Developing Comprehension

Part 2: Sample Lesson Plans
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O using strategy in conjunction with another  
X strategy focus  /  pre-focus attempt at strategy
I feel frightened

Brian Moses, Mike Gordon

Dimensions of Learning

- Empathy
- Emotional response

Comprehension Strategies

- Connecting to text - Background knowledge
- Early Predicting

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

“I feel frightened” is a small book from a series of texts on “Your Emotions” by Brian Moses and Mike Gordon. Often used for PD lessons it is a great text for showing children how using their background knowledge to connect to text helps them understand the text and the characters’ feelings more. As everyone has been frightened at some point in their lives and different things frighten different people, it makes for interesting discussion and shows very clearly to children that our background knowledge is different depending on our personality and our experiences.

The students in the Gr 2 class had been using the term background knowledge with the teacher but had not been making connections to the text. Without connected back to the text they were unable to use their experiences to relate to the characters and the plot and eventually predict and infer.

I began modelling the strategy by using think-aloud. I explained how certain words and pictures in the story reminded me of the things that frightened me. As I modelled I recorded the text that initiated the connection and what my thinking was on a double-entry journal. Students can use a double-entry journal to help them study concepts or vocabulary, express opinions, justify an opinion using text, and understand or respond to the text they are reading.

The double-entry journal is basically a two-column graphic-organiser. In the left column, students write a quotation or a concept from the text, which they want to expand upon, understand better, or question. In the right column, students relate to or analyse the information that is written in the left column.

In this lesson I wrote quotes from the text (on sticky notes) as they initiated a connection with my background
knowledge. These I placed in the left-hand column and in the right hand column I put sticky notes on which I had summarised my connections.

When I had finished I discussed with the students that my background knowledge was enabling me to connect with the little girl in text. Because I was thinking about the things that frightened me it helped me understand how she felt. A lot of things that frightened her frightened me too!! I would be able to predict what she might do, work out what has happened and how the characters were feeling by thinking of my experiences – especially with spiders!!!!

**Talk partners** also worked well in this lesson to encourage the students to recall and talk about the sorts of things that frighten them.

This little girl was showing her partner the size of a spider that had scared her. After giving them a couple of minutes to discuss this we then discussed as a whole class how their background knowledge would help them connect to the little girl in the story.

Students then recorded the experiences they had discussed with their talking partners and we displayed them on the chart “I feel frightened when...........”
I then went back to the double-entry journal to model to the students how to analyse connections. Not all of our connections are real ones – some are co-incidences.

Connections such as this one where I was reminded of when I was a child and found a huge tarantula in my bed that caused me to scream and jump out the window, would help me understand how the charter felt when she found a huge spider under her bed. So I ticked this connection to show it was real.

In the story the little girl is frightened by her jack-in-the-box. When I saw the picture of the jack-in-the-box in the story it reminded me of the one I had as a child. However I wasn’t frightened by mine, just our dog - much to the amusement of my sister and myself!!!

After the children had seen me analyse some of the connections I let the students help me make the decisions and was pleased to find that some of them were keen to have-a-go and were able to not only make a decision but justify it.

In this example the children were quite definite that this was a coincidence than a real connection because I loved my jack-in-box unlike the little girl who was terrified of hers! We gave this connection a cross.

I did remind the children that these types of connections would help me enjoy the story better but wouldn’t help me understand it better.
The Small Dragon

Brian Patten

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(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

This poem by Brian Patten was first published in *Love Poems* (Flamingo/HarperCollins, 1990) and intended for an adult readership, however it has been adopted by children. I think what makes it such a popular poem is its ability to appeal to all of us – it leaves room for lots of interpretations. As an adult it may have more subtle meanings – maybe a dare???

I liked the “The Times” quote which described Patten’s magic ability to turn radiant imagination loose.

For readers to visualise they need to use the text and their background knowledge and poetry is a wonderful medium for doing this. Poets use descriptive text but use only a limited number of words to deliver their message which is also often hidden. This means children need to use their mental images to make sense of the text and fill in the details.

I first read the title and then we broke into talking partners to share our background knowledge on dragons. The children had very strong background knowledge for dragons which had come from books and movies they had seen. We listed some of their thoughts on a chart for future use as I read the poem.

To use the text to visualise, children need to understand what the text is saying ie vocabulary. So the first job was to read the poem and then return and discuss the words. I asked them what good readers do when they come to a word they don’t know the meaning of. They wanted to keep telling me to “sound it out”, but then one child then decided a dictionary would be a good thing to use and many nodded. However they all agreed when I said that when I have to keep stopping and looking up a word it is annoying because I lose my place and can’t keep track of the story.

At this point in time I don’t mention the word inferring I just called it “our thinking”. The strategy inferring needs to be taught explicitly once children have gained confidence with the other strategies of background knowledge, visualising and questioning. I have found teaching questioning leads really easily and logically into predicting (see “The Refugees” and Inferring (see “John Brown Rose and the Midnight Cat”).

Comprehension2.docx
One of the terms the children had difficulty with was “roots of stars”. We reread the text but found no clues from it so decided we needed to work it out for ourselves. We used our background knowledge to discuss what we already knew about “roots” and “stars”. The children after prompting and returning to their background knowledge inferred that the roots were to hold the stars up into the sky to stop them falling down.

I then reread the text to find the words that would help us visualise the poem. As the children decided I underlined them.

While doing this the children needed to make some inferences about the meaning of some phrases eg “leaves are still reflected in its eyes”. The children used their background knowledge for the word “reflected” and worked out quite easily that the dragon had leaves reflected in its eyes but only a couple of children had thinking about what it meant. The first child said he thought it meant that the dragon wanted to go back to the forest. After some discussion others thought that maybe he was lonely. Others suggested he needed to go back to the forest or he might die. This seemed to be validated in the next paragraph as the boy tried unsuccessfully to feed it. The child gave suggestions of the type of food it might eat considering it lived in the forest.

In the third paragraph their thinking was along the lines that maybe the dragon wanted to lay an egg or maybe he was uncomfortable on the wood and needed to make a warm bed. Most suggested he would have made it out leaves – from the branches in the woodshed.

I asked the children what they thought the last paragraph meant. I told them authors often don’t tell us clearly what is happening and leave it up to us to make our own minds up. When
we read something and go “Huh?” that often means we have to stop and work out what the author is saying. We need to look at the words, what the text has already told us and what we know (our background knowledge) to work it out.

We read the paragraph a couple of times but few children had an opinion until one child whispered almost inaudibly; It’s his imagination. It took me ages to get the little girl to say it loud enough for me to hear her. She seemed so unsure and concerned that maybe her answer would be wrong. This gave me a perfect opportunity to talk to the children about how what we think cannot be wrong. That whenever we read our interpretation is right for us. We all have different background knowledges and we use our background knowledge to work out what is happening in a text.

What words helped you work that out? I asked. She said it was the word “wonder” because “wonder” sounds like a dream or his imagination. Another child, now more confident said the word “if” was a clue because “if” sounded like it hadn’t really happened yet. Both these children had made an inference using the text and their background knowledge. We were on the way!

Before the children drew their mental images I broke them into talking partners to share their thoughts and clarify their ideas.

This child not only drew what he “saw” in the woodshed but labelled the items.
This child “got it” – got the magic.
Lizzie’s Invitation

Holly Keller

Dimensions of Understanding
- Empathy
- Comprehension Strategies
  - Background knowledge – text to self

(Conducted over 2/15 minute sessions)

One of Ellin Oliver Keene’s *Outcomes (Responses) and Dimensions of Learning* (2011) for teaching children to use comprehension strategies, is the development in them of a sense of empathy for characters. This is a great book for this. The book, *Lizzie’s Invitation*, with its simple text (often used in Health and PD classes,) tells the story of Lizzie who didn’t receive an invitation to one of her classmates’ birthday parties.

She is devastated and ends up having to take the day of school she is so upset. On the day of the party the weather reflects her feelings of depression. She goes off to the park in the rain to be by herself. In the park things improve when she finds a new friend.

All of us at some time in our lives have not received a coveted invitation or haven’t been picked for a game and can relate to her feelings of being abandoned - left out.

I introduced the story by asking the students what invitations were, what they looked like, and what sorts of invitations the children were familiar with. I then began reading the book, and very soon we found out the invitations being given out were to a birthday party.

We discussed background knowledge and what it meant and how good readers use it to help them understand the text.
Anchor charts created with students on chart paper serve as consistent reminders of teaching points, clarify thinking, make connections, and/or remember a specific skill, strategy, or concept; to make thinking permanent and visible. I asked the students to use their background knowledge to remember all the things they could about birthday parties – ones they had had themselves, and ones they had been to. I prompted the students by asking them to think about the special food they’d eaten and the sort of things they did at the party.

With their talk partner the children enthusiastically discussed their experiences.

When we returned to the class discussion they all agreed that parties were fun and something they would all want to go to. When I asked students what it would be like if they missed the party they all agreed it would be bad. The students inferred it would be bad for two reasons – firstly because parties were fun and not to be missed, but secondly and maybe more importantly Lizzie would feel left out because she was the only one left out.

Young children often have limited vocabulary for feelings. People will often be “sad” or “happy”, so it is important to develop in them a richness of words to describe the multitude of feelings that we humans can experience. This story was the perfect context for the words like disappointed, lonely and left-out. By using their background knowledge and the text, these words came to life.

The words can be reused in the future by getting the kids to link them back to Lizzie. eg Remember how Lizzie felt when she didn’t get an invitation? What words did we use to describe how she was feeling? Recording them on word walls or anchor charts ensures they are remembered and reused.

I then asked the children to think about a time when they had been left out or someone had not shared something with them. By doing this the children were connecting back to the text to Lizzie which enabled them to understand how she must have been feeling.

While working with this class of Grade Twos, I developed a technique that helped the children get the concept of connecting to the text. It made the connection visible and dramatic. While we talked about Lizzie I had a strong feeling of empathy for her and expressed this to the children. I asked Melanie (one of the girls in the class) if she would pretend to be Lizzie so I could tell her how I felt.
I instinctively reached out my hand and said *Hello Lizzie I feel so bad for you. I remember being left out of the soccer team at school and I was so disappointed and felt so left out when everyone went off to practise and play games. I want to reach out to you and tell you how much I understand how you are feeling and how I wish you could go to the party.*

The physical action of reaching out to Lizzie really caught on and I encouraged the others to do the same. I allowed them time to reach out and hold “Lizzie’s” hand and tell her how they felt and why they understood how she was feeling.

