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Chapter One

How to help children understand what they read

Any teacher who has ever tried to teach children how to comprehend what they read has been frustrated at times. For some children, understanding comes easily. For others, it takes practice.

Most children begin looking at books long before they can read the words in those books. As children develop into readers, they depend on these illustrations to help them comprehend the actions and visualize the characters. Gradually children move from picture books to books with occasional pictures and then to chapter books with few, if any, illustrations. Reading books without pictures requires children to form pictures about the stories in their minds. Sometimes this leap to stories without pictures leaves a gap in young readers' comprehension. Take away the pictures, and for some children you take away their understanding.

Gone are the days when family members listened to a novel read by a parent instead of watching TV in the evening. Children don't have to visualize what is going on in a story when everything is pictured for them on TV, in movies, or in video games. Teachers or parents who begin reading chapter books to children at a

young age are helping them practice their visualization skills, which increases their reading comprehension.

My students and I have been creating books for the past 30 years. We have worked together, in small groups, and individually. They have illustrated my writing, they have illustrated their own writing, and they have illustrated writing by other published authors. We have written joke books; ABC books; number books; fictional stories; poetry books; books about our town, state, and country; nonfiction research books; and books about ourselves. We have even written books that we shared with my daughter's high school students, while they shared theirs with us. Regardless of the type of book, however, students understood what they were reading because they made the connection between the written word and the pictures in their mind.

The *You Can Picture It* series lets children make the connection between just reading words and reading for understanding. It doesn't use the format of many comprehension practice programs, which is read a story and answer questions. This series allows children to practice comprehension skills by using their creativity to illustrate a story. By reading the words and then making pictures, children are interpreting the setting, plot, and characters of the story; thinking about deeper meanings in the story; and making deductions about the story. This process leads to understanding. Students then use those illustrations along with the

words to make a book. The children choose a title, draw a cover, and write a short summary on the back of the book. This summary ensures and reinforces their comprehension of the story. Their book can then be shared with others and/or used as reading practice over and over.

Chapter Two

How to use

You Can Picture It

(a step-by-step guide)

The *You Can Picture It* series is very easy to implement in the elementary classroom setting or as an at-home project. The students begin with the text of a nonfiction selection. They end with a finished book.

This book is divided into 25 nonfiction articles covering grade levels one through five. The subjects of the selections are interesting places to visit around the United States. (Fiction stories and poetry are available in other books of this series.) The grade levels and destinations are listed at the beginning of each section. You decide if you want to use the same selection for all of your students or use different article levels within one classroom.

You might want to begin with a selection that is below your students' reading level for the first book and read the selection with the students. Once they have completed their first book, they should understand the process for the next times. Or you might just jump right in with individual articles the first time. I will leave that up to you to decide. It works well either way.

The students might use several hours, days, or weeks to complete this project. Of course, quality work is always better than fast work.

Step One: Pick out the article/articles and run the number of copies that you need. This book is spiral bound so that it will lie flat on your copy machine. The copies can be made on colored or white copy paper.

Step Two: Read the article with your students if you are working as a group. Discuss any information and specific facts found in the stories. Talk about the fact that they should picture the setting in their minds before they draw on paper. Some questions to ask would be: What do you think the place looks like? Are there any new vocabulary words to understand? What are some of the details about the setting? Does the author tell you everything or do you have to figure out some of the details? If the students are working on individual articles, have them read the articles to themselves.

Step Three: Then have the students cut the article into the four parts.

The article parts are in order on the page, but the students will need to make sure that they put them in the correct order in their books. You can also give them the text cut apart and have the students put them back together to practice their sequencing skills. A glue stick works well to paste the article parts onto the pages. Depending on your class, you might want to put the book pages together before the children paste and illustrate, or you can have them put the pages in order after they illustrate.

Step Four: Explain to the students that they should reread the article (possibly several times) carefully and look for information about the place, any details that are important, and try to relate the article to their own experience. If several students are working on the same article, this would be a good time for those students to discuss the article together.

Step Five: Then have the students begin to draw. Crayons or colored pencils are the best art mediums to use (depending on the paper used of course). I always ask the students to do their work in color rather than just using a pencil. With color, you can get a better idea about their understanding of the setting, details, etc.

Step Six: Once the students have completed their drawings, it is time for the cover. Tag board or construction paper works well for the cover. You might want to have a discussion about nonfiction titles and point out different covers on published books. Talk about the fact that the title and the cover should get the reader interested in the article. The title should reflect the main idea of the article. Of course, on the cover the student should write his or her name as the illustrator.

