Assessing Comprehension Thinking Strategies
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Discussion questions:
• What did comprehension assessment look like when we were elementary and middle school students?

• Of those assessment tools, what really assessed what you knew about reading comprehension?

Reflection question—time to write!
• What does assessment mean to you?
1. What are some ways to assess students’ thinking about comprehension?

2. What are some strategies that strengthen comprehension?

3. Why is this type of assessment so important?

Strategies that strengthen comprehension:

- Thinking Aloud
- Using Schema
- Inferring
- Asking Questions
- Determining Importance in Text
- Setting a Purpose for Reading
- Monitoring Comprehension
- Visualizing
- Synthesizing and Retelling
- Analyzing Text Structure/Patterns
When students truly comprehend, they…

• Think more deeply about texts
• Focus on what’s important
• Retain and apply information from the text in a new setting
• Change and/or broaden their thinking because of the text
• Change how they are thinking about the content based on the type of text

Key points to remember:

• Students need the opportunity to describe their thinking process—how and why a comprehension strategy helps increase comprehension

• Students can focus on thinking about the text rather than retelling/responding to the text

• The ultimate measure of success in comprehension is when a student can describe how and why the use of a comprehension strategy helps him/her understand more completely.

Assessing Comprehension Thinking Strategies, by Ellin Keene
(Shell Education, 2006)

• Formative and Summative Assessments
• Document thinking
• Use rubric to monitor growth over time
• Use included text or any other leveled text
• One-on-one with student reading silently and responding orally
• One-on-one with student reading silently and responding in writing
• One-on-one with text read aloud
• Small or large groups with text read aloud and students responding in writing
• Small or large groups with students reading silently and responding in writing
Visualizing (Using Sensory and Emotional Images) Oral Assessment

Directions: Read the following instructions to the student. Record the student’s responses below each question/statement.

A. When I read the text, did you create pictures or images in your mind? Tell me everything you can about the image in your mind while I was just reading. What details in your images are not in the words or pictures in the book?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

B. Can you remember creating pictures in your mind to help you understand the ideas when you read another book? Tell me everything you can about those pictures or images.

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

C. Choose one of the questions below to ask the students:

• We have just talked about the pictures you created in your mind while I read. Do those pictures help you to understand the text better?

• How do images help you understand more about what you read?

• What would you tell another reader about how to create images to better understand a text?

__________________________________________________________________
# Visualizing (Using Sensory and Emotional Images) Rubric

**Directions:**

Use this rubric to record the student’s scores on each set of questions. Circle the number corresponding to the statement that best reflects the student’s response. Consider all three questions when scoring the student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td>No response or unsure what he/she is supposed to describe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td>Describes some visual or other sensory and/or emotional images; may be tied directly to text or a description of the picture in the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td>Describes own mental images, usually visual; images are somewhat elaborated from the literal text or existing picture and help him/her to understand more than he/she would have without creating the images. May include some emotional images that enhance the meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td>Creates and describes multisensory and/or emotional images that extend and enrich the text; describes ways in which images help him/her to understand more about the text than would have been possible without the images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td>Elaborates multisensory and emotional images to enhance comprehension; can articulate how the process enhances comprehension.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observation Notes:**

___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
What Makes an Insect an Insect?

How are a bee, an ant, and a fly the same? For one thing, they are all insects. They all have six legs and three main body parts, called the head, the thorax, and the abdomen.

An insect’s head has eyes and a mouth, and many have antennae, too. Insects use their antennae to feel, taste, and smell things.

The middle part of an insect’s body is called the thorax. If an insect has wings, this is where they are located.

The hind part of an insect’s body is the abdomen. It is usually the largest part of an insect’s body. People have abdomens too, but some people might call their abdomen a belly.

Insects have skeletons, too. But their skeletons are on the outside of their bodies, and they are called exoskeletons. The skeletons are very hard, so they protect the soft inside part of the insect’s body.