This is how we connected back to the text- to Lizzie.
I stopped reading just as Lizzie was heading off to the park. The book would be finished by the teacher in the following days. This tiny book had so much to talk and think about it would take at least 2 days to complete.

I left the children as they wrote messages for the chart below.

The teacher reported later that many connected deeply and left very personal messages for Lizzie including:

*Lizzie I feel so sad you didn’t go to the party, I hope you find an invitation in the park and you can go too.*

*I didn’t get to go on the trip I know how you feel.*

*I feel lonely when no one plays with me. 
I will play with you Lizzie.*

These touching messages show a strong empathy for Lizzie.

Some used the words from the story, the illustrations and their background knowledge to make simple predictions.

*I think your Mum will buy you something nice to make you feel better.*

*Lizzie will find a new friend.*

It is clear that these children have a deep understanding of the text.
Dreams
Ezra Jack Keats

Dimensions of Understanding

- Pause and consider
- Fascination with ideas
- Create new background knowledge

Comprehension Strategies

- Questioning
- Predicting
- Inferring

(Conducted over 2/15 minute sessions)

The teacher of a Gr 1/2 class was frustrated with her students calling out the answer to her questions as she modelled the Questioning Strategy.

I have found children often think that when we ask questions while reading they have to be answered immediately. I guess that is what they have been accustomed to in classrooms. They need to understand that they can predict the answer but can’t confirm or modify the prediction until they read on. At the end of the book many of their questions may still not have been answered; hence the need to infer.

I used the book “Dreams,” a beautifully illustrated book by Ezra Jack Keats to help them develop this concept. It is about a boy called Roberto and the paper mouse he made at school. Even though the mouse is weak and small he actually manages to become the hero and save the day!!! Before we read, I discussed with the children how it was to be small and weak (background knowledge). They thought it was hilarious when I asked them would they be able to fight off a big bear or a savage dog, and all agreed that would it would be impossible. So I posed the question, Could someone small and weak like a paper mouse be a hero? Just as the teacher had reported the children called out No. I suggested they wait until we had read the book to find out. They reluctantly agreed.

As I began to read the text and model the questions I was asking myself, the children continued calling out Yes or No. Even with more open/inferential questions like; Why can’t Roberto sleep? Many would just call out an answer He’s not tired and expect me to say Yes you are right/ or wrong. They just weren’t getting it.

So after a lot of discussion which I summarised on a simple anchor chart, coupled with a lot of persistence it wasn’t long before the children began saying I predict…… instead of yelling No!! It also didn’t take them long to chime keep reading!! when I asked them how we should find the answer to our questions. Some also began asking their own questions As Debbie Miller suggested in her article “Not So Gradual Release of Responsibility in Comprehension Going Forward” (2011), I gave the children the opportunity to have-a-go as soon as they felt confident enough.
After the lesson I would rewrite this in a more attractive way and refer back to it as I continue to model the Questioning Strategy.

As the questions were asked I wrote each on sticky notes and stuck them to the Asking Questions Anchor Chart. As we read, we coded the questions that were answered in the text with an A. At the end we noticed that many of the questions we asked were not answered so I introduced the word infer to the children. I talked to them about how authors don’t always tell us exactly what is happening. They want us to work it out on our own. It means we have to do more work and think deeply. This helps us “get into” the book and enjoy it more. I lead them to discover that there were clues in the book that helped us do this eg When we were trying to answer the question “Did Roberto think the mouse would be able to save the cat?” we reread the first page where Amy asked Roberto what the paper mouse could do and Roberto answered he didn’t know. I then asked the children if a paper mouse was strong and they all said “No!” They then decided that Roberto would never have expected the mouse to be able to help.

Children all want their ideas heard, so to give them this chance without listening to them all individually, and to encourage them to talk about texts without relying on teachers’ feedback and approval, talking partners are very effective. As Debbie Miller states in Not So Gradual Release in Comprehension Going Forward (2011) ...it also sends the message that I trust you – I believe you have something important to say - and It makes children more aware of their mental processes and develops children independence and skills to discuss texts with others and themselves. It is essential however that teachers model how to have a conversation with a partner.

I think it best that teachers initially choose the partners so that children feel safe and confident with their partner. Girls and boys are often more relaxed with same sex so initially I would allow this. When their discussion skills, confidence and use of strategies improve, then more random selections can be made. There will always be a small group of students in a class who are initially unwilling or unable to verbalise their thinking. I think it is best to have those children sitting in front of the teacher and when children turn to speak to their partners the teacher leads and encourages the conversion between these children. As they warm up and
are more confident to have-a-go they can try chatting with their own partner. Get children to sit in the reading area with their talking partners at the start of the session.

I stopped at the page where Roberto looks down from his apartment window and sees something in the street that makes him gasp. Instead of asking the students to verbally predict what he saw, I got them to visualise what Roberto saw and then to sketch it. I encouraged them to write a label under their sketch to explain their prediction. All children completed the sketch and sentence in “record time” compared to doing other tasks the teacher said. They all sketched quickly and were not worried about their spelling. They enjoyed looking at each other’s predictions and were learning that there was no right or wrong answer when we predict, that we all interpret text in our own ways.

A couple of pages later and to my delight, Claudia saw the illustration of a little mouse’s shadow, put her hand up, and quietly but confidently said You know, I think that shadow is going to scare the dog away. This inference without any leading question from me to inspire it, was spectacular! She also came to the rescue when one of the students asked why the mouse’s shadow had become so large, by going into quite an in-depth discussion about light and shadows. When I asked her how she knew this she said she was playing with a torch the night before and discovered that. Do we need any other reason to give children equipment and let them play with it!
Some questions can only be answered by an **Outside Source** or by asking someone else – like Claudia! In the story “Dreams” we inferred that the paper mouse was actually an origami mouse. We actually made this inference when I read the dedication and discovered it was to a number of Japanese people. The students were very interested in this and asked a lot of questions about it which lead to further investigation, and a search of the library for books on the topic. The origami books that used to be in the library seemed to be missing so the teacher is planning on finding origami projects on the internet for the students. I suggested this be set up as a literacy station that the students could chose to use during independent time. We also collected books from the library on mice to add to the classroom library.

**Curiosity** is an essential element of the Questioning Strategy and one the teacher needs to model to her students. We need to enrich the natural curiosity that children have when they come to school. Too often this is extinguished before they leave us. Allow children the opportunity to ask questions and investigate what interests them, what makes them curious.

“In her classroom our speculations ranged the world. She breathed curiosity into us, so that each morning we came to her carrying new truths, new facts, new ideas, cupped and sheltered in our hands like captured fireflies…”

John Steinbeck

*The one real object of education is to have a man in the condition of continually asking questions.*

Bishop Mandell Creighton
Black Dog
Pamela Allen

Dimensions of Understanding
- Empathy
- Experience a memorable emotional response
- Think about a book long after they have finished reading it
- Revisit and rethink about the text
- Generate own hypotheses and theories

Comprehension Strategies
- Background knowledge
- Questioning
- Inferring and Synthesising

(Conducted over 2/15 minute sessions)

Ellin Oliver Keene (2011) talks about Outcomes (Responses) and Dimensions of Learning when she asks: How do we know they (children) really understand? One of the responses she talks about is experiencing a memorable emotional response. I defy anyone to read Pamela Allen’s hauntingly beautiful Black Dog and not have an emotional response. It is also a book that readers will want to revisit and rethink in order to understand more deeply. Older readers in particular will feel what Ellin Keene calls character empathy – when we feel we know the characters and have experienced the same emotions. It is a book about the pain of love, abandonment and infatuation. One of my favourite picture books and an excellent tool for teaching background knowledge, questioning and most importantly inferring and synthesising.

The beauty of the book is that children of all ages can get something from it. The most powerful image is towards the end when the dog, depressed and desperate because he has been abandoned for a new love (the blue bird), climbs a tree and jumps out. Younger ones just see the dog who is being ignored and is desperately trying to rekindle Christina’s affection, and infer the dog is up there to either chase the blue bird away or get Christina’s attention. Some deeper thinkers might infer that the dog was trying to be the bird in order to regain Christina’s love.
Older students will often infer that the dog is actually wanting to get her sympathy by hurling itself out of the tree, others think he is committing suicide – a very difficult subject to discuss with students but one older children will have background knowledge for. Older children are able to see the symbolism of the black dog and the blue bird. Some also see the use of the seasons to symbolise the deteriorating friendship. Many can empathise with the dog and retell stories of abandonment and loss.

[Image of sticky notes with writing on it.]

Gr 4 and 5s record their thinking (inferences) about why the dog jumped from the tree. The sticky notes have been grouped into similar interpretations.

With a class of Gr 4/5s I stopped reading the book at this dramatic point and asked the students to think about what was happening. I prompted them to think about what the text had told us already and to think deeply about what they saw in the picture. I also asked them to use their background knowledge to connect back to the text and to record their thinking (inference) on sticky notes which we displayed.

The students were very interested in each other’s inferences and conversation was lively. They discovered that some of their peers wrote similar inferences while others were completely different. So it was important that the students were able to justify their inferences by discussing the clues they got from the text and their background knowledge. They soon discovered that everyone’s thinking was valid and often related to previous experiences and clues that they had noticed. They also learnt that discussing ideas with each other

When I asked them to discuss with their talking partner what they thought the author was trying to tell us, “What is the message, the big picture or the theme?” they came to a number of conclusions including - friendship, not taking your friends for granted, and being kind to each other. These could be added to a chart of themes which could be used to compare and contrast other texts over the term.
The Lost Thing
Shaun Tan
(2/20 minute sessions)

Dimensions of Understanding
• Empathy
• Extrapolate from details

Comprehension Strategies
• Using text and background knowledge to visualise
• Use sketch to sketch to record images

(Conducted over 2/20 minute sessions)

Students had been working on visualising with their teacher but weren’t consciously thinking of the processes they needed to use to make their mental images - their background knowledge and the text.

