Connect to the Story

Keys to Comprehension



Connect to the Story



Keys for the Teacher

Activating prior knowledge before reading a text is an important step. This habit is analogous to stretching before exercise class begins. You loosen muscles and become receptive to what lies ahead. Most young children are masters at this skill. Every detail mentioned reminds them of something. The trick is to keep the children focused specifically on the text.

Keys for the Children

Good readers connect their brains to stories before they even begin to read.

Lesson

A wonderful way to introduce this concept is to begin with two big paper clips. Explain that we are going to pretend that one paper clip is a book and the other paper clip is our brain. Share that when we see the cover of a book or hear the title, our brain quickly begins to think about what we already know that matches the book. Link the paper clips together and point out that when we connect the book and our brain together, we're ready to read. Clarify that when your brain is ready, it will be easier to figure out words and understand the story.

Each read aloud is another opportunity to model this strategy. Vary these discussions regularly by having students share their thoughts with an "elbow buddy." This gives everyone an opportunity to talk to activate their brain and deepen their thinking.

Challenge the children to connect to a story each time they read. Have students help make a list of questions they could ask themselves.

What do I notice about this book?

What does this book make me think of?

Have I seen this before?

Notes...

- Class discussions with young children often result in "bird-walking" (going off topic). One topic leads to another and another very quickly. To maintain focus, we acknowledge a child's contribution by saying, "That's interesting," or "Wow," or "I never knew that." Then we call another's child's name and say, "What do you notice about this book?"
- Connecting to a text through pictures is another successful technique that works especially well with non-fiction. Showing pictures before reading provides an opportunity to pre-teach vocabulary that might be important throughout the text. This can be particularly helpful for English language learners.
- Besides connecting before reading, connections can be made quickly during and after the reading. One higher-level question to ask is, "Why do you think this book was important for us to read today?"
- Periodically, during individual conferring, we ask a child to connect to the text they are reading. It is a quick, authentic assessment to see if the student has internalized the concept. If not, we can re-teach the skill instantly.

