

BOOSTING COMPREHENSION

Chloe predicts what might happen next in a book. Thomas draws pictures about the stories he reads. And Jayla puts on puppet shows to act out her favorite books. These children are deepening their understanding of stories. Doing the activities in this guide will strengthen your youngster's reading comprehension, too.

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TAKE A PICTURE WALK

A picture is worth a thousand words! Try this idea to show your child how looking at illustrations before reading helps her get ready to understand a book.

Choose a picture book your youngster hasn't read before, and cover up the words with sticky notes. Then, have her go on a "picture walk" by turning the pages and describing what she sees. *Example:* "The bulldozer is scooping up dirt."

Now remove the sticky notes, and read the book with her. Ask your child to point out information she picked up just from the pictures.

ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE



Does your youngster know that everything he learns gets "saved" in his brain—just like files are saved on a computer? Help him "activate" this background knowledge to improve his comprehension.

Have your child draw a picture of his brain on a sheet of paper. Look at a book cover together, and let him fill the brain with words that come to mind. For a story about the beach, he might write *ocean, waves, swim, sandcastle, bucket, and hot*. Ask him to tell you about the words. ("You need sand and water to make a sandcastle.") These are things he knows about the beach!

Then, read the book with him. Each time he spots a word he wrote, he gets to put a check mark beside it on his "brain." He'll see that knowing something about a topic makes a story easier to understand—and more fun to read.

MAKE FLASHLIGHT PREDICTIONS

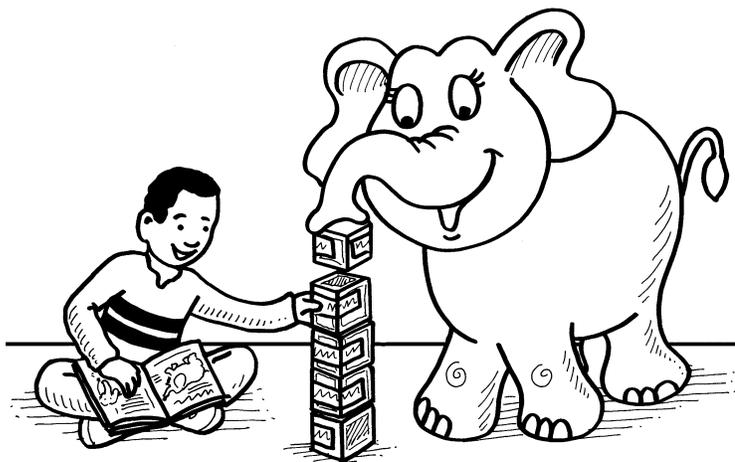
Thinking about what could happen next can deepen your youngster's comprehension. Encourage her to make predictions as she reads with this activity.

Take turns holding a flashlight while you read a book together. When the person holding the flashlight has a prediction, she turns on the light and says, "Light bulb moment!" Then, she shares what she predicts will happen and why. ("I think the dragon that Harold drew with his purple crayon will eat all the apples on the tree.")

Keep passing the flashlight back and forth and sharing predictions until you reach the end of the book. *Note:* The flashlight holder may also call a "light bulb moment" to revise a prediction she has already made. ("Oh, the dragon scared Harold. Now I predict Harold will draw a way to escape.")



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BUILD A MAIN IDEA TOWER

Here's a hands-on way for your youngster to explore main ideas and details in nonfiction.

Let your child choose a nonfiction book. After you've both read it, ask him what it was mainly about (for instance, how and where elephants live). He can write this main idea on a strip of masking tape and put the tape on a building block. Now search the book for details about the main idea, and help him label another block for each one. *Examples:* "Eat grass and leaves," "Live in Africa and Asia," "Use trunks to hug." Finally, suggest that he stack the blocks with the "main idea" block at the top. He'll see that details "support" the main idea.

CREATE CHARACTER AWARDS

Encourage your youngster to get to know storybook characters by giving them awards. That will help her better understand characters' traits, feelings, and actions, increasing her overall comprehension of the story.

After reading a book, suggest that your child think of an award that each character deserves. For *Make Way for Ducklings* (Robert McCloskey), maybe she'll give Mrs. Mallard an award for being careful and Michael an award for being helpful. Now she could use construction paper and crayons to make certificates. She can write each character's name on the award, along with the title of the book and what the award is for.

Let your youngster hang the awards on her bedroom door and use them to tell you about the characters.



TRADE CLUES

Play this game to help your child draw conclusions from a story.

Skim through a book (without showing it to your youngster), and write down three sentences that could lead him to a conclusion about the plot. *Examples:* "Jack's mother took his temperature." "Jack watched through his bedroom window as other kids played outside." "Jack was excited to go back to school." Ask your child what he might conclude (Jack was sick).

Now let your youngster browse through a book and write three sentences for you to use to reach a conclusion.

RETELLING A TALE

When your child tells a story in his own words, he strengthens his reading comprehension. Retelling is also something he does in school—it shows his teacher how well he understands what he reads. Use these ideas to make retelling fun at home!

PAINT A STORY MURAL. Have your youngster paint story events on separate sheets of paper labeled "Beginning," "Middle," and "End." When his paintings dry, help him tape them together and hang his mural in a hallway. Then, he can pretend to be a museum tour guide and lead your family down the hallway, using his paintings to retell the story.



PUT ON A PUPPET SHOW. Let the next book your children read become the inspiration for a puppet show. Give them brown paper lunch bags or old socks to turn into puppets. They could draw each character's face on the bottom of a bag or glue craft materials onto a sock. It's show time! Listen as they retell the story in their own words, using a different voice for each character.

FOLLOW A PATH. Ask your child to draw a long, winding line on pavement with sidewalk chalk. Next, help him add these labels spaced out along the line: "Characters," "Setting," "Problem," and "Solution." He can pretend the line is a tightrope and walk along it. Whenever he gets to a label, he retells that part of the story before moving on. For example, on "Setting," he'll describe where the story takes place. ("The brothers lived on a big farm with green fields and a red barn.")