This wonderful book is a fun way of showing the students how to do this. Before I read Shaun Tan’s vividly exciting book “The Lost Thing,” I hid the book in a folder so the students couldn’t see the illustrations. I told the students that good readers make pictures in their heads using their background knowledge and the words in the book. This helps them understand the story.

Sketch-to-stretch, is a strategy that teaches students to interpret texts through drawing. It also encourages diverse perspectives in response to text and fosters an environment of open discussion.

I told them to close their eyes and try to visualise The Lost Thing as I read the story. As I read the story I also encouraged them to listen for the words that would help them imagine “The Lost Thing.” The text is quiet simple and the only clues were the word “weird” and the sentences – “It had a sad sort of lost look.” and “It’s feet are filthy,” shrieked Mum”. I listed them up on the whiteboard as the students recognised them as clues that would help their visualisation.

There was also vocabulary that we needed to discuss as I read – dilemma, intriguing, anonymous and moral. It is really important that new words are recorded, analysed and discussed for future use.

After I have read the book I asked students to tell each other how they saw ‘the lost thing’ in their heads. Debbie Miller talks about how images are influenced by the shared images of others in her book Reading for Meaning (2002). I asked the students if their discussion had
changed their thinking. Most said no but some said it had made their thinking clearer. We also discussed what it was like to be lost and the children related experiences when they were left behind or couldn’t find home (background knowledge). This would help us to visualise how the lost thing may have been feeling and looking.

Finally I asked the students to quickly draw their image (sketch to sketch) for “The Lost Thing.” After the drawings were completed we stuck them on the chart and discussed how they were all different. Students talked about where their ideas had come from (their background knowledge), including books, movies, TV and their imagination and how they used this and the text to come up with the final sketch.

Be sure to emphasise that students should not be concerned with their artwork. Sketches should be done quickly. The point of the strategy is to get their interpretations down on paper without using words.

I talked with students about how everyone’s background knowledge is different which means their images are all different even though they had similar features. Each drawing is different because each child connected to the text in their own personal way to come up with their own interpretation of “The Lost Thing.”

Students used the text and their background knowledge to make thoughtful visual interpretations of “The Lost Thing”.

Comprehension2.docx
I think Louwtije’s image of “The Lost Thing,” has such a hauntingly “sad sort of lost look.” I felt she showed real empathy for the creature - a deep understanding.

When the students eventually saw the amazingly imaginative illustrations in the text the story truly came to life and they saw it in a whole new way. Their discussions became quite vibrant as each illustration was revealed. I think Tan’s illustrations are exceptionally creative and imaginative but whenever I read that story I see Louwtije’s beautiful image in my mind.
Cold Paws, Warm Heart

Madeleine Floy

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

In this beautifully illustrated book the setting and the bear’s feeling of cold are a metaphor for being lost and alone. Hannah is kind and warm hearted girl who does everything she can to make the bear feel warm.

My own personal love of animals was affirmed in this text. Books are a strong way to develop new beliefs and values in children. I know some of these beliefs are “western” and may not reflect cultural viewpoints but it’s one I think children everywhere need to be made aware of and to make up their own mind about. Assuming he is cold, Hannah gives him her long striped scarf and begins to build a friendship that ultimately warms Cold Paws up on the inside.

I read the book through with only limited stops to discuss vocabulary. When I finished I asked the children what type of bear the main character was. The children all chimed in - *Polar Bear*!! *How do you know this?* I asked. Most said they had read or seen TV programs about them. In talking partners they discussed with their partner everything they knew about a polar bear. This was then quickly listed up on the whiteboard. I reminded the children that they were using their text to world background knowledge to recall the polar bear facts. “Thinking about what you already know about polar bears helps you find what the author was trying to tell us.”
For students to make a leap into inferring they often need a probing question to get them started.

“How can a polar bear be cold?”

There was dead silence, but eventually a couple of students said they had just been talking about how polar bears can live in the freezing cold because they have big thick coats and lots of fat to protect them so they didn’t think a polar bear should ever be cold. “Then if it isn’t the weather that is making him cold what could it be?” The students were asked to think back through the text and use the pictures to help them. Think about what you already know about polar bears and what the author has told you about this one and see if you can work it out.

I told the children to look carefully for clues as we reread the story to see if they could work out why the polar bear would be feeling cold.

We completed a cause effect graphic-organiser as we read the text again. The visual summary would help the students see the patterns in the text between his feelings and the Hannah’s actions. This would hopefully lead the students to make the inferences to record how the little girl made the bear feel warmer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hannah’s gifts</th>
<th>Cold Paw’s feelings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a woolly scarf</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a game of jumping jacks</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a mug of steaming hot chocolate</td>
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When the children started getting the connection they discussed it with their talking partners. Many began to wave their hands around and get excited as they worked it out. They were then given paper to record their thoughts (inferences).

The snow didn’t make him cold He felt lonely and that was what was making him cold. Hannah loved him and he wasn’t lonely anymore.

Maybe he was feeling lonely. He was big and scared everyone away. Hannah was nice to him he felt warmer.

Hannah was kind and it made him feel loved and love makes him feel warm.

Hannah gave him things to make him warm which helped a bit but when she hugged him that was what did it. That made him warm.
The Big Sneeze

Ruth Brown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Understanding</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Recognise patterns</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Using Background knowledge (Text-to-Text Connections) to make predictions</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Using background knowledge and mental images to visualise</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text organisation</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Cause/effect</td>
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*(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)*

This book is a perfect one to study the text organization feature of cause/effect, and with its predictable and cumulative text it is also an excellent one to use with young children who are beginning to use the prediction strategy.

The story is set in a big old barn where a lazy farmer is sleeping in the hay. Suddenly a fly lands on his nose. The ensuing sneeze causes a chain reaction of events that lead to a near disaster. It concludes with the appearance at the barn door of the farmer’s annoyed wife to find out what had caused such a commotion. Only an innocent sneeze actually!!!

Initial discussion on what they would expect to see, hear and smell in a barn meant the children were all using the correct background knowledge to get their mental images on track. By hiding the pictures the students were then encouraged to visualise (using their background knowledge and the text) to predict what each effect would be.

By the time they got to the page where the sparrow chased the spider, many of the students were using text-to-text connections based on their prior knowledge of similar books. When asked, the students replied that having already read the books like “The Old Woman Who Swallowed a Fly”, they had worked out that there was a similar pattern. The animals are chasing animals they don’t normally get on with and/or eat! One student neatly summed it up as one of those “food-chain” books. This is one of the Dimensions of Understanding – readers recognise patterns - we are aiming for.

As each mishap occurred the students used their T-T connections and the visualisation of the text to predict what the effect would be. The use of talking partners was very effective and the children all thoroughly enjoyed the session.

We then reread the story and the children closed their eyes and let their movie run. Time was given for them to share their movie and much giggling and arm waving ensued.

A graphic-organiser and sticky notes were then used to record the chain of events. Redoing the flow chart would be a useful independent or small group activity after the book had been explored by the class.
Bertie and the Bear
Pamela Allen

Dimensions of Understanding
- Recognise patterns
- Pause and consider new twists in the text
- Generate own hypotheses and theories

Comprehension Strategies
- Using background knowledge to make predictions
- Asking questions
- Using text and background knowledge to make predictions
- Early inferring

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

I used “Bertie and Bear”, another great little book from one of my favourite authors Pamela Allen, with a class of grade ones. The strategy Questioning was still quite challenging so I knew I would need to do more modelling and provide support as the children developed this skill.

I initially discussed the term Predicting with the students who were all familiar with the word and were comfortable with the idea that it was a “clever guess” about what you thought would happen next. I also reminded them that we use our background knowledge and the text to help us make those prediction.

Today, I am going to show you how asking ourselves questions before we read helps us to make prediction. I went looking for a book that I could use to show you how to do this and I found this one. I held up the book and we discussed the title and author and I encouraged the students, when asking them what they could see on the cover, not to give me a list eg bear, boy; but to give me a description (I can see a bear chasing a boy.) I also asked them to discuss what the bear looked like (wide mouth, sharp teeth, long claws, brown fur, running) and to use this information to guess how the bear might be feeling (angry, hungry). This also needs to be done with the boy (little, wide eyed mouth open, running) The kids guessed he would be very scared!! I had background knowledge from how he was dressed that he might have been a scout. I discussed with the children all I knew about scouts and what they did.

I also modelled text-to-text connections when I discussed some of the other books Pamela Allen had written before. I know she writes funny books, like “Belinda”, “Mr McGee” and “Who Sank the Boat”, so I think this might be a funny book too.

When we first pick up a book it is important that we think about what we know and then ask questions about what we don’t know. As soon as I picked up Bertie and the Bear and looked at the illustration and the title I began to wonder and these are the questions I asked myself.
As I wrote up my questions (see left), I encouraged the children to think about questions they might have. However many, instead of asking questions, began predicting answers to the questions I had asked. More strategy teaching and modelling would help this. On the Resource Disk there are a number of strategies and activities to develop this skill.

For the first question “Who is Bertie?” all agreed with my prediction that it was the little boy on the cover. I told them I had used what I knew about the titles of books and cover illustrations (text-to-text connections) to predict that if a bear and a boy are pictured on the cover than the Bertie in the title probably refers to the little boy. As I stuck this prediction to the double-entry journal I asked them, Do we know the answer yet? Many said yes but a couple were adamantly that we would need to read the book first.

We then tried to predict why the bear was chasing the little boy. Remember that when we predict we need to think about what we already know (our background knowledge), and also look for clues in the text. When reading this book background knowledge about bears would really help us to predict the answers to my next two questions.

I gave them time to discuss their background knowledge for bears in their talking partners. I then asked the children to help me fill the mind map with ideas. They were able to tell me they knew all this because they had seen lots of things on TV about bears. One boy said he had seen a real bear in his travels and some had read other story books about bears. We talked about how different people have different background knowledge about bears. Someone who’d been attacked by a real bear would have a totally different background knowledge to someone who’d never seen a bear and had lots of toy bears that they loved. Background knowledge is different so our predictions will be different.
For question two “Why is the bear chasing the bear?” I initially asked children to discuss their predictions with their talking partners to get their conversations and thoughts kick-started. I reminded them to think about the text (the picture on the cover) and their background knowledge about bears.