So the next time you see a bug, look at it closely. Is it an insect or not? How can you tell?
Theodore's Supermarket

Theodore had a big homework project assignment for the weekend. He was supposed to design his own ideal supermarket. The best way to do this, according to his teacher, was to go to the local supermarket and analyze how the store is arranged.

Since Sunday was shopping day for his dad, Theodore took his notebook and tagged along. Arriving at the supermarket, Theodore’s dad grabbed a shopping cart. Theodore made a note for his supermarket plan: “Make sure carts aren’t noisy,” he wrote down immediately.

As they entered the store, Theodore noted the produce section. Apples, bananas, potatoes, sprouts, asparagus, and onions were bagged. Using the big, white scales, Theodore weighed each bag to see what it cost and placed it in the cart, thinking about each step in the process. Then he mapped out where he thought the scales would go in his store to be the most convenient for customers. Theodore’s dad, the family chef, spun around a rack displaying little bags of spices and picked out taco seasoning for one of the dinner recipes that week.

The next aisle was brimming with food in cans and jars. Theodore updated his diagram to include black beans, refried beans, peas, sauces, salsas, and soups. Confounded by the dizzying shelves of soups, Theodore noted that the ones in his store would be better organized so people could find things easily.

Slowly, they went up and down every aisle in the store as Theodore’s dad stocked up on their family staples. Theodore mapped out where certain departments would go and how his shelves would be arranged.

A sign read “Home Supplies” in the next aisle. Theodore imagined how he would organize these items while his dad picked out a few things they needed. Sponges, dish soap, laundry soap, brooms, mops, recycling bags—all these things were neatly organized.

The last part of their shopping trip was the dairy aisle. Theodore realized how well planned this was, so customers could choose their dairy products last and let them remain cold in the dairy case while they did the rest of the shopping. Theodore, figuring his dairy aisle should also be near the checkout area, mapped out his store. His dad picked up some milk, eggs, margarine, and sour cream. “We’re out of orange juice, too,” Theodore reminded him.

The shopping was finally done, and so was Theodore’s map. Later on, having put finishing touches on his store, Theodore wondered what other kinds of buildings he could design someday and thought that perhaps a career as an architect might be in his future.
Assessing Comprehension Thinking Skills

by Ellin Keene • Grades 1–8

Assess students’ reading comprehension

- Receive an extensive reading comprehension assessment to use with your students, including formative and summative assessments
- Examine how students use thinking strategies to comprehend text
- Discover how to document students’ thinking and use a rubric to monitor growth
- Learn how to assess:
  - Thinking Aloud
  - Using Schema
  - Inferring
  - Asking Questions
  - Determining Importance in Text
  - Setting a Purpose for Reading
  - Monitoring Comprehension
  - Visualizing
  - Synthesizing and Retelling
  - Text Structure/Structural Patterns

Ellin Oliver Keene has been a classroom teacher, staff developer and adjunct professor of reading and writing. She now consults with schools and districts around the country on a variety of topics. Ellin is co-author of Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Readers’ Workshop, as well as numerous chapters for reading textbooks and education policy journals. Ellin Keene has this to say about Assessing Comprehension Thinking Strategies: “I’ve found that stopping students during reading to think aloud provides a much more accurate picture of student comprehension. When students learn to articulate their thinking about a text, either in oral or written form, they are able to go far beyond simply reporting on a particular text; they are reporting on their thinking about that text.”

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Help students comprehend text through purposeful dialogue
- Empower students to have meaningful discussions about text as they implement the effective, research-based strategies
- Increase comprehension of text by promoting purposeful conversations that get students thinking and talking about what they read
- Define what purposeful talk is and understand why it is important
- Effectively implement the comprehension component of the National Reading Panel report with provided instruction models

Implement quickly and easily
- Provides support for teachers through lesson design
- Model lessons from real classrooms demonstrate how to utilize the strategies

About the author
- Maria Nichols is an elementary level literacy staff developer for San Diego City Schools. Previously, she was a classroom teacher for 15 years, including 3 years of professional development work and demonstration teaching at the district’s Literacy Professional Development Center.