



# Supporting Early Learners

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**Partners in Learning**

**Partners in Learning** believes that children have the best possible chance to reach their full potential when educators and parents work in partnership to provide supportive learning environments.



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## Issue Two: Understanding and Comprehending What We Read

The literacy topic for this issue is: **Understanding and Comprehending What We Read**. That is, making sense of text. On page four you will find our sections: Parents Ask, Recommended Resource, and Numeracy.

Reading comprehension is a developmental process. It begins from the time very young children notice print around them and continues as children learn to read. In fact, reading comprehension is a life-long skill and applies to: story books, information books, nursery rhyme books, magazines, electronic text, graphic literature such as comic books and cartoons, environmental print such as street signs, and other print as we use it in our daily lives. Reading comprehension can be improved by showing young children how to:

- make connections and predictions
- ask questions
- visualize or make mental pictures

This issue focuses on how parents can use discussions and questions **before, during, and after** reading story books and information books to their children. Examples include: I wonder about . . . , This made me think about . . . , If I could change this part I would . . . , This makes me feel . . . , I would like to know more about . . . , This reminds me of . . . , This character is like me because . . . , What do you think will happen next? Can you close your eyes and make a picture of this in your head? What else do you want to learn?

## Understanding and Comprehending What We Read

**Before Reading** discussions motivate and orient children to the story or topic. This stimulates the process of bringing to mind what they already know.

Suggestions:

- Discuss organizational features such as: title, cover picture, and table of contents and have your child predict from these clues what the story might be about or what they might learn.
- Take a 'picture walk' through the book before reading. This is simply looking at and briefly discussing pictures, diagrams, headings, and captions to get an idea of the plot or information.
- Watch for unusual phrases or words and make sure your child understands them ahead of time.
- Tell your child why you chose a particular book to read to them. It might be because the story book has a theme such as 'sharing' and you want to discuss sharing with your child. Or it might be an information book about something you know your child is currently interested in. This shows children how we usually choose our books for a reason or personal purpose.

**During Reading** discussions offer an opportunity to explain, expand, and focus the reading experience as you go. A common question is: How often should I stop during a read-aloud? Our best advice is to make sure your child knows it is okay to ask you to stop and explain words or something they find confusing. Our experience in working with children is that sometimes they want to just listen to the story for pure enjoyment. At other times, they want to stop and discuss and discuss and discuss! Do what works best for you and your child. At first you can take the lead and make comments or ask questions. You will be surprised at how quickly your child will get the idea and start making their own comments and asking their own questions.

Prompts:

- This is an unusual word. Do you know what it means?
- If I read the sentence again can you guess what this word means?
- This part is confusing. What do you think the author means by this?
- This is an interesting fact. I didn't know this.
- Why don't you close your eyes while I read and tell me what pictures you see in your head?
- Does this remind you of something, or someone, a past experience, another book, or a movie you have seen?
- What do you think will happen next? or How do you think the story will end?

**After Reading** discussions are an opportunity to reflect, and respond to what was read. What do we want to take away and remember? Has it changed the way we think? What facts or ideas do we want to remember? Do we want to learn more?

Prompts:

- If you had been the author how would you have ended the story?
- Would you have solved the problem in the same way?
- Has this ever happened to you? What other connections can you make?
- What was your favourite part? Why?
- What was the most important or most interesting thing you learned?
- Can you tell me how this story began, what happened in the middle, and how it ended?
- Would you like to learn more about this?

Story books often get children interested in particular topics and this can lead to a search for related information books. This is called **Pairing** and is an effective way to broaden your child's interests, build vocabulary, and expand background knowledge. **Pairing** is also an opportunity to show children that we read story books and information books differently. When we read a story book we read page by page and from

beginning to end so we can follow the sequence of events. This is not necessary when reading an information book. We can browse through the book and read 'here and there' depending on what interests us as we go. We can stop and study pictures and diagrams with their labels and captions. We have chosen a **pair** of books to show more specifically how you can use **before**, **during**, and **after** reading discussions and questions. **The Kissing Hand** was chosen because many children at some point in their early years will decide they would much rather stay at home than go to school. This is a common occurrence and frequently happens for no apparent reason. This book is a wonderful resource to acknowledge such feelings and to discuss possible solutions. Story books such as **The Kissing Hand** are effective in sparking an interest and a reason to read a related information book. Chester, the main character in **The Kissing Hand** is an adorable raccoon. Who wouldn't want to find out more about raccoons after reading this story? **Exploring the World of Raccoons** is a perfect **paired** information book to use as a read-aloud for early learners; far too difficult for most of them to read on their own, but not too difficult for them to understand.

### **Story Book: The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn**

ISBN 0-590-63555-7

**Before Reading:** Discuss the title and illustration on the front cover. Then talk about what you think the story might be about. Go through the book and enjoy the wonderful illustrations. Try a picture walk. That is, see if you and your child can tell what the story line is by looking at the pictures. Read the first page and ask your child if they have ever had similar feelings of missing you while they are at school. On the next page ask your child if they know what the word 'nuzzle' means. And then act out nuzzling!

