fun and interesting. In fictional stories, characters can also be talking animals. Fictional stories are stories that are not based on real life. Nonfiction stories have characters that are real and based on historical evidence.

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Such a Character	3–6	Story Elements: Character	Help your child pick a favorite character and ask why that character is a favorite. Ask: “Are you a lot like the character or different? Why? If you could be one of the characters in this story, who would it be?” Explain that characters are the different people that are part of a story. Different characters make the story more fun and interesting. In fictional stories, characters can also be talking animals. Fictional stories are stories that are not based on real life. Nonfiction stories have characters that are real and based on historical evidence.
Be the Critic	3–6	Story Elements: Character, Setting; Main idea, Retell, Sequence	After reading a book together, help your child write a review about the book that includes title, author, main idea, setting, characters, reasons for liking this book, and why another person would want to read this book. Encourage at least one sentence for each item.
Break the Story Down	3–6	Story Elements: Character, Setting; Main Idea, Retell and Sequence	Ask your child to describe the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Help deconstruct the story into three parts, using just a line or two to summarize each part, as opposed to retelling the entire story with details. Explain that all stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning usually introduces the setting and the main characters. By the middle, we start learning more about the story or any problems the characters may face. By the end, we find out what happens to the characters, or how any problems were or were not resolved.
Work Out the Problems	3–6	Story Elements: Problem, Solution	Ask your child: “What problem(s) did the characters face in the story? How was it solved? Think about everything that happened in the story — can you remember the main problem? How was the problem caused in the first place? Who solved it or how was it finally solved? Could it have been solved in another way?” Explain that an important part of every story is the plot. The plot is the main story line or main problem in the story. Characters in a story might go through something, or may need to solve a problem. A good plot makes the story more interesting.

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Problem Talk	3–6	Story Elements: Problem, Solution, Character	Ask: “What problem(s) did the characters face in the story? Think about everything that happened in the story — can you remember the main problem? Which character(s) suffered the problem? What caused the problem in the first place? Who solved it (or, how it was finally solved)? Could it have been solved in another way?” Characters in a story might go through something, or may need to solve a problem. A good plot makes the story more interesting.
Change the Setting	3–6	Story Elements: Setting	After reading a story together, ask your child to name the setting of the book. Then ask: “Could this story take place in another place or at a different time? Do you think that would change the story? Tell me why.”
Change the Ending	3–6	Story Elements: Solution	After reading a book together, ask your child: “If you were the author, how would you end this story?”
Change the Ending	3–6	Story Elements: Solution	Have your child think up a new ending for the story and tell what would happen if the story continued, as creatively as possible. Your child can even be a character! Explain that the ending of the story usually helps the reader know what happened to all the characters and/or how any problems resolved. Endings are happy, or sad, or exciting, or a mix of many emotions. What kinds of endings do you like the most?
New Ending	3–6	Story Elements: Solution	Have your child think of a new ending for the story and write two more paragraphs to tell what would happen if the story continued. To make it fun and interesting, consider adding a new character. Explain that the ending of the story usually helps the reader know what happened to all the characters and/or how any problems resolved. Endings are happy, or sad, or exciting, or a mix of many emotions. What kinds of endings do you like the most?

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Story Pieces	3–6	Story Elements: Solution	Ask your child to describe the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Ask: “Was it a happy ending? Why or why not? What was the most important part of the whole story?” Explain that all stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning usually introduces the setting and the main characters. By the middle, we learn more about the story or any problems that the characters may face. By the end, we find out what happens to the characters, or how any problems were or were not resolved.
Parts of the Story	3–6	Retell and Sequence, Story Elements: Character	Ask your child to describe the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Help deconstruct the story into three parts, using just a line or two to summarize each part, as opposed to retelling the entire story with details. Ask: “What do you think about the ending? Was it a happy ending? Why or why not? What happened to each of the characters in the end?” Explain that all stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning usually introduces the setting and the main characters. By the middle, we learn more about the story or any problems that the characters may face. By the end, we find out what happens to the characters, or how any problems were or were not resolved.