

Comprehension strategies

Comprehension strategies

Making connections	Forming and testing hypothesis about texts	Asking questions
Creating mental images or visualising	<u>Comprehension strategies</u>	Identifying the main idea
Inferring		Summarising
Evaluating ideas and information	Identifying the author's purpose and point of view	Analysing and synthesising

Making connections

Readers make connections between what they know and what they read.

Student: "When I make connections I'm thinking about my memories and the book all at once."

Teacher: "Keeping in mind what you've just said about the main idea here, are there comparisons you can think of between this text and the one on global warming?"

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 131
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 142
- Duffy pp. 81–86
- Harvey and Goudvis pp. 67–80
- Miller pp. 53–72

Other resources with a focus on making connections:

- Research and examples of how teachers activate prior knowledge building on their students' familiarity with a topic to develop comprehension. <http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr100.htm>
- Using the think aloud strategy to model making connections. <http://www.nwrel.org/learns/tutor/spr2001/part3.html>

Forming and testing hypothesis

Readers form and revise hypotheses or expectations about texts.

Student: "When I hypothesise, I look at the title, the illustrations, or charts and diagrams. Then I make a decision about what to expect. It gets hard when it's about some really complicated thing that I've never heard of."

Teacher: "There are lots of verbs in this first paragraph that convey action. How can you use this information to form an expectation about the text as a whole?"

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 132

- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 143
- Duffy pp. 81–86
- Miller pp. 157–171

Creating mental images or visualising

Readers use the ideas in texts together with their prior knowledge to create images in their minds.

Student: "The scene in the potato field in winter made me feel wet, cold, and...like crying."

Teacher: "I'm creating a picture in my head that has the plot reaching the crisis point soon."

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 133
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 145
- Duffy pp. 95–101
- Harvey and Goudvis pp. 97–105
- Miller pp. 73–92

It is important to remember that the reading strategies work together, and do not operate discretely. However, for examples of assessment resources with a particular focus on creating mental images or visualising, see **What is it?** and **Memory**.

Other resources with a focus on creating mental images or visualising:

- 'Mind Pictures: Strategies That Enhance Mental Imagery While Reading': http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=792 http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev/profdev094.shtml
- Visualisation transforms students from passive to active readers, while improving their reading comprehension.

Identifying the main idea

What is the main idea?

It may be helpful to first explain what the main idea is not. It is not the information obtained during the introduction to the text when the title, headings, illustrations etc. are briefly considered, and linked to background knowledge, prior to reading.

Although these text features are often useful in scaffolding readers towards finding the main idea, on their own, they are not enough. Readers need to explore the text at a deeper level in order to confirm or put aside any tentative thoughts about the main idea that the text introduction may prompt.

It is also important to note that the main idea is not simply what the text is about. To paraphrase Gerald Duffy (2003), "Charlotte's Web" is a story about a spider called Charlotte and a pig called Wilbur, but the main idea is more to do with the things that give life meaning: friendship, love, birth and death. The main idea then, is what the author wants readers to understand is important and valued in the text, i.e., across the whole text, not just within sections of it.

If you intend to use one of the Main Idea assessment resources available in the English bank and are not familiar with teaching the main idea comprehension strategy, it would be useful to read the "Teaching and learning" section of the resource prior to administering the task. The more you understand about the concept of main idea, the clearer you will be when you introduce the task to your students.

Resources

- What or who am I?
- What is this?
- What is it?
- Boy's Song

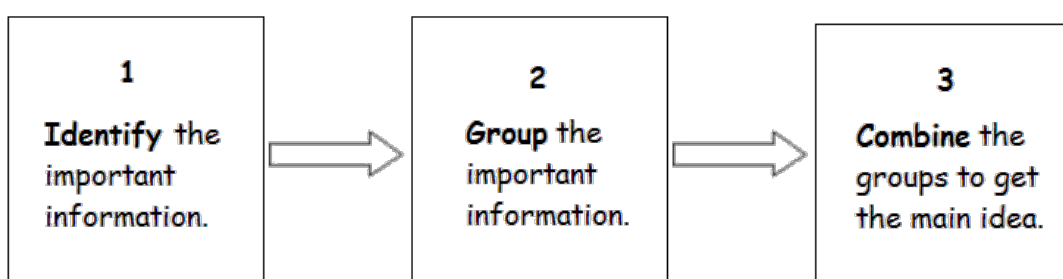
Resources

- Emergency planning guide
- Learning to Read
- Sand dunes
- Describing logos
- The Rice Balls
- To work or not
- Skaties – are they really to blame?
- What is the main idea?
- El Flamo
- Giant weta
- Close Encounters I