One child volunteered to talk about what she and her partner had been discussing. They thought the little boy on the cover had disturbed the bear while it was sleeping. They knew that bears hibernated and thought the bear would be most annoyed if he was woken up. During this discussion when children volunteered their predictions we referred back to our background knowledge chart. The discussion actually brought up other facts about bears. For example one child predicted that the little boy could jump in the water to escape the bear, but another child said, *Hey bears can swim, so that’s not a good idea!* We added this new fact to the chart and the child modified his prediction.

It was with great, if very ghoulish enthusiasm, that almost all of the children predicted the answer to our third question, “*Will the bear catch the little bear?*” All agreed “*Yes, the bear would eat the little boy.*” We referred back to the background knowledge mind map and the children all reread where I had noted that bears run fast and are very vicious, have big sharp teeth and long claws. We looked again at the bear on the cover and agreed it was certainly angry enough to slap the boy around fairly badly and possibly have him for dinner. I was the only one who offered an alternative and more positive ending by suggesting the boy could climb a flag pole to escape. “*I know bears can climb trees so the boy would have to climb something smooth and slippery Hmmm…. I know that scouts always have flagpoles (background knowledge) so there would be one handy for him to use I predict.*” Connecting to other texts helps us predict what type of story it will be and influences our thinking eg “*I know Pamela Allen writes humourous stories so I predict the story will have a happy ending.*”

I put up the sticky note up with my prediction on it in the left-hand column.

I was modelling to the children the importance of using the text and the background knowledge to make predictions. It will take many modelling and interactive sessions before children will be able to do this independently. Take it slow there is no rush!!

I then began to read the book. Very quickly our first prediction was confirmed. On the first page we read that the little boy’s name was Bertie. So I put a C for confirmed, on a sticky note, quoted the text from the book and added it to the right-hand side of the double-entry journal.
As I read the story the children delighted as each character appeared making loud noises to try and rescue Bertie. We all had fun interpreting those noises that everyone made.

I modelled to the children how predictions can be changed (modified). I now had new information from the story that made me think that maybe the loud noises would chase the bear away. I wrote this on sticky notes and added a large M to the top to show I had changed my first prediction.

I built up suspense as we neared the end. The bear planted his feet, “stopped quite still. He turned right around….” I held my breath turned the page without showing the children the picture, gasped and slammed the book shut and told the children I just didn’t think I could show them the picture “Oooh too much blood….” The children were beside themselves with suspense and excitement!!!The final question was answered with much giggling and excitement as I read about the bear thanking everyone for all the music, bowing, turning cartwheels and then dancing. The children were delighted. On the double-entry journal I put a C on my prediction that Bertie would escape because that had been confirmed; in fact, “Bertie danced after the bear.” But I put a NC where I said the music would frighten him away because that wasn’t confirmed; in fact the bear loved the music and danced to it. I reinforced to the teachers watching that it was important not to label predictions as right or wrong but to label them confirmed and not confirmed.

If I’d had time it would be beneficial to do a Venn Diagram to compare and contrast real bears with bears in literature. This would also help with predicting because bears in literature would be able to do things real bears wouldn’t.
When we looked at the chart we noticed that the question “Why was the bear chasing Bertie?” remained unanswered. We had made predictions but the answer wasn’t found in the text. This meant we needed to work it out by ourselves (infer).

Using our background knowledge mind-map I asked the children to make a clever guess about why the bear was chasing the boy. I told them that now they had more information from the text their “clever guess” may have changed from their initial prediction.

Their answers were vivid and covered a number of different background knowledge (see below). The students were able to tell me why they had made these “clever guesses”.

The boy who thought Bertie had woken up the bear was able to tell me that he had used his background knowledge about bears hibernating and the picture on the cover of the angry bear to help him make his good guess. This Grade 1 boy was undeniably thinking about his thinking.
The book is perfect to integrate with drama, music and art. The repetitive nature of the text would lend itself beautifully to puppets, a wall story, story grammar etc.
The Relatives Came
Cynthia Rylant

Dimensions of Understanding
- Experience the aesthetic
- Experience an emotional response
- Recognise the influence of beliefs/values

Comprehension Strategies
- Background knowledge – Text-to-Self
- Vocabulary
- Visualising

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

“The Relatives Come” is a wonderful book to be studied when talking about families. Heart-warming and humorous, it is a particularly good one to do with PNG kids whose experiences with extended families are rich and extensive. When I held this book up in a predicting session I was running at Boroko East, the teachers immediately burst out laughing and began chatting to each other, “We can all really relate to that!” one of them said. I think it is one of those glorious books that reaches across cultures. Families are such an important part of the human story for all of us, and having them arrive on the doorstep is something we can all relate to.

Obviously Cynthia Rylant is American. The relatives coming from Virginia bring a freezer box full of soda pop, crackers and bologna sandwiches. This gives teachers a great stepping stone into looking at families around the world and their food and traditions maybe.

The writing is filled with the most vivid images. The relatives aren’t named but we felt like we are one of them. The joyous and emotional greeting which went on for hours, “You’d have to go through at least four different hugs to get to the kitchen to the front room. Those relatives!”

My favourite part of all is when everyone bunks into together, or sleeps on the floor arms and legs thrown over the next. “It was difficult, going to sleep with all that new breathing in the house.” This is one of those lines you linger over and savour.

Stephen Gammell’s illustrations are colourful and warm with humorous details that bring you back to the book over and over again. Each time you read it you find another tiny detail to over linger over.
Children love this page with the little girl feeding her sausage to the dog, the little boy in the centre whose plate has tipped and he’s losing his food. “Who will be straight there to grab it as it hits the floor?” Uncle up the back, is spilling his dinner onto the baby’s head.

As I read through the book and modelled my thinking to the children I paused at important sections that brought back memories to me. The children also spent time with their talking partners sharing their experiences and responding to the images.

Later on I give the class time in pairs and individually to browse it in depth. A wealth of information is gleaned just by picture-reading.
Belinda

Pamela Allen

Dimensions of Understanding

- Experience the aesthetic
- Think about the book long after they have finished reading
- Focus, advocate and evaluate

Comprehension Strategies

- Background knowledge
- Asking questions

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

Belinda is a hilariously illustrated and scripted tale of Old Tom who is left to milk the farm’s cow Belinda, when Bessie goes away for a few days. However Belinda won’t hear of it and Old Tom has to use all the tricks in the book to get Belinda milked so everyone on the farm can get their dinner.

This book can be used across the primary school with junior and even senior classes. Every child and adult I have read this to has been captivated and delighted by the drawings. I have never seen a cow captured with such character, expression and love. Just thinking about her rickety bow-legs, bony bottom, and delicious expressions from suspicion, anger, stubbornness and contentment makes me giggle.

I used this book with a group of Grade 1s to model questioning. I started by asking them what good readers do. Some suggested it was someone who could spell all the words and another said it was someone who could pronounce them properly but from up the back came a soft voice that answered “They make pictures in their head”. This was the class I had taken for lesson on “The Small Dragon” a few months earlier so it was pleasing to hear this. Others then caught on and said “They use their background knowledge.” “They ask questions.”

We discussed the cover using what the children already knew about cows (although initially a lively discussion was had whether it was actually a cow or a bull). They all agreed it was a cow because it had teats and an udder but they didn’t know the words for them. It amused me to see them use their hands to try and describe where they were located on a cow and what they you did with them. I had a number of kids giggling as they simulated milking a cow. I gave them the words telling them to think of under the cow to help them remember the word udder. They knew cows made milk for their babies called calves and that that is where the milk we drink came from. We then had a quick chat about how farmers milk cows to get milk for us to drink and that the cows keep making milk as long as we milk them.

The children had no text to text connections for Pamela Allen’s books so I shared mine. I told them I had read a lot her books and that most were funny with all the illustrations being drawn by her. I guessed this book would also be funny. I also guessed it would be a fiction book as a non-fiction book about cows would more likely have a photo of a cow not a drawing.
of one with a funny face. The cover was also pink covered in white flowers unlikely decoration for a non-fiction text.

Using the anchor chart, I told them that good readers ask questions before, during and after reading. This enabled them to focus on the text as they looked for answers and made the story more enjoyable and more exciting. We discussed that questions about the cover would be before-reading questions and that I would use the symbol B to record this on the chart. When we looked at the title I immediately had a question which I wrote on a sticky note; *Who is Belinda*. When we looked at the title page we saw a lady walking towards the cow. I asked if anyone had a question but a couple only gave me what they thought was happening so I asked them to listen to my question; _I wonder what that lady is going to do?_ and added that to the list. The children decided that it was another before-reading question so we gave coded it B.

I then began to read the book and very soon both of our before-reading questions were answered. Under the column on the anchor chart I wrote a big A so we knew that we had found the answers.

We continued through the book and I modelled some more questions at appropriate spots. It is important not to stop the flow of the book too much by asking too many questions. It is essential you read through the book a number of times before-hand and chose the best places to stop. When there is an obvious problem or decision to be made a question will always arise naturally. Some of the questions I modelled included; _I wonder why Belinda kicked Old Tom?_, _Will Old Tom be able to catch Belinda?_ and _How will he catch her?_ Some of the children started catching on and were keen to add their questions. I continued to support them as they attempted this. We decided we should add D to the anchor chart beside these questions so we’d know we had asked them during the reading of the text.

When Old Tom dressed up as Bessie I asked, _Will Belinda believe Old Tom is really Bessie?_ The children were very amused by the series of illustrations of Old Tom as he tried to fit into Bessie’s dress. Eventually he had to stuff a pillow down the front in an attempt to look more like her, and with her boots and hat on he was almost transformed. However the students were concerned that his big white beard would give him away and Belinda would kick him again.

As we read through the text the children became more focused and active in discovering the answers to questions as I read. I continued adding A in the far right-hand column, when my questions were answered. Most of the students were unable to ask questions so this will need a lot more modelling by the teacher. In our schools many children listen and read inactively, without monitoring their understanding and asking questions. I guess teachers have to take on a lot of this responsibility – children grow up with the idea that teachers ask the questions and they have to answer them. This paradigm shift means we have to model and support our students to engage in the text and kick-start their natural curiosity and become active readers. If you are an active reader the books will come alive; they will engage you.

