

Teaching comprehension and inference

In order to become an independent reader it is essential that the children understand that reading is not just about being able to read the words on the page.

They need to be able to take in what they are reading, understand the meaning of the words and the sentence and interpret it.

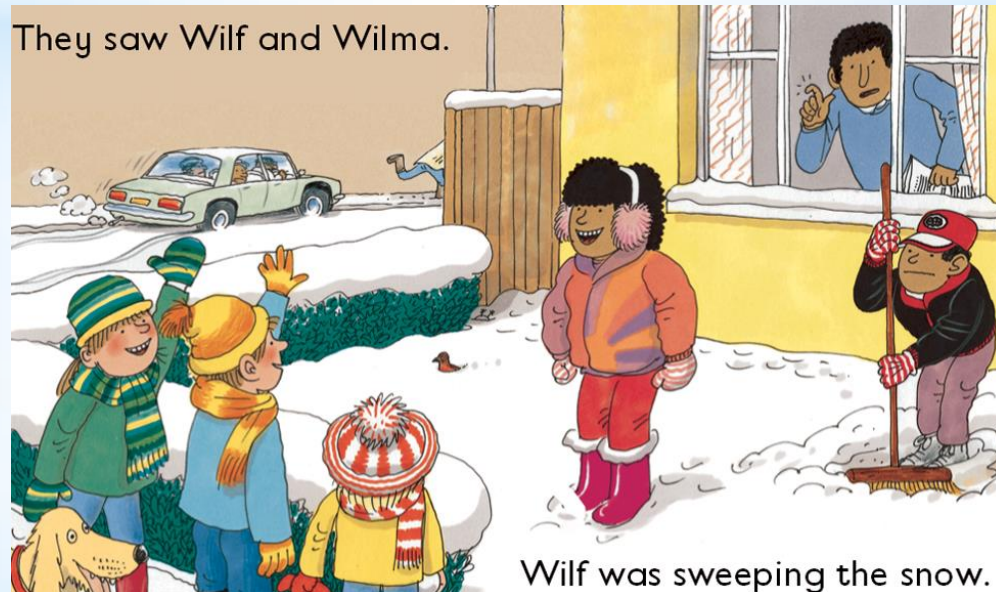
A comparison to help adults understand how children can sometimes read without understanding what they are reading is to consider how we could decode words written in a different language (that uses the same alphabet) but wouldn't understand what it means.



Teaching comprehension and inference

Throughout Reception and Key Stage One, while the children are learning to decode words they are also learning comprehension strategies.

Initially this is done through the use of pictures and looking at the meaning of individual words.



Teaching comprehension and inference

Once a child is able to read slightly longer texts more fluently we begin to ask questions about what they have read rather than what they can just see in the picture.

Simple comprehension questions could be:

- What just happened?
- Why did the character do that?
- How do you think the character is feeling? Why?
- What might happen next?
- What do you think caused that to happen?
- Where are the characters? How did they get there?

Inference

Inference skills are more complex comprehension skills.

Inference means - filling in what is not written on the page or working out what the author is trying to tell you using clues and evidence from the text when it is not explicitly written.

This is a skill which comes naturally to most adults but needs to be explicitly taught to children.

Lots of inference skills can be taught using pictures or simple sentences.

More confident readers might use a text extract.

Have a go using a picture



Who can you see in the photograph?

Can you be certain they are boys?

Can you tell where the children are?

How do you think they are feeling?

What do you think they are doing? What might they have been doing before this?

What do you think might happen next?

Have a go using a simple sentence

Jamie pedalled really hard, but halfway up the hill he had to get off and push.

What was Jamie doing? How do you know that?

Emily's new kitten had done something very naughty and Emily was so upset when she saw her fish and the broken glass on the floor.

What had happened?

Have a go using a text extract

Ben slumped down with his head on his knees while his big brother Sam heaved a heavy sigh behind him. The holidays were meant to be fun, but they still had another 4 weeks of this! The grass was damp from the rain last night but the sun beat down overhead. Through the still, sticky heat came the sound of the cricket match in a nearby field. There was nothing else on the horizon but trees and fields. Sam looked around him and shook his head.

Who are the children?

What are they doing?

How are the boys feeling?

How does the author tell us the time of year?

What do you think the boys have been doing before this part of the story?

What might happen next?

Finding evidence

The next step is to ask children to explain how or why they think that.

This can be very difficult and is a complex skill.

We encourage the children to be reading detectives. They must try to back up their thoughts with evidence from the text or the picture.

The evidence should be a particular part of the image or a specific word, phrase or sentence.

“I wonder why....

Is a good question to pose to children, especially children who are less confident or may be anxious about answer comprehension questions.



Have a go using a picture



Who can you see in the photograph?

Can you be certain they are boys? **What makes you think that?**

Can you tell where the children are? **What makes you think that?**

How do you think they are feeling? **Why do you think that?**

What do you think they are doing? What might they have been doing before this?

What do you think might happen next?

Have a go using a text extract

Ben slumped down with his head on his knees while his big brother Sam heaved a heavy sigh behind him. The holidays were meant to be fun, but they still had another 4 weeks of this! The grass was damp from the rain last night but the sun beat down overhead. Through the still, sticky heat came the sound of the cricket match in a nearby field. There was nothing else on the horizon but trees and fields. Sam looked around him and shook his head.

Who are the children? **How do you know?**

What are they doing? **How can you tell?**

How are the boys feeling? **How does the author show this in the text? What words have been used instead of feeling words?**

How does the author tell us the time of year? **What words or phrases tell us this?**

What do you think the boys have been doing before this part of the story?

Why do you think that?

What might happen next?

Guided reading

Once a child is able to read fluently and have demonstrated that they are able to answer questions about a text they will begin reading in small groups.

Guided reading involves the teacher working with a small group of children on a text or an image and then facilitating a group discussion.



Shared reading

Inference and comprehension questions are regularly discussed during shared reading sessions.

Shared reading is when the teacher or another child reads aloud to the class.

This is a good opportunity to ask more complex inference questions as the text tends to be of a more challenging level.

Shared reading is also a good opportunity to:

- Model fluent, expressive reading
- Model effective reading strategies
- Develop children's love for reading

Developing a love for reading

Our main aims for teaching reading at Coleridge:

- Ensure all children have the skills to become successful independent readers.
- Ensure all children have a good understanding of what they are reading.
- **Develop children's love for reading and encourage them to read for pleasure.**



Developing a love for reading

Reading for pleasure has an immediate knock-on effect on academic attainment (Evans et al, 2010)

Children growing up in homes with many books get the equivalent of 3 years more schooling than children from bookless homes (Evans et al, 2010)

All children (and many adults), regardless of their age or reading ability, enjoy listening to stories being read out loud to them. Children who regularly hear good literature read by an enthusiastic reader tend to have much better reading and writing skills.