Finally, because the main idea is hardly ever explicitly stated by the author, and because readers can't get inside the author's head to find out exactly what they want readers to understand is important and valued in the text, readers can only ever make an informed guess about what the main idea is. Consequently, readers often disagree about the main idea. Any disagreement is best seen as a valuable opportunity for discussion.

How do you find the main idea? When determining the main idea the reader uses text details, in conjunction with their prior knowledge, to think about what the main message of the text might be. As they read, they begin to tentatively group related details, constantly asking themselves where the author is placing emphasis or value. At various stages throughout the reading the reader may decide to reject very small groups of related details as not being particularly valued by the author. However, as they read on, gathering and grouping more details, they may reverse such a decision. Finally, the reader combines all the evidence, including their prior knowledge, and decides what is most important and valued in the text.

- Close Encounters II
- Pest Fish
- Feathery Friends
- The Weevil's Last Stand
- Big Shift
- The Sleeper Wakes
- No Big Deal
- Great-grandpa
- The Terotero
- A very special frog
- Ecological islands
- Finding a fine mat
- Once bitten
- It's snowing - again!
- The impossible bridge
- Don't miss the bus!
- A gift for Aunty Ngā
- Dit, dit, daah
- Saying goodbye
- Flood
- Why do I blush?
- Giant Weta II
- Rock doc II
- Breakfast for peacocks
- White Sunday in Sāmoa
- Tom's Tryathlon
- Motocross
- Daisy Data



What students and teachers might say:

Student:"First I look for details, then I group them together to help me work out what the main idea is."

Teacher:"Some of you think the main idea is 'you need to trust the people around you before you can try something new', and some of you think it's 'when you get out there and take risks, all sorts of doors open for you'. How do you think your background knowledge might be affecting what you think the main idea is?"

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 133
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 148
- Duffy pp. 117–124
- Harvey and Goudvis pp. 122–143
- Miller pp. 141–156

It is important to remember that the reading strategies work together, and do not operate discretely. Click on the link for examples of assessment resources with a particular focus on identifying the *main idea*.

Other resources with a focus on identifying the main

idea:[http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/brown/This article reviews the literature on searching and extracting details and main ideas in paper-based informational texts. The article concludes with some suggestions for teacher professional development, some potential connections to searching digital texts, and some possible directions for raising overall reading comprehension.](http://www.readingonline.org/articles/art_index.asp?HREF=/articles/brown/This%20article%20reviews%20the%20literature%20on%20searching%20and%20extracting%20details%20and%20main%20ideas%20in%20paper-based%20informational%20texts.%20The%20article%20concludes%20with%20some%20suggestions%20for%20teacher%20professional%20development,%20some%20potential%20connections%20to%20searching%20digital%20texts,%20and%20some%20possible%20directions%20for%20raising%20overall%20reading%20comprehension.)

Inferring

Readers use text content as well as background knowledge to come to conclusions that are not stated explicitly in the text.

Student:"When the story doesn't hand you the answer you have to infer."

Teacher:"The author doesn't explicitly tell us how Portia is feeling. What words in the text help us to infer her feelings?"

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 132
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 146
- Duffy pp. 102–108
- Harvey and Goudvis pp. 105–116
- Miller pp. 105–121

It is important to remember that the reading strategies work together, and do not operate discretely. However, for examples of assessment resources with a particular focus on inferring, see Tangiwai. To model making inferences, see Cuthbert's Babies.