At the end of the book when Bessie finds her mud-stained dress in the cupboard, I asked, _Will Old Tom tell Bessie want he did?_ I asked the students if my question would be answered. Many said yes but a couple said the book was over so we would never know. We looked back and found another question not answered, _Why did Belinda kick Old Tom?_ There were certainly quite a few clues in the book but no direct answer.
The students hadn’t been introduced to the term inferring so I used the idea of “having a good guess”. I modelled how I went back and reread sections of the text to find the clues for the unanswered question, Why did Belinda kick Old Tom? I thought aloud – After Tom tried unsuccessfully to chase Belinda, then catch Belinda with the rope and the carrot he sat and thought, and thought and thought and then he went into the house and got Bessie’s dress. I think he believed Belinda wouldn’t let him milk her because she was so used to Bessie. When he dressed up as Bessie Belinda was quite happy, so his reason must have been right. But we had to go back and do a lot of rereading and thinking to work that out so the answer wasn’t just there for us. When this happens we can call it ........ The children replied, “Having a good guess.”

I then gave them an opportunity to “have a good guess” and answer the after-reading question I asked, Will Old Tom tell Bessie? The children chatted in talking partners and then some gave their opinions to the class. One beautiful angelic girl in the front with huge doe-eyes whispered softly, I think he will tell Bessie why her dress is all muddy. When I asked her why she thought this she answered, Old Tom is a good person so he wouldn’t tell lies. When I asked her why she thought old Tom was good she said He kept trying really hard to milk Belinda because he didn’t want the animals to be hungry. That is why her dress got dirty. She had made a double inference – some of them had certainly got it.

They were confident about what background knowledge was so I tapped into this as well in order to informally introduce predicting by encouraging them to use their background knowledge and the text to make “guesses” about what the answers to the questions I posed might be. “What do you think will happen?” I agree with Debbie Miller (2011) when she talks about not so gradual release of responsibility. Some children get-it immediately and are busting to have-a-go, so don’t be afraid to let them otherwise we can squash their enthusiasm and make them frustrated. Use them as models for the other children who will take time to work it out. Remember talking partners are also a good way of allowing children an opportunity to have-a-go safely without any pressure to share their ideas in front of the class. As they gain confidence and want to share their thinking you will know immediately – they will be jumping out of their skin with excitement and waving their arms around like windmills. However if they are way off track and giving answers that are confusing everyone, including themselves, you can gently say that today you are going to show them the sorts of thinking you would like them to use next time and that they need to listen and think about what you are doing.

All the children threw up their hands but I asked them to wait for a minute before making their guess. Before you answer I want you to use your background knowledge. In particular I want you to use what you already know about books and their covers. That slowed them down but after thinking for a minute one bright little boy said very confidently that books often put the name and picture of a character on them and Belinda is probably a character in the book. Why would I stifle this child’s thinking by not giving him an opportunity?

**Questions send readers on quests. They cause readers to seek, pursue, and search for answers or deeper understanding.**

(Zimmermann and Hutchins, 2003, p. 80)
Imagine You’re a Pirate
Sally Grindley Ed

Dimensions of Understanding
- Create new background knowledge
- Revisit and rethink and explore other texts
- Remember

Comprehension Strategies
- Background Knowledge
- Asking Questions

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)
This lesson is based on a session recorded in Debbie’s Miller’s article The Thinking behind the Teaching in her latest book Teaching with Intention (2011). In her session the students were studying sharks by activating, building and revising background knowledge.

A group of Gr Ones and Twos were about to begin a unit on Pirates, so I started the lesson by listing on an anchor chart all the things they already knew about pirates. Giving the children time to collect their thoughts by chatting with their talk partner is an effective way to focus their thinking.

The class had been working on asking questions in fiction texts to help them focus and read with more understanding, so I told them how asking questions when reading nonfiction texts was helpful in focussing our research and finding the information we needed. Because the children had had previous experience with asking questions I asked them, “What words do questions start with?”

On another anchor chart I listed their answers. This became a good scaffold for students still not sure about the structure of a question.

“You know lots of information about pirates but to help us find out the important information about pirates we need to ask questions. I modelled some questions I had about pirates and then asked the students to take some time to think and talk to their talk partners and come up with a couple of questions. “What do you wonder about pirates.” From the discussion I listed a number of their questions came up including “Can girls be pirates?” We listed the questions on sticky notes and build a new anchor chart.

Comprehension2.docx
I asked them how we would find the answers to our questions and the children said “Look it up in a book.” “What sort of book?” I asked and held up a book on animals. The children all agreed no that wouldn’t help. “We need a book on pirates.” they all agreed.

Before we chose a book to help us find the answers to our questions we discussed that books came in two types - fiction and nonfiction. If we need information they decided we should look at nonfiction books because we read them to learn and were full of information. I showed the children a number of books and we made decisions on their type based on the text features we could see eg non-fiction texts often had an index, contents page, maps, photographs, diagrams, subheadings etc.

Two books in the classroom - The Night Pirates by Peter Harris and Pirate Stories edited by Sally Grindley were deemed to be fiction by the features the children found in them. I told them that although we could find lots of information about pirates in the pictures and text it may not be accurate, as nonfiction authors use their imaginations and magic to tell stories about pirates.

The book Imagine you’re a Pirate (left), by Lucy Clibbon was deemed to be non-fiction by its contents page, index, subheadings and labelled illustrations, and the children decided it would be a good text to use to find answers.

I read the text and we discussed images, labels and diagrams looking for answers to our questions.
As we found answers to our questions I recorded them on a working anchor chart we had set up.

Questions that were unanswered remained on chart as more texts were read looking for answers. Children used their independent reading time to continue to look for answers to these and more questions that were added to the chart over the course of the unit.
Charlie is My Darling
Malachy Doyle

Dimensions of Understanding
- Empathy

Comprehension Strategies
- Using background knowledge (text to self) to connect to characters and understand their feelings.
- Using text to text connections to understand setting and how it affects the plot
- Early predicting

A group of Grade Twos were in the early stages of using background knowledge to connect to text. The teacher asked me to model a lesson to the students.

It is important when you model background knowledge that you use books that you can personally connect with easily, but that are not too far away from the children’s experiences. This book by Malachy Doyle certainly ticks all these boxes. Also its expressive yet simple pencil and pastel pictures are very attractive to children.

This book is about a little boy (the narrator) who befriends an old lady, Ellen Adams, the owner of a very energetic dog named Charlie – who is “her darling”. Because Ellen Adams is old and frail she is unable to walk her Charlie Darling. We learn later however that Charlie is a dog who **likes to run, who likes to play, who likes to paddle, likes to breathe fresh air, and who likes to race back home to Ellen Adams.**

The boy first sees Charlie as he is walking past Ellen Adams' house. The dog is looking longingly out of the window and the boy feels he has to knock on the door. When he finds out that the old lady can’t take Charlie for walk he offers.
As I read the book I listed on a double entry-journal, my connections to the text and how my background knowledge helped me understand how the characters felt and what might happen.

When they get to the park, Charlie slips the lead and runs off. I used the illustration which showed how busy the park looked and my background knowledge about trying to catch my dog in a park to predict it would be very hard to get him back.

The children agreed and some related stories of trying to catch their dogs on the beach or out on the street. I modelled connecting to the text through my background knowledge by retelling the story of when my dogs went missing and how upset and worried I was.

I allowed the children to share their feelings too with their talking partners. I encouraged them to use their feelings to connect to Charlie and understand how he was feeling. One of the children said he would be even more upset because it wasn’t his dog. We then discussed the term “guilty” and how that feeling would relate to the little boy. He has lost the old lady’s dog. I asked the children how they knew she really loved the dog and they remembered how the lady had called the dog Charlie-my Darling. I asked them what they would do if they were the little boy. I let them discuss this in their talking partners.

While in the park Charlie Darling has lots of fun jumping in the lake, shaking himself over people then chasing a rabbit and disappearing. The little boy reluctantly goes back to Ellen Adams house but finds with delight that Charlie had run home. Next time he goes to the park he takes Ellen Adams with him and delights at the fact he now has 2 new friends – “one that is young and fast and yappy and the other that is old and slow and happy” - and he is very glad that they are both his friends!
The Rough-Face Girl
Rafe Martin

Dimensions of Understanding
- Recognise patterns
- Recognise influence of beliefs
- Remember

Comprehension strategies
- Text to Text and Text to the World Connections
- Use of background knowledge and the text to Predict.
- Modifying predictions when more information is presented
- Use of background knowledge and the text to determine word meanings

(Conducted over 2 /20 minute sessions)

This beautiful Algonquin traditional story is one of about 1500 “Cinderella stories” from around the world. Its messages are universal - true beauty is found in a person’s heart and the selfish should be punished but the down-trodden, who remain kind, should be rewarded.

With magical and often frightening illustrations, the Gr 7 class I was working with were immediately fascinated and eager to look at the book. I worked with two groups, who had been assessed using their results from the NAPLAN practise test. The “top group” had all scored well however the second group had scored poorly even though their decoding ages were on par with their chronological ages. Neither groups had had any experience with the comprehension strategies used in this support document.

I spent quite a while running through the 3 types of background knowledge and both groups picked up the concept quickly. Interestingly while modelling how to use text-to-text connections with the author Roald Dahl as an example, I discovered that the second group had very limited experiences - none of them had read any of his books, or even been read one of them and only one had seen the movie “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.”

I then modelled how my background knowledge about spiders might help me predict what might happen in a text. Using the cover of the children’s book “The Spider and the Fly” (Tony DiTerlizzi) I showed them how knowing that spiders eat flies could help me predict what the story might be about. The cover illustration reinforced this prediction with a sly, evil looking spider and a sweet innocent looking fly depicted. It would also enable me to predict what vocabulary I might come across.

I then asked them to use their background knowledge and the text (illustration and title) to predict who the girl on the cover of “The Rough-Face Girl” was and what the book might be about. Here again there was a gulf between the background knowledge of both groups. “The top group” immediately recognised the girl as being Native American. They spoke of the feather, her hair style, her clothing made of leather, the hand-stitching and even the pine trees as being clues to her origin. They spoke in talking partners about what they knew about
Native Americans and how this text-to-world background knowledge that could help them predict her origins and why she looked the way she did on the cover and what the story might be about. Their predictions showed metacognition (see below).

