Dear Parents,

I came across a few great ways to help children improve reading comprehension. I thought I would pass it along. One of the easiest ways to improve comprehension is to make sure your child is reading books that are at their own reading level. When a book is too hard, your child is using up all of his/her brain power on decoding the words, that he/she simply cannot make any sense of it. On the other hand, when your child reads books that are comfortable, he/she can have the inner conversations and attempt to make sense of the text in an enjoyable and much less agonizing way.

**5 Magical Strategies**

When you regularly and thoughtfully work with your child on the following strategies, you will notice an impressive difference in not just the child’s comprehension, but probably in several other aspects of the child’s life as well.  When you teach a child to comprehend, you are also teaching a child to empathize, to infer, and to become a more tolerant, understanding person who can think outside of the box.

Practice these strategies patiently, one at a time, with some favorite books at home, which also happen to be at a comfortable reading level for your child.

**1.  Make connections**

Simply encourage your child to make personal connections to the content of the book he/she is reading.  There are three different kinds of connections we tend to make while reading: text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world.

Text-to-self connections are easiest.  We merely relate concepts in the book to aspects of our own lives.  For example, “I love the lake in this book.  It reminds me of our summer vacations when we always visited that lake in New York.”

Text-to-text connections are also fun and easy.  Perhaps the characters in this book remind of the characters in a book you read last week.  Also, don’t feel constricted by the text-to-text label.  I always encourage my students to think of movies and TV shows to which they can relate their books, too.

Text-to-world connections are trickier.  With these connections, you want to relate what you’ve just read to a larger, worldly phenomenon, and not just something specific to your own life.  This is where the hard work comes in for both parents and teachers.  Encourage your child to think outside the box.  Show them in compelling ways that other people may think and behave differently.  This will develop over time, so be patient.  There more explicit you are with making text-to-world connections, they better your child will become at it.

**2.  Infer**

Making an inference is also known as reading between the lines. In order for children to adequately understand, they must be able to make inferences, yet this is a difficult concept even for some adults to grasp.  Gradually work with children on drawing conclusions based on what information they know.  Likewise, show them how to make educated guesses, and to look for hints to back up their reasoning.

**3. Predictions**

An uncomplicated strategy to foster comprehension is to simply ask your child to make frequent predictions.  Most parents and teachers make the mistake of only asking children to make predictions at the beginning of a book.  Instead, ask children to make predictions at the onset of a book, as well as at strategic points throughout the book.  This stimulates their thinking in a number of ways.  At the end of the book, discuss with children whether or not they liked the ending.  Would they have ended it differently?  If so, how?

**4.  Visualize**

One of the best parts of reading is to picture the story or the content in one’s head. Ask children to describe how they picture the characters and the setting in the story. If it’s non-fiction, ask them to draw their own pictures of the content.  Another fun activity is to compare and contrast visualizations between book and movie versions of various stories.

**5.  Questions**

Asking children questions is the simplest and most old-fashioned way to ensure they have understood material.  Don’t just ask questions at the end of a given passage.  I would suggest stopping at strategic points to see how they are doing throughout a passage.  Furthermore, the quality of the questions themselves can also determine the quality of understanding.  Most people only ask explicit, concrete questions that only pertain to memory.  For example, “what color shirt was he wearing?”  Instead, I encourage people to ask implicit questions, which are open-ended, and to which there is not necessarily a right or wrong answer, but by which you can still determine how well the child understood.  For example, rather than asking what color shirt the character wore, in its place ask “Why was it important that the character wore a blue shirt?”  This causes the child to think in a deeper manner, without having to memorize the color of the shirt, yet you still yield rich insights pertaining to how well the child is comprehending.