Comprehension

Teacher Use:

Comprehension refers to the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning. In other words, there are two challenges: Figuring out how print represents words (accurately and efficiently--extracting), at the same time formulating a representation of the information being presented (building new meaning and integrating new and old information--constructing meaning).
(Snow & Sweet, 2003, p. 1.)

Visualizing, or picturing what is read, is one of the eight metacognitive mental processes or actions outlined by the National Reading Panel that will benefit students while they read. However, like any skill, students will need to be taught how to visualize through a gradual release of responsibility model. Move through the below series of activities gradually, until students are comfortable visualizing. Once students have them down, you can regularly ask students to describe what they visualize when you come across descriptive text that uses imagery.

Visualization strategies and pictures are included in this resource.

This resource can be used in whole group instruction, literacy stations, small group instruction, or for reading intervention.

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Directions:

To preserve the use of this activity, laminate strategy pictures and use the strategy guide as a reference for instructional purposes.

Describing a Picture (Teacher Modeling Followed by Student Practice): Some images are located below. You should print and cut out the images to use them for the describing a picture activity. There are enough images to do this activity with a small group of students, if you are doing it in a whole group format you may need to find additional interesting pictures from Google Images to have a sufficient amount for guided/independent practice.

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Guided Practice

Use the first image from below, the image of a screaming person. Tell the students you plan to describe a picture to them using some details, and that you want them to try and imagine what the picture looks like based on your description. However, when you describe your image, you should choose to leave out a few details initially. This omission will make it harder for students to imagine the exact picture you are describing, but you can use that omission to help them realize the importance of descriptive details. For instance, describe the woman in the picture above, giving details about her eyes (closed), hair color, teeth, etc. However, don't mention that she appears to be screaming.

After you describe it to the students, ask them if they are able to picture the woman you are describing. Then, show them the picture and ask if your description fully helped them to visualize the picture. Ask them if you left out key details that you should have shared. Once the students recognize your omission, let them know the importance of details when you are describing something. Tell them that you want to use a regular set of describing words or questions to help guide your description. Print out the words/phrases below, making enough so students can each have a set to use with a partner. Have the students help you use the questions/words to work with you for some guided practice on more accurately describing the initial picture you told them about.

Once the guided practice concludes, have the students partner up with a peer. Provide each group a set of the descriptive words and two pictures. Encourage the students to take turns describing their picture to their peer using the descriptive words. Circulate around the room to provide support.

Visualization



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Who or what is it?

What is happening?

Colors

Where is it?

Shapes

How am I looking at it?

Is there movement?

Sizes

Comprehension

Guided Practice

Picturing Something Familiar (Teacher Modeling Followed by Student Practice):

Instruct students to bring in a picture of something familiar from home (their backyard, a favorite toy, their bedroom, gaming console, etc.). Bring in a picture of something familiar from your household as well. Model for the students how you will review your picture privately, use the descriptive words to determine how you will need to describe it, and then place the picture out of sight while you describe it to the students. Encourage the students to try to make a mental picture and imagine what you described. Then, share the photo with them and have them compare whether or not your description sufficiently helped them to imagine the location, item, etc.

Next, have each student review the picture they brought in at their desk, using the descriptive words/questions to determine what they will need to describe to a partner. Have the students leave their picture at their desks, and partner up with a peer. Once they are with the peer, they should each describe their picture/item using the descriptive words.

After the partners are done, they can share their actual pictures and talk with their partners about whether their description provided all the details needed to visualize the picture/item.

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Guided Practice

Visualizing at the Sentence Level (Teacher Modeling Followed by Student Practice)

Write a vivid sentence on the board, you can use this one as your initial example: "The large snake slithered down the sidewalk." Engage in discussion with the students about how different people might imagine/describe this sentence (EX: some people may picture a green snake, some people may picture a large snake like a boa constrictor while others may picture a much larger snake like an anaconda, etc.). Take time to form your mental picture, review your descriptive words, and describe your image to the students. Afterwards, print some of the below sentence cards. Read the sentence aloud, and ask a few students to come up to the front of the room to form a visual image of the sentence and describe it to the class using their descriptive words.

Have the students partner up with a peer, working with that peer to write or dictate a descriptive sentence that can be easily visualized. The teacher should circulate to assist with spelling/writing as needed. Students should then work with a peer to imagine the sentence, discussing how they would describe it to the class using the descriptive words. Encourage some groups to share their sentence, image, and verbal description with the class.

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Guided Practice

Visualizing at the Sentence Level, Teacher Modeling Followed by Student Practice

The huge waves splashed on the beach.

The cocoon opened and a butterfly slowly crawled out

The dog chased its tail.

The car screeched to a stop.

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Guided Practice

Visualizing Descriptive Text (Teacher Modeling Followed by Student Practice)

Find a short story, poem, or book that contains vivid descriptions or imagery that might be easy to visualize. Some key items from books that are easy to visualize and describe are things like descriptions of characters or settings. For instance, you might choose a book such as “Three Billy Goats Gruff” and select the following lines: “Just across the valley was a field full of rich green grass. At the bottom of the mountain was a stream. Across the stream was a bridge. But under the bridge lived a terrible troll.” Encourage the students to take a moment to visualize some part of that description after you read it aloud (they may visualize the field of rich green grass, the mountain stream, or the terrible troll under the bridge). Select some students to describe what they visualized to the class. You could provide segments from other books for students to visualize and describe to a peer for follow-up practice, circulating to help students read the passages if needed.

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Guided Practice

The Visualizer (Part of Reciprocal Teaching Routine)

Reciprocal teaching is a time-tested reading comprehension strategy whereby students are trained to take an active role in the reading process. A student might be assigned the role of "predictor" (asks the class to stop and make a prediction at points in the story), "visualizer" (stops and asks a student to visualize something and describe their image to a peer or the whole class), etc. There is a separate set of Reciprocal Teaching Cards assigning the duties/questions for each reciprocal teaching role. Those can be used as cues to assign students a role while reading with a peer or during whole group read alouds. Once your students are capable of visualizing as a regular classroom routine, regularly assign a student as the "visualizer" during whole/small group reading.