Step Seven: Students can bind the books in a variety of different ways. They can be stapled; punched and tied with ribbon, yarn, or brads; or put together with plastic combs. Check to make sure that the pages are in the correct order before binding.

Step Eight: The last step in the completion of the book is to write a summary of the article. Show the children summaries that are on the backs of some published books. Discuss that the summary does not tell the whole story, but just gives the main idea. One or two sentences should be enough. Have the students write this summary on the lines provided on the selection paper. Summaries should then be glued onto the back covers of their *You Can Picture It* books.

Step Nine: Once the books are finished, they can be read and enjoyed. Have the students exchange books and see how others “saw” the article. The

students can form reading circles with other students who read and illustrated the same books. They can share ideas about how they pictured the setting and details. You can also have them critique each other's books by using the rubrics included in this book. I have given you rubrics for self, teacher, peer, and peer group evaluations.

I want you and your students to have fun with this project. Not only does *You Can Picture It* help children with reading comprehension, but it can be an activity that allows their creativity to shine.

Chapter Three

Curriculum Objectives Grades 1 - 5

Using the *You Can Picture It: Fiction* program, each student will

- understand that reading is a process of seeking meaning
- recognize plot, setting, and characters of a story
- make judgments and inferences about plot, setting, characters, mood, and events in a story
- make deductions about a story
- identify problems and solutions in a story

- make predictions from text content
- reread if the meaning is not clear
- form an opinion about a story
- discuss literature with others
- understand literal and figurative language
- summarize text content
- identify and use chronological order
- identify and use cause and effect
- recognize words with multiple meanings
- relate new information to prior knowledge
- use information in text to draw conclusions
- use self-monitoring and self-correcting strategies
- identify the main idea of a text
- understand the structure and organization of a book
- evaluate his or her own work
- evaluate the work of others

Grade One – Fiction

Dad took the two children to the park for a picnic. A little green frog jumped onto their yellow blanket.

Tommy and Katy tried to feed the frog a chocolate chip cookie. The frog didn't want the children's lunch and jumped away.

They watched a brown bug fly in front of the frog. He opened his big mouth, stuck out his long red tongue, and ate the bug.

Tommy wrinkled his nose and said, "I wouldn't want any of his lunch, either."

Take a peek into this story:

Grade 5 - Fiction

The two-man silver submarine, nicknamed Squirt by the crew, separated from the recovery ship and dove toward the bottom of the calm ocean. Jordan was going with her dad to look at the old vessel that had been found several weeks earlier just off the coast of Florida. Jordan had been diving with her dad for several years, but still got butterflies in her stomach every time she was invited to go. At ten years old, she already knew what she wanted to do when she grew up.

Jordan looked out of the small round window on the side of the little sub. The water was pretty clear today. She could see corals of many colors, fish of even more colors, and a vast blue wilderness everywhere she looked. She tried to remember the names of some of the ocean life that she had studied about in the many books that she had piled up on her desk at home.

Mr. Rosario pointed to something straight ahead and Jordan focused her eyes on the distance.

“Wow, what a sight!” whispered Jordan.

In front of her was the most fantastic old warship that she had ever seen. It was on its side in the sand with several rusty black cannons sticking straight up like flags.

Her dad briefly took the sub around the exterior of the ship. “We can’t stay down for long today,” he said. “But my crew will go over this ship with a fine-toothed comb during the next several months.”

Suddenly they both heard a voice on the radio.

“Storm brewing, Mr. Rosario,” it said. “Better come on up.”

Jordan’s dad knew that this was not a good place to be when the ocean got rough, so they quickly began their ascent to the surface. As the little sub rose higher and higher, the ride got wilder and wilder. Finally the sub broke through the surface, and Jordan felt Squirt swaying as it was being lifted by the crane on the side of the ship. They would have to ride out this storm in a safer place.

Take a peek into this story:

How Did I Do?

Self evaluation for _____

Date _____

Story title _____

What to do:

- Read the book carefully.
- Look at all of the illustrations.
- Think about how you completed your project.
- Fill in the form at the bottom of this page using the numbers below.
- Total the score and write it in the correct space.
- You may write a comment.

1 = I need to work a little harder

2 = I tried, but I can do even better

3 = I did a good job

4 = I did excellent work

_____ The story is in the correct order.

_____ The pictures show many details.

_____ The work is neatly done.

_____ The summary gives the main idea.

_____ The title fits the story.

_____ The cover design fits the story.

_____ Total score for this project.