

Encouraging Visualization to Strengthen Reading Comprehension

Lots and lots of children have “comprehension” troubles. Even if they can read fluently, many struggle with afterwards being able to tell you what they read. I suspect that one culprit is the multiplicity of image-rich technologies with which many kids are saturated. They don’t HAVE to make images in their minds because scores of images are flashing before their eyes any time they are playing or relaxing. Compared to this bombardment of visuals, words in black ink on white paper are terribly sterile.

Another culprit in my students’ struggle for comprehension was ME. I had the biggest heart for my students, but in the mad dash to get them reading, I frequently neglected making time to have them practice visualizing what they read. But it is not at all too late to remedy the situation. Start small, start fun, and practice often. Thanks to the plasticity of our brains, we can grow and change depending on the experiences we have.

From Words to Images

Use *Sight Words in Sentences* for practice with visualization. Instead of just having the child read the sentences as practice for fluency, have him choose one page and turn it into a mini story complete with illustration. If the child is really young, let her just pick a sentence to write and then illustrate. Here are some examples. In the first, the sentence is a question and the illustration shows the ladybug on the ground verifying that the larger ladybug is indeed in the big blue flower.



The next, rather cryptic sentence is simply “He has a yellow one.” It is left totally up to the child’s imagination to determine what “one” is. In this case, there appears to be a lollipop or a rather fuzzy balloon!

An older child might want to elaborate in writing before drawing the picture. At any rate, when he or she is ready to share the art with you, ask questions to encourage him to elaborate orally about what he was thinking as he drew.

These two sentences were taken from the green pages in *Sight Words in Sentences*, meaning the first level of sight words were used to make them. There are five levels in all, so the language will vary greatly depending on the reading level the child is on.



Start with Picture Cues

You could also use SnapWords™ sight word cards as picture cues. These words are great for encouraging a child to think of words in terms of their context in a story and as vehicles for conveying meaning.

Have your child select a word that catches her fancy and then elaborate on it. An example:



He said "help" when the fish
was about to bite his toe!

And here's another:



I got a hammer and some
tools and I made a doghouse
for my dog! It was cool!

Doing these comprehension-building activities is a really fun thing for you to do with your child. Although it is more efficient to send them off alone to do the work of building their visualization skills, oh my! how great it would be for the child to hear your thoughts as you choose a sentence or SnapWords™ card and talk about what are you are drawing as you illustrate, or what you are writing as you look at the SnapWords™ card.