

## Handout | Kate Cain and Jane Oakhill

### The Main Elements of Comprehension

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*Jane and Kate were both consulted by the government on the comprehension-related content of the National Curriculum 2014.*



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### Five elements of good comprehension

1. Vocabulary and background knowledge.
2. Integration and inference skills.
3. Understanding sentences.
4. Knowledge and use of text structure.
5. Comprehension monitoring.

### Vocabulary and background knowledge

- Limited vocabulary and background knowledge can be a significant barrier to comprehension.
- A reader or listener of a story will fail to properly comprehend if they do not know the meaning of key words.
- Knowledge of core facts and relationships between events will aid comprehension.

### Integration and inference skills

- To construct a mental representation of the text's meaning, readers and listeners integrate each new piece of information, sentence by sentence.
- Successful comprehenders establish links between the different ideas and extract the gist or overall message.

## Understanding sentences

- Cohesive devices also play an important part in comprehension. These can be pronouns or words such as **before**, **after**, **because**, or **so**. These signal that a link is required and can sometimes specify the nature of that link. For example, the temporal conjunctions *before* and *after* signal the temporal order of events.
  - *The dog saw the cat before she could hide.*
  - *After the dog growled, the cat meowed in fright.*
- The causal conjunctions, 'because' and 'so', signal that a causal relationship can be established and may also prompt readers to make inferences. For example:
  - *The dog was tired because he chased the cat.*
  - *The tired dog stopped chasing so he could catch his breath.*

From this, it could be inferred that the dog is not used to chasing the cat or that the chase lasted a long time.

## Knowledge and use of text structure

- Understanding text structure can guide comprehension because the reader or listener will have a framework for their knowledge.
- In texts with more complex structures, comprehenders should be encouraged to look out for signposting.

## Comprehension monitoring

- Good comprehenders know when they have not understood something and can take action.
- This may include re-reading, looking up the meaning of unknown words or making an inference to make sense of the information they have been given.

A rich text at an appropriate level for the children concerned will allow instruction and practice in many of these skills simultaneously.