**During Reading:** There are many opportunities throughout this book to stop and talk about words and ideas. For instance, ask your child what is confusing about the sentence: "That night, Chester stood in front of his school and looked thoughtful." This can promote a discussion that raccoons are nocturnal and are most active during the night. Reread the phrase, "toasty warm thoughts" and talk about what made Chester have toasty warm thoughts and what makes you and your child have toasty warm thoughts.

**After Reading:** Talk about Chester and how Mother Raccoon came up with a solution. Discuss whether or not this was a good solution and whether or not there could be other solutions. Would this solution work for your child? What was your favourite part of the story and why? Ask your child to close their eyes and make a mental picture or visualize themselves at school. Ask them: What are you seeing? What are you feeling? Discuss what was learned about raccoons. Suggest a trip to the library to find information books about raccoons.

### **Information Book: Exploring the World of Raccoons by Tracy C. Read**

ISBN-13: 978-1-55407-617-8

**Before Reading:** Discuss the title and the picture on the front cover. Now take a look at the table of contents and predict what facts you might learn. Ask your child what they want to find out. Glance through the headings and captions so you can talk to your child and predict what each page might be about. For example, on p. 6 the title is 'Anatomy Lesson' and you could discuss what the word 'anatomy' means, what they know about a raccoon's anatomy, and how it compares to their own anatomy.

**During Reading:** On p. 11 the author has a delightful picture with captions that provide information on how raccoons use touching, hearing, seeing, tasting, and smelling. How does this connect to how we use our five senses? After reading p. 14 talk about how some animals eat only plants, others eat only meat, and some eat both plants and meat.

**After Reading:** Ask your child: What was the most interesting thing they learned and did they find answers to their questions? Are there more things they would like to learn about raccoons? A short activity would be to look at the index in this book and show your child how topics are listed in alphabetical order and how the index can be used to locate specific information in the book.

### **Questions Parents Ask:** How can I limit the amount of television my child watches?

- Parents should decide how much viewing and what programs are appropriate. Then involve your child in setting out a weekly viewing schedule that is reasonable and one you can live with.
- Make sure your child has choices for other activities such as: hobbies, sports, free play, and social time with friends.
- Schedule responsibilities before programs so there is a natural consequence rather than a punishment for not completing responsibilities. If children miss a favourite program once they quickly learn that privileges come after responsibilities.
- Tape selected programs so they can be watched when convenient to the family schedule.
- Rent DVD's or movies for the family to watch together. Have a popcorn & hot chocolate night.

### **Recommended Resource:** [www.readwritethink.org](http://www.readwritethink.org)

Once you have accessed this website, click on the **Homepage** and then click on **Parent and After School Resources**. Here you will find resources for parents categorized under the headings of Kindergarten, Grade 1-2, Grade 3-4, Grade 5-6 right up to Grade 11-12. In the Kindergarten and Grade 1-2 categories you will find titles with appealing activities that have been designed for parents to use with their children. Titles include: Read the World Around You, My Amazing ABC Book, Comic Creator, Postcard Creator, Crossword Puzzles, Bingo Games, Practice Letters and Sounds, Using Online Games, and Shape Poems.

### **Numeracy:** Number Sense

As children start to count, learn number names, and print numerals, we want to make sure they are also developing number sense. This means they are able to use, understand and manipulate numbers which provide the foundation for addition, subtraction and later multiplication and division. Even though children may be able to count to 50 or 100 with ease, they often lack what is referred to as number sense. You can support your child in developing number sense to 10 by making up a **Parts to Whole** game. With a collection of objects such as Lego pieces and the number 6 as an example:

- Ask your child to count out 6 pieces of Lego and place them on a table.
- Next, suggest: How many ways can we show 6?
  - 1 and 5; 2 and 4; 0 and 6; 2, 3, and 1; and even 1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1 and 1
- You will find this game can only be played for very short periods of time with little children. Watch for other opportunities to play **Parts to Whole** on the beach using shells, in the park using pine cones or stones, or with any collection of objects that might interest your child. Play **Parts to Whole** with all the numbers to 10. Your child will quickly discover that this game doesn't work with the number 1.
- If your child can print the numerals 1 to 10, show them how to record their findings. You can introduce the plus and equal sign as a natural outcome of the game. In this way your child is experiencing adding with real objects (2 Lego pieces plus 4 Lego pieces makes 6) and then recording the abstract equation as:  $2 + 4 = 6$ .

Dice, dominoes, coins, playing cards, and games such as Snakes and Ladders are fun ways to further reinforce number sense. Numbers are everywhere. Help your child see how they are used in our everyday life. For instance: What does the 5 on the clock stand for? How is the 8 on the cereal box used? What does the 20 mean on the ruler? What does the 9 mean on the thermometer? You can turn this into an **I Spy** game: I spy a 9; What does it mean? or How is it used?