

The Seven Keys to Comprehension

How to Help Your Kids Read It and Get It!

By: Susan Zimmermann
Author of Mosaic of Thought
And
Chryse Hutchins

Sounding out or decoding words is part of the reading puzzle but falls short of real reading. If children don't understand what they read, they're not really reading. If they don't unlock meaning as they read, the words are boring babble and they will never read well or enjoy reading. So, how is meaning unlocked?

In the 1980's, a breakthrough occurred: researchers identified the specific thinking strategies used by proficient readers. They found that reading is an interactive process in which good readers engage in a constant internal dialogue with the text. The ongoing dialogue helps them understand and elaborate on what they read. By identifying what good readers do as they read, this research gave important new insights about how to teach children to read it and get it.

Good readers use the following 7 Keys to unlock meaning:

1. **Create mental images**: Good readers create a wide range of visual, auditory, and other sensory images as they read, and they become emotionally involved with what they read.
2. **Use background knowledge**: Good readers use their relevant prior knowledge before, during, and after reading to enhance their understanding of what they're reading.
3. **Ask questions**: Good readers generate questions before, during, and after reading to clarify meaning, make predictions, and focus their attention on what's important.
4. **Make inferences**: good readers use their prior knowledge and information from what they read to make predictions, seek answers to questions, draw conclusions, and create interpretations that deepen their understanding of the text.
5. **Determine the most important ideas or themes**: Good readers identify key ideas or themes as they read, and they can distinguish between important and unimportant information.
6. **Synthesize information**: good readers track their thinking as it evolves during reading, to get the overall meaning.
7. **Use fix up strategies**: Good readers are aware of when they understand and when they don't. If they have trouble understanding specific words, phrases, or longer passages, they use a wide range of problem-solving strategies including skipping ahead, rereading, asking questions, using a dictionary, and reading the passage aloud.

Good readers use the same strategies whether they're reading Reader's Digest or a calculus textbook.

There is nothing fancy about these strategies. They are common sense. But to read well, readers **must use them**.

Excerpted from: 7 Keys to Comprehension: How to Help Your Kids Read It and Get it!

Authors: Susan Zimmermann and Chryse Hutchins.

Three Rivers Press

New York

2003

ISBN: 0-7615-1549-6