

## Raising Readers: Tips for Parents



## Comprehension: Informational Texts

Elish-Piper, L. (2010). Understanding reading comprehension: Information and ideas for parents about reading comprehension. *Illinois Reading Council Journal*, 38(3), 49-52.

Comprehension, or understanding, is the goal of all reading. Parents may wonder what they can do to help their children understand stories, textbooks and other texts they read in and out of school. This column describes key aspects of comprehension for informational texts such as textbooks and newspapers. The column concludes with practical suggestions for parents to use at home to foster their children's reading comprehension.

The purpose of informational texts is to convey content or information to the reader. When reading informational texts, readers use the text features such as the table of contents, headings, words in bold type, graphics, index and glossary to

help them understand what they read. In addition, readers use their background knowledge to relate what they are reading to what they already know about the topic of the text. If students understand how informational texts are organized and use their background knowledge while reading, they will be more likely to comprehend what they are reading. For example, if students preview an informational text, look at the headings and use the words in bold type and the glossary to understand key words in the text, they are more likely to comprehend what they are reading. In addition, if students prepare to read by thinking about what they already know related to the topic of the text and connect this information to what they are reading, they can improve their comprehension of informational texts.



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Jerry L. Johns Literacy Clinic**

*College of Education*

## What can parents do to foster reading comprehension of informational texts?

Here are 10 practical ideas parents can use to build their children's reading comprehension of informational texts.

1. Encourage your child to preview the headings in an informational text before reading. Pick one or two of the headings and ask your child to discuss what they expect to read about under that heading. Then, read those sections of the text together.
2. Preview the words in bold type in a section of an informational text. Check to see if the word is defined or explained in a gloss (a brief discussion of a word provided in the margin of the book) or in a glossary (located at the back of the book). Discuss the words in bold type before your child reads the informational text.
3. Discuss charts and graphs in informational texts with your child. Use prompts such as those provided below to help your child use charts and graphs to improve comprehension.
  - What is the title of the chart or graph?
  - What can you learn from reading the chart or graph?
  - Why do you think the author included the chart or graph?
4. Encourage your child to use pictures and captions in informational books to build comprehension. You can try the following prompts to help your child improve comprehension through the use of pictures and captions.
  - What do you see in the picture?
  - What does the caption tell you?
  - Why do you think the picture and caption are included in this informational book?
5. Good readers can identify the main idea in informational texts. Help your child practice this important reading skills by discussing in no more than one sentence what the text is about. Ask your child to use this prompt to focus on the main idea: "This text is mainly about...." You can direct your child to the title, headings and summary to determine if the main idea has been identified correctly.
6. Most informational texts contain a great deal of information. While it is important for children to understand what they read, it is usually not necessary for them to remember every fact or detail. After reading an informational text, ask your child to discuss three big ideas. These three big ideas should focus on the most important information in the text.
7. If your child has to read a textbook and answer questions, encourage them to read the questions first to set a purpose for reading the textbook (to be able to understand the text in order to answer the specific questions). Next, have your child read the text. Finally, have your child answer the questions.
8. Play "Stump Me!" with your child. After reading an informational text, have your child ask you questions from the text. If your child stumps you and you can't answer a question, have your child show you the answer in the text or explain it to you in their words. You can take turns asking and answering questions.
9. Help your child get ready to read an informational text. Look at the title, graphics and headings. Discuss what your child already knows about the topic of the informational text. Now, your child will be ready to read the text.
10. Invite your child to be the teacher by teaching you or other family members about key ideas from an informational text he or she has read. Invite your child to be the teacher by using one or more of these prompts.
  - Teach me about the most important information in the text.
  - Ask me questions (or give me a quiz) about the most important information in the text.
  - If you were the teacher and I was your student, what would you want to teach me about this informational text?

**We're here to help**

Jerry L. Johns Literacy Clinic: 3100 Sycamore Road, Suite 2003, DeKalb, IL 60115  
815-753-1416 — [literacyclinic@niu.edu](mailto:literacyclinic@niu.edu)