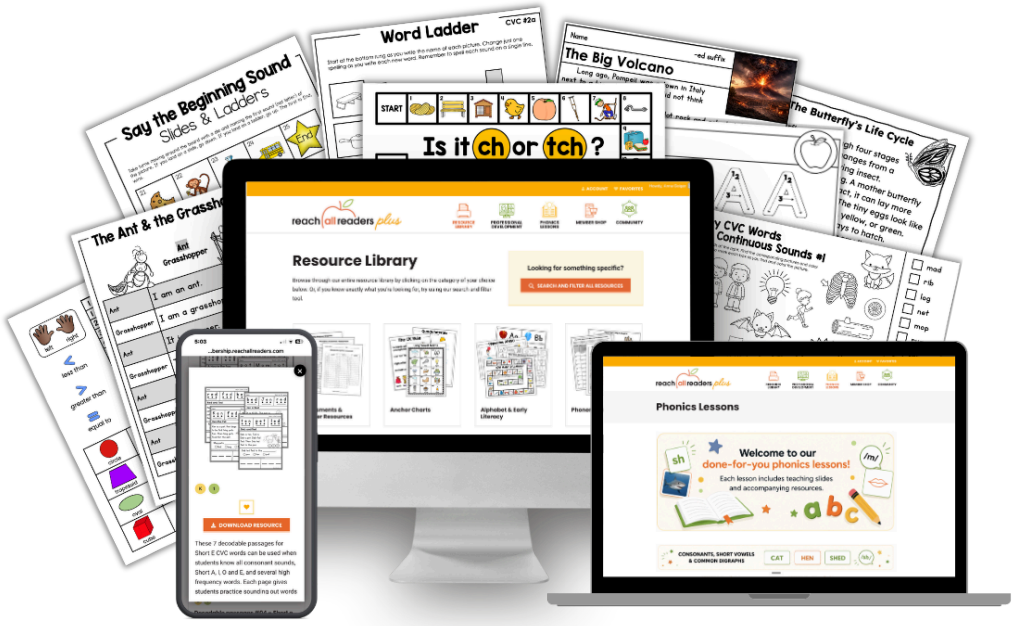
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Comprehension Fast Facts

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Comprehension
Fast Facts

› INTRODUCTION

Comprehension is the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning from text.

Comprehension is not just about understanding the words on the page; both the text *and* the reader bring something to the table.

Comprehension is complex and multi-faceted; it cannot be reduced to a set of skills.

› WHY TEACH COMPREHENSION?

Our ultimate goal for our students is that they create a strong mental model of the text they read. A **mental model** is an overall representation of the meaning of a text; it's what the reader walks away with.

› RESEARCH SUMMARY

- Higher levels of background knowledge help students understand text.
- Background knowledge helps readers make **inferences**, which are conclusions they reach based on the information that they already have.
- Background knowledge gives you a place to attach new information. Marilyn Adams calls it "mental velcro."
- When teachers are aware of the ways that phrases, clauses, and cohesive ties can make a sentence difficult to comprehend, they are better able to pick out tricky sentences and provide support to their students.
- Instruction in reading comprehension strategies improves comprehension. This instruction should be explicit and brief.
- Good readers monitor their comprehension as they create a mental model.
- Explicit instruction in text structure leads to gains in comprehension.
- Summarizing is a powerful strategy for improving comprehension.
- Research supports multiple-strategy teaching, in which the reader uses multiple strategies while interacting with the teacher.

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› IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION

- Spend a few minutes building background knowledge before students read a text.
- Look for challenging sentences so you can support your students as they read or listen to them. Challenging sentences may include multiple phrases and clauses, challenging conjunctions, unusual word order, or use of cohesive ties (such as pronouns).
- Instead of spending weeks on a particular comprehension strategy, choose the text first. Then teach one or more strategies that help your students understand the content. Strategies are only useful insofar as they help students understand and remember what they read.
- Teach students to monitor their comprehension.
- Teach students to identify story elements and different types of expository text structure.
- Teach students to summarize what they have read.

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