However I was stunned when I asked the second group to use their background knowledge to answer the question. Their world was so much smaller. *She is a school girl in her school uniform. Yeah, she got bullied in the playground. Yeah, someone belted her up, that’s why she has bandages on.* They had missed all the clues. This might then explain why their scores were lower. Their experiences with texts and the world seem to be so limited. Good readers read, develop their background knowledge and become better readers, just like in the saying, “The rich get, and the poor get poorer.” We have to give children every opportunity to widen their experiences; reading a wide variety of texts to them is one of the best ways.

It took me a long time to model how I used the details in the illustration to make my text-to-text and text-to-the-world connections about Native Americans.

I began reading, and on the first page we found text that would provide some text-to-text connections. The children recognised the beginning words “Once long ago…” as those used in fairy stories and traditional tales. We discussed other features that these genres had. The students and I listed the features of these – including magical beings and animals, good versus evil, triumph of the poor and down trodden etc and agreed *Would this be able to help us predict what might happen.* The groups discussed that yes we know that fairy tales have happy endings and the bad characters die or get punished. They also said that magic could solve problems and fix wrongs.

As soon as I got to the third page the top group were with me, and as I read “...there lived a poor man who had three daughters. The two older daughters were cruel and hard-hearted, and they made their youngest sister sit by the fire and feed the flames.” they all began waving their hands excitedly, *It’s just like Cinderella.* At this point we discussed the story of Cinderella...
and how using this text-to-text connection could help us with our predictions. I discussed with them how new information might want us to change or modify our predictions. They all wanted to do this so I gave them sticky notes and they enthusiastically added to their predictions.

As you can see in Helen’s modification of her prediction above, she is not only able to use her connections to fairy stories, in particular Cinderella, to modify her prediction but she knows why. She is thinking about her thinking.

Ishani is also able to modify her prediction based on her text-to-text connections with Cinderella (left).
The students then stuck their new prediction on top of their original one (above).

As we continued reading journal (left) to record the Cinderella and Rough-Faced Girl.

As the students picked up verbalised their new partners. As they become goal would then be that modifications, as they in their reading books and reading journals with reflections.

As I read the text I also modelled how the text and our background knowledge could help us work-out the meaning for unknown words. Words peculiar to Native American culture in particular tricked most of the students, eg moccasins, buckskin, wigwam. It did not take them long though to be able to verbalise, first in talking partners, and then to the whole group, what they already knew about Native Americans, and how the words and pictures, could help them with the meanings. I was delighted when one boy in the second group said thoughtfully, "Well Native Americans had lots of buffalo (we had discussed this in the previous lesson when listing all we - well mainly I - knew about their culture) so maybe buckskin is the skin of a buffalo." Then another said, "Hang-on there were deer too and deer have softer and less hairy skin and if you look at the picture the clothes are really soft looking so maybe it is a deer." Then one girl got very excited and said, "You know I think a buck is a male, so maybe it is a male deer skin."

Previously they had no strategies to try and work this out now they were really thinking!
(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

That’s What Friends Are For is a great book for showing children how authors set up problems for their characters and then go about trying to solve them. It is also perfect for using background knowledge to make predictions.

We read the title together and the Gr 1 and 2 children, with their talking partners, discussed what friends did for each other. Most of them came up with ideas like “They play together.” “They share their lunch.” But two boys decided that friends should “…help each other.” This was what I was looking for so we discussed this in more depth.

We also looked at the cover and made predictions about where the story was set. The students weren’t familiar with the term “setting” so I explained what it is and by using other books in the class library we predicted where those stories might be set too. One book had a kangaroo on the cover so the students decided it must have been set in Australia, and one book had a man fishing in a boat on it so the setting would probably be the sea. I asked them if they thought What Friends Are For was set in Australia, and they all agree it wasn’t because you don’t find elephants in Australia.

We also looked at the cover and predicted using the illustration who some of the characters might be.

I then explained to them: Authors often put problems in their stories and then get the characters to try and solve the problems. In this story Theodore the elephant has a problem and all his friends try and solve it. Let’s read the first page and see what his problem is.
On the first page we learnt that Theodore the elephant has a sore leg and can’t walk to the other side of the jungle to meet his cousin. I asked the children to discuss Theodore’s problem with their talking partner and try and work out a solution. As I listened into their conversations I noticed they were struggling. I asked them why it was so difficult to work out a solution and one of the children said, “Elephants are really big and heavy.” I drew their attention to the fact that they were using their background knowledge about elephants to try and solve the problem. When I asked them what they could do to help a mouse with a sore leg the solutions came thick and fast. *Hrm* that tells me that even though Theodore just has a sore leg, because he is an elephant and so huge and heavy solving his problem is going to be very difficult for his friends isn’t it? Let’s read on and see if one of Theodore’s friends can eventually solve the problem for him.

As I read the story we listed the solutions each friend gave Theodore and whether their advice solved his problems.

After reading about the advice the bird and the daddy-long-legs gave the Theodore I think I can predict what advice the friend will give Theodore. Birds can fly so that is what the bird advised Theodore to do. Daddy-long-legs have 8 legs so if one leg is hurt he has 7 more to use. If I think about the animal and how it moves I think I will be able to predict what advice each friend will give Theodore. So if I use my background knowledge about Theodore’s friends it will help me predict what advice each might give him. Let me see... the next friend who gives him advice is a monkey. *Hrm* what do I know about monkeys? I have seen monkeys in trees and I know they spend most of their lives up there swinging from branch to branch. That is how they move around the jungle, so my prediction is that the monkey will advise Theodore to swing through the trees. Let’s read on and see if I was right......... Yes I was right, that is exactly what he said. Using my background knowledge helped me predict that one.

Now I want you to think about what you know about elephants and tell me what you think will happen if Theodore swings on a branch with his trunk.

Using their background knowledge the children discussed in talking partners and all agreed the branch would break because Theodore was very heavy so Theodore’s problem would still not be solved.

Let’s read on.........Next comes his friend the crab. I am going to think about what I know about a crab and how it moves to predict what advice he might give Theodore. *Hrm* I saw a TV program that explained what happens when a crab loses its leg. Do any of you know? The children had no background knowledge for this so I explained that crabs grew another leg and maybe this is what the crab will advise Theodore to do. When we read on we found that yes
that was exactly what he suggested. I asked the children to use their background knowledge about elephants to help them decide if this advice would solve his problem and the children all agreed that no it wouldn’t be much help because elephants can’t grow another leg!

Eventually the lion suggests he roar and call all the animals together and the opossum then gives Theodore the advice he needs: “Let’s go and bring Theodore’s cousin to him!” Problem solved.

After we had read book I explained to the students how when authors write stories they often have another life story hidden in the first story. *I think the author had a hidden story in there for us, one that we can use in our life. This story was about an elephant who had a problem and how most of his friends just gave him advice until one friend, the opossum, actually helped him instead of telling him what to do. Hmm I think the author is trying to tell us something about how we should treat our friends. Does anyone think they might know the hidden message from the author?*

A couple of children in Gr 3 threw up their hands and together said, “You should help your friends”.

*Yes I agree, I think that is what the author wanted to tell us to do in our life. Don’t just give advice – help your friends. Good thinking everyone.*
Where The Wild Things Are

Maurice Sendak

Dimensions of Understanding

- Think about book long after it is finished
- Focus & advocate
- Experience aesthetic

Comprehension Strategies

- Use of background knowledge and text to infer word meanings
- Use background knowledge (text to self), and text to visualise

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

“Where The Wild Things Are” is one of the best-loved children’s book ever written, and was chosen by Barack Obama to read to a captive audience of children at the Easter Party this year at the White House. I am not sure who enjoyed it the most?

I used it with a group of Prep children to teach them how good readers determine a word’s meaning by using the text and their background knowledge, and also to introduce the strategy Visualising. First I hid the text in a folder so they couldn’t see the cover and then talked to them about visualising.

Visual means that you can see something. When you visualise you see pictures in your head. Great readers visualise when they read. I am going to show you how I visualise. Watch and listen carefully. Just say I am reading a story about a little girl who’s Mum had never let her have her own birthday party. She is very sad. So to understand why she is so sad I am going to make pictures in my head – like a movie you watch on TV. Hmm I will close my eyes and use my background knowledge to remember some of the birthday parties I have been to. That will help me make the best movie.

I then related to the children all the things I could hear, see and smell at the party....my family and friends with lots of presents covered in pretty paper and colourful bows, beautiful balloons of all different colours.....etc I continued to recount what I did at the party until I looked at them and said, Wow it was such fun. Hmmm when I think of the pictures in my head it makes me understand what the little girl is missing on and why she felt so sad. While I read the story Where The Wild Things Are we are going to have a go at visualising. It helps us to understand and enjoy the story more.
Firstly I asked them what the word “wild” meant. They all made roaring noises and clawed fists, so we talked about what wild things might be. The children talked with their talking partners and I heard many of them saying that tigers, lions and wolves were wild and the book was probably about those sorts of animals. “They are really vicious,” one boy said.

I told them I was going to cover the pictures while I read so we could have-a-go at visualising. *Good readers use their background knowledge and the story to make pictures in their minds.* The book was in a folder so the cover couldn’t be seen. I began reading.

It was essential that the students understand the word “mischief” in the first line of the text. “That night Max wore his wolf suit and made mischief of one kind ...” Without the concept that Max was being very naughty and was sent to his room they would never understand the reason for Max’s “trip” to Where The Wild Things Are. I asked the children to look at the pictures of Max (above) and we discussed what he looked like and what he was doing. I asked them to think about what he was wearing (a wolf suit) and when I got them to re-enact Max’s actions and facial expressions I kept reminded that they had decided a wolf was wild so that if they were acting like Max when he was wearing a wolf suit how would they act? “Wild!!” some of the children called out. So the children were then able to make the jump and infer that mischief must mean to be wild and do naughty things.

They then used their background knowledge to remember a time when they made mischief. I also asked them to remember what their Mums did when she found out. The discussions revolved around fighting with their siblings, spilling things, however many of the children just said “I was naughty,” but were unable to verbalise what they did wrong. Maybe these were just a very well behaved bunch of kids! So I told them all the naughty things I could remember doing as a child, which really tickled them.
I continued to read the text and we discovered that Max, had yelled at his Mum when she asked him to behave and he was sent to his room. The children were all quite shocked at the thought of yelling at your Mum and all agreed that not only would they have been sent to their room but they would probably have had a good belting as well.

