

Reading Strategies

How Can I Help My Students Read and Understand the Text?

Social studies teachers do not have to be reading teachers to help students read and understand their texts. Often, poor readers lack interest in the topic, have trouble concentrating, cannot understand a word or sentence, or are confused about how the information fits together. These problems can frustrate the student and the teacher, but there are strategies that can be used to improve comprehension and retention of information. Using these reading strategies helps students who need additional support with reading while strengthening the skills of strong readers.

Set Reading Purposes

Reading is a purposeful activity. We read to find answers to specific questions, satisfy curiosity, and be entertained.

- Have students preview the reading selection. Tell students to read the title, headings, and subheadings. Draw students' attention to diagrams, tables, and other visuals along with their captions. Discuss how these will help comprehension.
- Prompt students to predict what they might learn from the selection based on their preview. Invite them to list additional questions they hope to answer through the reading. Have them identify possible problems, such as unfamiliar words or ideas, to watch for as they read.
- Discuss the need to “shift gears” in reading speed and attention when reading. Support students as they plan how best to read a selection—slowly to watch for new vocabulary and ideas or quickly to review previously learned ideas. They can also discuss new information with a buddy as they read.

Vocabulary Development

Vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension are closely related.

- Relate new vocabulary to known words and ideas. After introducing a word and its definition, discuss synonyms or related words. Invite students to talk about the word, its meaning, and its use in the text so that they become familiar with the concept.
- When students encounter an unfamiliar word while reading, have them try to pronounce it aloud. Sometimes saying the word will trigger their memory of its meaning.
- As students read, help them use prefixes (word parts added to the beginning of base words), suffixes (word parts added to the end of base words), and roots (word elements from which other words are formed) as clues to decipher the meaning of words.
- Encourage students to use the context of surrounding words and sentences to determine a word’s meaning.
- If context clues and structural analysis fail to help students understand a key word, have them find the definition in a glossary or dictionary. If the word is not critical for understanding, have students note the word and read on. Later, have students reread the word in context. If the meaning is still unclear, have them consult the dictionary.

| Common Prefixes | Meanings | Examples |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| un–, dis–, non–, im–, and il– | “not” or “the opposite of” | unwrapped, dishonest, nonprofit, immortal, illogical |
| re– | “again” or “back” | reheat |
| post– | “after” | postwar |
| uni– | “one” | unicycle |

| Common Prefixes | Meanings | Examples |
|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| –ship, –hood | “state of” or “condition of” | friendship, neighborhood |
| –ment | “act of” or “state of” | management |
| –ish | “like” | childish |
| –ous | “full of” or “like” | joyous |

Focus on Comprehension

Reading is a meaning-making process. There are ways to help students make meaning as they read. These processes need to be modeled for students. And students need to be provided time to practice these comprehension approaches.

| Strategy | Definition |
|------------------------------|--|
| Establishing Purpose | Identifying and understanding why something is being read |
| Inferencing | “Reading between the lines” to understand implied information |
| Summarizing and Synthesizing | Identifying the major points and ideas from a selection |
| Predicting | Using available information to make an educated guess about what might happen next |
| Questioning | Maintaining an inquiry focus before, during, and after reading |
| Visualizing | Creating a mental image of the text in your mind |
| Monitoring | Noticing when comprehension is lost and applying strategies to regain meaning |
| Determining Importance | Finding main ideas and separating them from details |
| Connecting | Relating the text to personal experiences, other readings, and the world |

Taking Notes

Taking notes challenges readers to determine what information is essential while organizing it in a way that makes sense. Note-taking can also help students stay focused as they read. Reviewing notes can build students’ retention of important information.

- Have students take notes after reading long paragraphs in the section rather than the entire chapter. This helps them focus on important ideas and details and prevents them from losing track of the flow of information.
- Remind students not to focus too much of their time on taking notes. Students should read, think, write, and move on.
- To use notes to review a passage, have students read through the notes and highlight the most important information. As they review, encourage students to annotate their notes. This process helps with making connections between related ideas and clarifying complex concepts.

Summarizing

Summarizing demands that students identify the most important ideas and details to create a streamlined version of the text.

- After reading the section, have students recall as much of the information as possible. If the main idea and its supporting details are presented in a certain order, make sure students can recall that organization.
- As they summarize, students should try to answer as many of the following questions as possible: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

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