Resources

- The Whispering Giant
- The Winner Loses
- Creating sculptures
- Flying to remote places
- The Moa
- The Prince Who Gave Up Everything
- George and Lennie
- The Diving Competition
- No Circulars
- Shipwreck Bay
- Haircut lament
- Buttercup
- Huckleberry Finn
- Delicious Steamed Kai
- Spider
- Bug the Aphids
- Socrates

- Learning to Read
- Wind Song
- Hide-and-go-seek
- Sand dunes
- Sea-dog
- Declined
- Parcel
- Black Holes
- I'm home
- Let's make a bird ball II
- Night in the forest
- House Bus
- The sea
- Brushes and hedgehogs
- Prescription
- Song of the Vagabond
Tomato
- Selecting the Trees
- Theft costs us all
- Filter out the fiction
- A story about Maui
- The Lion and the Monkeys
- Newspaper report
- Porridge
- Activities keep you on the edge
- A Shattering Breakthrough
- The Bat
- Mako shark
- Why possums live in trees
- The windy night
- Moods
- Sofi's first night away
- Down Comes A Tree
- Steep streets

- Where angels fear to tread
- Fā'aluma
- Wearable Art show
- Do you get it?
- Cool to pierce?
- Runaway weather balloon
- A Load of Junk
- Pig Hunt
- Hedgehog
- Keeping watch
- The Foolish Man
- Happy birthday consumer
- Diving
- Fever
- Flea feast
- Personal Mail
- Grey hair
- Be my Valentine
- Saving our national bird
- To work or not
- Skaties – are they really to blame?
- Parachuting
- What is the main idea?
- The gift
- If I were...
- What or who are they?
- What is Susan making?
- What am I?
- What or who am I?
- What is this?
- Rock Doc
- Taniwha
- The Kuia and the Spider
- Giant weta
- What is this tiny thing?
- Tangiwai

- Memory
- What is it?
- Fat, four-eyed and useless
- Cuthbert's Babies
- Voices in the Park
- What could it be?
- Boy's Song
- What might it be?
- Feathery Friends
- The Sleeper Wakes
- No Big Deal
- Great-grandpa
- The Terotero
- Ecological islands
- Once bitten
- It's snowing - again!
- The impossible bridge
- A gift for Aunty Ngā
- Dit, dit, daah
- Up from the Ashes: "grateful"
- Playing with words: implode
- Playing with words: memorable
- White Sunday in Sāmoa
- Tom's Tryathlon
- What are "they"?
- Daisy Data
- Railway Crossings
- Too Much Noise!
- Whale watch
- Which one am I? (1)

- Which animal am I?
- Which one am I? (2)
- Shoes for the King
- The Missing Socks
- Treasure Island III
- The Lion and the Mouse

Summarising

Readers briefly retell a part, or a whole text.

Student: I've got to keep asking myself, "Is this important information or just supporting detail?"

Teacher: Your story map succinctly retells the important events because it gives an overview of the story's structure. What would your story map have looked like if you had been summarising a recount?

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 133
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 149
- Duffy pp. 125–132

Evaluating ideas and information

Readers make judgments about what the author is saying.

Student: "I don't eat meat, so I know I'm biased, but come on, this author writes nothing about the ethics of battery farming. All he talks about is the process of eggs to supermarket. He's missed out the most important bits!"

Teacher: "So, most of us think this author has been particularly effective at describing how each of the characters experienced a different form of grief. What do you think of the way she wrote about life in the 1950's? Did you feel you were there?"

It is important to remember that the reading strategies work together, and do not operate discretely. However, for examples of assessment resources with a particular focus on evaluating, click on the keyword [evaluating](#).