The next day we spent some time retelling what had happened yesterday in the story and then I read the next page but hid the illustration. “That very night in Max’s room a forest grew...and grew...”

Remember how I visualised yesterday about the birthday party? Well when I read this part about the forest I remembered being lost in a forest when I was a child and I could see all these huge trees with massive trunks covered in vines. The tops of the trees were so high they were out of sight......I continued on with my description of what I thought the forest would look like and as I did I quickly sketched my mental images (see left). When I had finished I discussed with them how important it was to do a quick sketch and that it didn’t matter if it didn’t look perfect. *We don’t colour in we just draw quickly – it is just a way of remembering what the pictures in your head were like.*

The children were delighted with this and excited when I told them the next day that I thought they might like to have a go at sketching their mind pictures. We continued reading about Max as he ...”sailed away for a year and a day to where the Wild Things Are....”

I had hidden the pictures again and we spent some time reading and discussing the text and finding the author’s clues for what the Wild Things looked like ...”yellow eyes....terrible roars, terrible teeth ....terrible claws...” I wanted them to extend their concept of wild things from real wild animals to imaginary animals so we discussed what a fantasy wild thing might look like. We talked about other books that had fantasy wild creatures and noted their features. Children then discussed their wild
things with their talking partners and then draw their mind pictures on sticky notes to share with the class.

With the wild things on display we talked about the story. I was hoping they could look past the literal text and infer what had really happened. I talked to them about how in the beginning Max was up to mischief and got into trouble and how he sailed away to the island Where the Wild Things Are where he became King of the Wild Things and tamed them. They had a big rumpus but after a while he became bored and wanted to go home. I asked the children how could Max’s dinner still have been warm if he had been away for so long?

Children’s mental images of The Wild Things. Most of them got the idea of quick sketches and were able to give their talking partner the more vivid details of their “mind pictures.”

Do you think he really went away to where the Wild Things Are? “Oh yes,” they all replied. Are you sure? “Oh yes!!” they insisted. Even when I shared my thinking (inference) that Max may have dreamt the whole visit to where the wild things are the children would have nothing of it. They insisted he really sailed away and had an adventure.

This is why picture books are so wonderful. Children of this age will understand and take the text at face value - quite literally, but as they mature as readers they will be able to look deeper into the text and start filling in the missing pieces.
Did Max’s Mum stay angry with him for long? “No she didn’t.” I think the author is telling us that Mum will always love and forgive us. The children all nodded and smiled. They got this!
Dimensions of Understanding

- Extrapolate
- Find patterns

Comprehension Strategies

- Use background knowledge and the title to predict
- Summarise using Who, Wanted, But, So Strategy

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

This book by internationally acclaimed author and illustrator of children’s books, Anthony Browne is full of teasing visual jokes and an important message. To summarise the book using the Who-Wanted-But-So Strategy is it essential that children understand the text and get the big picture. They need to come to understand why Mrs Piggott was unhappy and left, and how the family changed because they needed her so much.

As I read the book we discovered that Mrs Pigott spent all her time at home looking after her demanding and ungrateful husband and sons. As well as having a full-time job she cooked and cleaned but she is completely taken for granted. We looked at the illustrations and I pointed out that the photos of Mrs Pigott were different from those of Mr Piggott and the boys. It took the children awhile to see that the pictures of Mrs Piggot were very dark and murky looking but the photos of the boys were very bright and colourful.
To help the children make the connection I encouraged them to talk with their partners about how Mrs Piggott would feel about having to do all the jobs without any help and with her family telling her to hurry up all the time. The children decided that Mrs Piggott would be very unhappy and sad. I thought aloud the connections I was making between the drab colourless photos and how Mrs Piggott was feeling. *I think the illustrator is giving us a clue to how Mrs Piggott is feeling. I think he made the pictures look sad like Mrs Piggott’s feelings. The pictures are drab and sad-looking just like we think Mrs Piggott feels.*

One day Mr Piggott and his sons return home to find Mrs Piggott gone and a note saying “You are pigs.” The children discussed this in their talking partners and all agreed that she went away “...because the family wouldn’t help her.”

As I read on we watched as the male Piggotts underwent some curious changes, along with their surroundings. The children delighted in finding pigs popping up everywhere in the house - the telephone, the taps, the wallpaper...even the moon through the window had pig images on it. Mr Piggott and the boys had turn into pigs and the house becomes like a pig-sty. They eventually end up rooting around on the floor for food. *I think the author/illustrator is having fun with the pigs by putting them everywhere. He is also reinforcing how the husband and boy’s behaviour was just like pigs. At the end of the week I will put the book in your library and you can have a close look at the pictures and maybe have a go at reading the book again.*
Mrs Piggott returns, but with conditions. From now on everyone helps with the chores - the boys made their beds and Dad learned to iron. They cooked together. Mum also did her chores - she mended the car.

Now the children had a good understanding of the text I modelled how we could summarise the story. They were familiar with the term retelling which requires the students to recount the details of story including setting, characters and plot (literary texts). However in a summary we only retell the most important points. A way to do this is to use the scaffold strategy Who, Wanted, But, So.

On the working anchor chart I modelled children how this was done. First I set up questions and then used the story to answer them.

“Who was the most important person in the story?”
I modelled first one, “I think the most important person in the story was Mum. Mum was being taken for granted and had to do all the chores. Dad and the boys were rude to her and didn’t appreciate what she was doing. Mum had enough and left and the boys couldn’t cope without her and realised how much she did for them and how much they missed her. If Mum hadn’t gone, the problem would not have been solved and nothing would have changed. At the beginning she was sad and at the end everyone was happy. Without Mum there would have been no story.”

What did Mum want? Some of the children by this stage had caught on and were keen to have-a-go. They all agreed that Mum wanted to the family to help her do the chores and were able to justify this by referring back to the text - “the pictures were dark so she was sad”, “She left them’. “When they helped her she stayed.”

But did they help her at the start? The children all agreed that no they didn’t.

So what did Mum do? I again lead them back to the text and we discussed Mum’s solution to her problem which was to go and teach them all a lesson. Problem solved.
Mum

wanted Dad and the boys to help her with the jobs

but they didn’t

so Mum left and came back home when Dad and the boys decided they missed her and agreed to change their ways.
Clancy and Millie
Libby Gleeson

Dimensions of Understanding

- Empathy
- Emotional response

Comprehension Strategies

- Use of background knowledge to connect to characters in text.
- Use illustrations to make inferences about the plot.
- Use illustrations to make inferences, and the text (words and illustrations) to infer how the characters are feeling.
- Early synthesising

(Conducted over 2 /15 minute sessions)

In the book “Clancy and Millie”, Clancy’s family has just moved house. To understand how Clancy might be feeling I asked the children to think about how they might feel if they had to move to a new house. You might have to leave your school and all your friends. Talk to your partner about how you might feel………. How do you think Clancy will feel in this book?

Before we look at Clancy and his feelings I am going to show you how to use the illustrations to work out what the author is trying to tell us. Do you see all these houses on the first page? I am wondering which one is Clancy’s house. The text doesn’t help me- it just says “Clancy moved from his old house”, so I must look carefully at the picture to see if that will help. Hmm… let me see. There is a house with a bike outside. That might be Clancy’s bike. What about the green house at the end. Ah look it has boxes outside and I can see a For Sale sign. Yes I think that will be Clancy’s house because when you move you might sell your house and you need boxes to put your stuff in when you move.”
Ensure students can justify their inferences by using “because.”

Now let’s read on and see if we can work out how Clancy is feeling. Remember we will look at the text to see what he is saying and the illustrations to see what he is doing and how he looks.

As we did this I recorded our thinking on my anchor chart.

“It’s too big,” whispered Clancy. His face looks sad, standing still, his head is raised looking at the new house and he is clutching his toy.

**Inference** - Clancy is not happy about moving to the new house.

Still clutching toy, face sad, kicking stones outside new new house.

**Inference** - Clancy is bored and unhappy.
Clancy is playing with boxes, his toy has been put down, he is smiling.

**Inference** – Clancy is feeling happier.

Clancy’s neighbour (sic) asks if she can play, Clancy readily agrees. “Let’s play Three Little Pigs,” says Clancy. They are talking and smiling, the toy is still down, and they built houses out of the boxes.

**Inference** - Clancy is feeling better.

At the end of the book we see Clancy and Millie heading into Clancy’s new house, they are holding hands and smiling.

**Inference** – Clancy and Millie are now good friends and Clancy is now much happier in his new house

*I think this story wasn’t really just about Clancy and Millie. When authors write they often have a hidden story, a life story which gives us a message. I think the author was trying to tell us that we shouldn’t be sad when we move to a new house because we will make new friends. Clancy was sad at the beginning but was happy at the end when he met Millie. That’s what happens in our lives too. We make new friends when we move house too.*

It takes children a long time to be able to synthesise so they will need you to model this strategy often.
From Egg to Chicken

Lifecycles: Series

Dimensions of Learning

- Learners create schema
- Learners recognise text organisations

Comprehension Strategies

- Recognise text organisation of non-fiction texts
- Use background knowledge to guide questioning
- Use questions to guide determining importance

(Conducted over 2/15 minute sessions)

Before I read the book I showed the students a fiction book – “Where The Wild Things Are”, and asked them what they thought the book would be about and how the text was organised. We discussed the term fiction and listed all the features of fiction texts including such things as a beginning, middle and end, settings, characters and how these characters solve problems posed by the author and how the problems are solved.

When I showed them the cover of From Egg to Chicken I asked the students what sort of text it might be and what they predicted the text would be about. The children predicted that the book would be full of facts and would have no characters or particular setting. I then talked to the children about author’s purpose. When an author writes a book like this (holding up “Where the Wild Things Are”) he writes it to entertain us – to make us sad, or scared or to make us laugh. We connect with the character and feel we understand him. However when an author writes a book like this (holding up From “From Egg to Chicken”) can anyone tell me

the author’s purpose? I asked the children to discuss it first in their talking partners and as I listened to their conversations I heard many of the children talking about “learning” and when we got back together as a whole class we discussed this and the children predicted that they would learn about how chickens grow in eggs and about their life-cycles. I then talked to them about how authors wanted us to get the facts as efficiently as possible (that means as many facts about what we are researching as quickly as possible). The children then helped me list all the features that would help a reader find information in a non-fiction text quickly. We discussed
how the contents page, index and headings, maps, labels etc would do this.