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 134
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 151
- Duffy pp. 141–151

Resources

- Working from home
- Grey hair
- The Rice Balls
- Memory
- To Spray or Not to Spray?
- Close Encounters I
- Close Encounters II
- Pest Fish
- The Weevil's Last Stand
- Big Shift
- No Big Deal
- Great-grandpa
- A very special frog
- Finding a fine mat
- Don't miss the bus!
- A gift for Aunty Ngā
- Saying goodbye

- Flood
- Why do I blush?
- Giant Weta II
- Rock doc II
- On the Reclaim
- Get out of my hair!
- Kissing Frogs
- 'Apa!
- Wolf
- The Blink-off
- And the Winner Is...!
- Unfair!
- My Dad, the Soccer Star
- Sports Day
- Kebabs
- Flowers for James
- Breakfast for peacocks
- Motocross
- Daisy Data
- No More Cats
- Katie's Birthday
- The Lion and the Mouse

Identifying the author

Readers identify and reflect on the author's purpose or reason for writing, and on their particular point of view or perspective.

Student: "Sometimes I'm happy for the author to make me think certain things, and sometimes I'm not."

Teacher: "You've just said that this group of words belittle the council official. What does the use of these words tell you about the author's point of view on this topic.

Does this text need to be balanced?"

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 133
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 147
- Duffy pp. 133–140

It is important to remember that the reading strategies work together, and do not operate discretely. However, for examples of assessment resources with a particular focus on identifying the author's purpose and point of view, see Taniwha and The Kuia and the Spider.

Analysing and synthesising

Readers analyse information and combine it in ways that transform it.

Resources

- I want a dog
- Animals in Zoos
- Working from home
- Mmmm... mine
- The gift
- Organ donation
- Taniwha
- The Kuia and the Spider
- Memory
- Fat, four-eyed and useless
- Cuthbert's Babies
- Dit, dit, daah

Resources

Student:"Getting information from all sorts of places is ok, but the best bit is when you play around with it so you create ideas that are new; ideas no one else thought of.

Teacher:"None of you liked the witch at the beginning, but by the end of the story, you'd all changed your minds. What information did you pull together that made you change your minds?"

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 133
- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 150
- Duffy pp. 149–155
- Harvey and Goudvis pp. 143–167
- Miller pp. 157–171

It is important to remember that the reading strategies work together, and do not operate discretely. However, for examples of assessment resources with a particular focus on analysing and synthesising, see *Voices in the Park* and *Cuthbert's Babies*.

Other resources with a focus on analysing and synthesising:*McLaughlin, M. and DeVoogd, (2004). Critical literacy as comprehension: Expanding reader response. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 48:1, September, 2004.*

- Washday for the clouds
- The night the lights went out
- Making comparisons II
- Making comparisons
- Paikea
- El Flamo
- What or who am I?
- Taniwha
- Taniwha messages
- The Kuia and the Spider
- Tangiwai
- Fat, four-eyed and useless
- Cuthbert's Babies
- Voices in the Park
- What could it be?
- The Sleeper Wakes
- Great-grandpa
- Once Were Warriors: visual analysis
- Kiwiburger: advertisement analysis
- Hugo
- Dancing Cossacks
- Cinderella
- White Sunday in Sāmoa
- Shoes for the King

Asking questions

Readers ask and attempt to answer questions for, and of, themselves.

Student:"If I'm not asking questions, I'm not thinking."

Teacher:"I'm having a negative reaction towards the character of Sam, so I need to question why. I'll look at the words the author has used in relation to Sam, but I'm also going to think about whether it might be that I'm just not interested in the things he likes."

- Effective Literacy Practice Y1–4 p. 132

Resources

- Library research
- Watching ice melt
- The Moon's surface

- Effective Literacy Practice Y5–8 p. 144
- Duffy pp. 87–94
- Harvey and Goudvis pp. 81–94
- Miller pp. 123–140

- Computers
- Fun Club
- Job application
- Rocks in our area
- Interviewing techniques

Other resources with a focus on asking questions:

- Clarke, Shirley (2001). Unlocking Formative Assessment, pp. 104–109, Hodder Moa Beckett.
- Walker, Barbara, J (2005). Thinking aloud: Struggling readers often require more than a model, pp. 688–692, *The Reading Teacher*, Vol. 58, No. 7, April 2005.
- Fordham, Nancy, W (2006). Crafting questions that address comprehension strategies in content reading, pp. 390–396, *Journal of Adolescent Literacy*, 49:5, February 2006.

Promotional Text:

Information about the reading comprehension strategies from Effective Literacy Practice.

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