*When you are looking for facts in a non-fiction text it is important that you use these text organisational features to help you.*

Another thing good readers do when reading information texts is they think about what they already know about the topic before they start reading. This helps them predict words they might come across and guides them in asking questions about things they don’t know or understand. Do you know what we call this? One very excited boy up the back jumped up and said *Background knowledge!!*

After discussing their background knowledge in talking partners I then used a working anchor chart to record the children’s prior knowledge. I explained how thinking about what I already knew about chickens and eggs would help me to prepare to read the text and it got me thinking and wondering about things I didn’t know. These wonders I turned into questions and I recorded them on the anchor chart for the students to see (below). The three questions I wanted to find answers for were -

- What does the chicken eat in the egg?
- How does the chicken breathe in the egg?
- How long does the chicken stay in the egg?

I also reminded the students that we when we read the text we also need to check that our background knowledge about chickens and eggs is correct because sometimes we have information in our background knowledge which is confused or wrong.

I reminded the students that the author wanted us to be able to find the information as efficiently as possible so had organised the text to enable us to do this. I asked them to remember our previous discussion about the features in non-fiction texts which would enable me to do this. We decided the Contents would help us. *How do I know which heading the information I need will be under?* We looked at the first question and decided that this question was about what happened before the chicken hatched. So we went through the Contents and decided the chapter "Inside the Egg" on page 12 would be a good place to start.
As I read the text we checked the facts about chickens and eggs that we had listed from our background knowledge, and ticked off those that we could corroborate. As we found facts that helped answer my question, we wrote the key words in the middle column. Any details or interesting facts from our reading we listed in the right column.

We only got a few pages into the book so the teacher planned to continue the lesson on the following days. I encouraged her to use the working anchor chart as a guide to writing up a new information report on “From Egg to Chicken” using the notes we had taken about our background knowledge and the new information we discovered that answered our questions. We discussed that other texts may need to be used if our questions were not fully answered using this book.
A Fisherman’s Tale
Keith Faulkner & Jonathan Lambert

Dimensions of Understanding

- Recognise patterns

Comprehension strategies

- Use visualising to retell text
- Early synthesising

(Conducted over 3/15 minute sessions)

This lesson is based on Debbie Miller’s article I Can Create Mental Images To Retell and Infer Big Ideas which was printed in The Reading Teacher Vol 66 Issue 5 pp 360-364, 2013 International Reading Association.

You will need to use a story that has repetitive structure eg The Magic Fish (Freya Littledale, Scholastic, 1992). I used The Fisherman’s Tale (Keith Faulkner, Blackie Children’s books, 1994) which is a bright and fun flap book.

In the first session the children and I discussed the learning intention (Retell stories by creating mental images). The children had previously done a unit on visualising and were confident about sketching without worrying too much about the image. It is important students don’t fret about whether their image is accurate or not. “I can’t draw a whale!” is the last thing you want to hear. Ensure you model what a sketch looks like so children get the idea.

The story tells of a little boy who goes fishing and catches a fish. He brings it home and puts it in a jar as a pet, but the fish outgrows the jar and has to be put in a fish tank. It is obvious the little fish is actually a whale and the whale continues to outgrow the containers it is put in until on the last page the boy releases it into the sea.

I read the book and verbally shared my mental images at the first few key points in the story (when the whale has to be moved to a new container). The children go the idea quickly and I then encouraged them to share their images with their talk partner. I listened in to check whether they needed any more modelling and how confident they are at sharing their mental images.

We reviewed our learning intention and I asked them to hold their thinking for tomorrow’s lesson.

On the second reading I give the children clip boards and strips of paper folded into a number of
sections that reflected the five key parts of the story. I called them thinking strips.

At each key point I stopped and asked children to draw in each cell of their thinking strip what is happening in story. “Where has the boy put the baby whale now?” “In the bath tub.” “Okay I want you to remember your mental image from yesterday. Take some time to focus on that big old bath tub and then sketch what you see in the next box on your thinking strip. Label your sketch. This will help you when you retell the story tomorrow.” All the children eagerly yet quickly sketched their images onto the strips.

The next day I asked the students to look at their mental images on their thinking strips and for a few minutes retell the story in their minds. I walked around and prompted a couple of students who needed a help getting started. I then asked them to go somewhere in the classroom with their talk partner and take it in turns retelling the story. I worked with the couple of children I had noticed earlier, to prompt them when needed.

We then talked as a class about how the thinking strips helped us to remember our mental images and retell the story. When you are reading independently this is a strategy you can use.

Debbie Miller often leaves the last cell so children can attempt to synthesise. I asked the children what they thought the author was trying to tell us. This is often tricky for children to do when they are young. However modelling an lot so practise will get them started.

One child in the class got it when he said, “You should check first before you bring home a fish in case it is a whale.”
APPENDIX

Comprehension Strategies

Think-aloud

Sticky Notes

Anchor Charts

Talking Partners
### Comprehension Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Good readers......</th>
<th>Prompts.....</th>
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</table>
| Monitor Meaning Fix-up Strategies          | • Follow our inner conversation  
• Listen to the voice in our head and leave tracks of our thinking  
• Notice when we lose the meaning and try Fix-Up Strategy:  
  • monitor inner voice to focus our thinking  
  • stop and go back  
  • reread to enhance understanding  
  • identify what’s confusing  
  • consciously select the best strategy  
• Read, Write, and Talk - think their way through the text | • I don’t understand the part where...  
• This _____ is not clear  
• I can’t figure out...  
• This is a tricky word because...  
• I am confused about _____so I will use ____ to help me understand it.                                                                                                                                 |
| Connecting to Text using Background knowledge | • Activate background knowledge and make connections between our experiences (text to self), between texts (text to text) and the world (text to the world)  
• Know everyone’s background knowledge for a topic is different, depending on their experiences and what they have read about a topic.  
• Follow the Text Signposts - Use nonfiction features to guide learning  
• Change our background knowledge as we read. Merge thinking with new learning, (some of ideas are confirmed, and some are proven wrong).  
• Throw out ideas that we had which are proven wrong.  
• Build background knowledge - add new background knowledge to our mental files when we read new information about a topic. | • What happens in this story is like what happened when I _____.  
• I already know ________ about that topic.  
• As I read this passage, it reminded me of my own life in this way_____.  
• That sounds like an experience I have had ________.  
• Thinking about what I already know helped me understand this part of my reading by ________.  
• This reminds me of another book I read ________.  
• How did my understanding about one book help me get at the meaning of another book?                                                                                                                                 |
| Mental Images (Visualising)                | • Make the words on the page real  
• Create a movie of the text in our heads  
• build meaning as they go by visualising | • I visualised _______because the text said ________.  
• This is what I saw, heard, felt, smelt, and tasted when I read those words.                                                                                                                                 |
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<tr>
<th>Asking Questions</th>
<th>Predicting</th>
<th>Making Inferences</th>
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| - Ask questions of the text before, during and after reading to help us:  
  o to propel our reading further  
  o to add to our understanding and to gain information.  
- Ask thin and thick questions to expand thinking  
- Realise that sometimes the answers aren’t in the text or illustrations and we have to look somewhere else or infer.  
- Wonder about the text to understand big ideas | - Make a smart guess about what’s going to happen next  
- Preview the text  
- Use our background knowledge and make connections  
- Identifying text structures (see App 6) to help them make predictions as we read,  
- Keep track of our predictions and revise them based on any new information. | - Make judgments  
- Use mental images  
- Allow for personal analysis of text  
- Read between the lines  
- Make own discoveries without the author directly stating |
| - I wonder..........?  
- How could that be?  
- Why do I think that?  
- I feel...  
- I think...  
- I predict...  
- I’ll bet...  
- I imagine...  
- Are my predictions confirmed or do I need to modify them based on what I now know? | - This is a tricky word. What word would make sense here?  
How can I infer its meaning from its place in this sentence?  
- Authors leave clues for me as I read. Did I put them together to figure out the big ideas? |
| - Asking questions has helped me understand __________. |
### Determining Importance
- Distinguish between: fiction and nonfiction
- Always look over the entire selection to get an idea of what the topic is about
- Get the bigger ideas and themes
- Use text features and clues to help you figure out the important information (e.g., pictures, graphs, key words, and headings)
- Target key information - code the text to hold thinking
- Construct main ideas from supporting details
- Create a Topic/Detail/Response chart
- Determine what to remember - separate interesting details from important ideas
- Spotlight new thinking - learn to use a Fact/Question/Response chart
- Distinguish your thinking from the author’s - contrast what you think with the author’s perspective
- As I read that passage, what was the most point important here?
- What is essential to remember?
- Do I think this author was for or against this idea?
- What information did the author present to build evidence for his case?
- What do I think the author is trying to tell me?
- What is important to me? How is this different to the author?
- What do you think the reader would learn from this?

### Summarising
- Sum up, retell the most important details of the story so far to make sure they understand and remember.
- Key people/items
- Key events and relationships
- Key places
- Key words and synonyms
- Key ideas and concepts
- First _________. Then _________.
- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- What was the outcome?
- Is the essential piece of information included?
### Synthesising

- Read to Get the Gist
  - Read, Write, and Reflect - Create a summary response to extend thinking

- Read, Think, and React - Paraphrase and respond to information
- Take individual pieces of information and combine them with our background knowledge
- Form a new picture or ideas from the facts and information
- Combine the strategies of making connections, visualising, question inferring, and summarising
- Ask ourselves, “How has our thinking changed from reading the text?”
- Reread and Rethink - rethink misconceptions and tie opinions to the text

- Are interesting but nonessential facts or details eliminated?
- Would someone who read my summary understand the main points of the text?

- I have learned that...
- This gives me an idea...
- Now I understand that...
- Has your thinking changed after reading this passage?

### Multiple Strategy Instruction

Strategies are not to be used singly—good readers do not read a book and *only* make predictions. Rather, good readers use multiple strategies constantly.

Students eventually need to be able to move fluidly through the various strategies when reading. They also need to understand when and why to select and use a specific strategy and how it will lead to deeper understanding.