

Raising a Reader

without pulling your hair out

Unlocking
Understanding



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Introduction

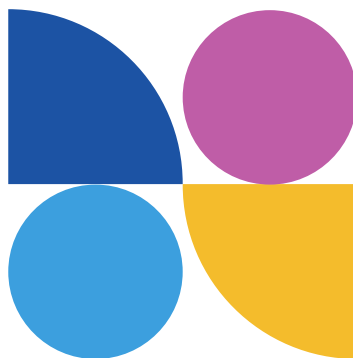
I'm Frances Wong, and I've been a teacher since 2005. In that time, I've had the joy of helping thousands of children discover the magic of reading, including my own two!

I'm also the author of a number of children's books, which means I get to see reading not just from the classroom, but through the wonder of stories themselves.

One thing I do know, reading is so much more than a skill. It's an adventure you and your child can share. Schools will teach children to read, of course, but it's those moments at home, talking about stories, laughing over pictures, exploring characters and ideas, that spark the joy and love of books that lasts a lifetime.

In this guide, we're going to focus entirely on comprehension, helping your child understand, enjoy, and think about the stories you share together, and the best part is, your child doesn't even need to be able to read to engage with a book.

You'll find practical tips, bite-sized ideas, and simple ways to make comprehension a natural, enjoyable part of everyday reading, so your child can love stories, ask questions, and explore ideas long before they begin formal reading instruction.



Frances Wong

Children's Author
Teacher with over 20
years experience

What is Comprehension?

In a nutshell, **reading comprehension** means understanding the story, the pictures, or the words. It also involves making connections, predicting what might happen next, and thinking about characters' feelings and actions. It's about asking questions, noticing details, recalling events, and enjoying the story while thinking critically and imaginatively.



Why is Comprehension Important?

Reading comprehension is about more than just being able to say words on a page, it's about understanding and connecting with a story.

When children practise comprehension, they learn to notice details, think about characters' feelings and actions, and understand the sequence of events.

This develops critical thinking skills, helping them make predictions, draw conclusions, and ask questions about what they are seeing or hearing.

Comprehension also builds language and vocabulary naturally.

As children talk about stories, describe pictures, and retell events in their own words, they are learning new words, phrases, and ways of expressing ideas. They begin to understand concepts like cause and effect, problem-solving, and perspective-taking.

Importantly, developing comprehension encourages a love of reading and stories. Children who understand and enjoy books are more likely to return to them, engage with new stories, and explore the wider world of ideas. Strong comprehension skills lay the foundation for confident, thoughtful learners in every area of life.

When Does Comprehension Start?

I know babies can't talk, but comprehension actually starts from birth!

Many baby books don't have stories, just simple pictures, so you might naturally ask your little one, "Where is the apple? Where is the ball?"

At this stage, no one expects a response. But these pretend conversations (pointing, naming, and describing) build early comprehension and language skills. Every time you talk about the pictures, your baby is learning to notice, connect, and understand.

These early interactions lay the foundation for listening, understanding, and later, reading. Even the tiniest children benefit from this playful engagement, setting them up for a lifetime of enjoying and understanding stories.

The Tip Top Best Tip



Questions to Ask While Reading with Your Baby:

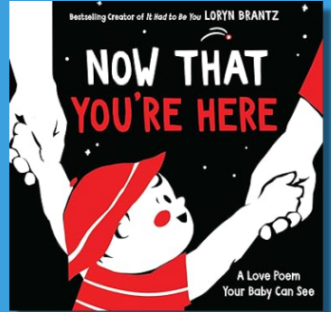
- Where is the [object/animal] on this page?
- What sound does the [animal/object] make?
- Can you show me [object/animal] with your finger?
- What do you think will happen next?

You might need to supply the answers at first, but you'll be surprised at how your not-yet-verbal baby joins in and engages with the story. Even without words, babies learn so much from these shared reading moments, building a love of books.

My Favourite Books for Babies

Now That You're Here by Loryn Brantz

But really, any book by Loryn Brantz is wonderful! I especially love this one. It has the same warm, celebratory feel as *On the Night You Were Born*, and the bold, colourful illustrations are full of little details to explore with your child. I highly recommend these books!

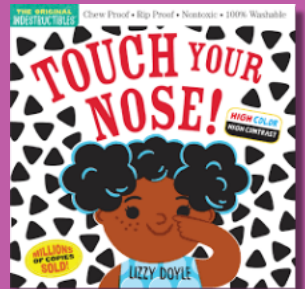


Look Look! by Peter Linenthal

I read this book with my own children and I just loved it. They were captivated by the high contrast images, pointing at all the pictures. There isn't a lot of text in this book so I read it as 'Can you see the...' and 'Where is the...' But it was a favourite the children chose time after time.

Touch Your Nose! by Lizzy Doyle

I love Touch Your Nose because it gives parents a bit more of a clue of how to use this book with their babies. It's full of simple prompts and playful actions that encourage babies to interact, imitate, and explore body parts, helping develop language, awareness, and early motor skills while making storytime fun and engaging.



Comprehension for Toddlers

Toddlers are starting to notice more about the world around them, and books are a fantastic way to support this learning. Even without reading the words, children begin to understand stories, recognise patterns, and make connections.



Comprehension Comes Before Reading

Your child does not have to be able to read to understand a story.

In fact, the book doesn't even need to have words for a child to follow the story.

What really builds understanding is conversation, description, and a language-rich environment.

Talking about the pictures, asking questions like "What is happening here?" or "How do you think the character feels?" and encouraging your child to point, gesture, or respond in their own way all support comprehension.

These interactions help children connect ideas, recognise sequences, and make predictions,

which are the foundations of understanding stories. Even simple discussions during picture books or wordless books develop listening, thinking, and language skills, preparing children for more complex stories as they grow.

Shared reading becomes a space for curiosity, imagination, and meaningful conversation, turning every story into a learning opportunity long before formal reading begins.

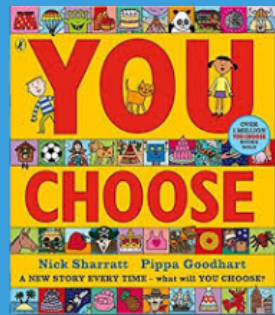
Wordless books are perfect for building comprehension because children use imagination, describe scenes, predict outcomes, and practise storytelling without needing to read words.

My Favourite Wordless Books

You Choose by Nick Sharratt

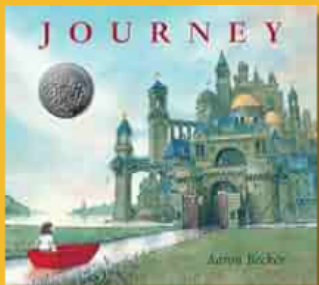
Technically not a wordless book, but this book is full of conversation starters and suggestions for ideas.

Its playful illustrations and open-ended prompts make it perfect for encouraging children to talk about choices, describe what they see, and create their own stories.



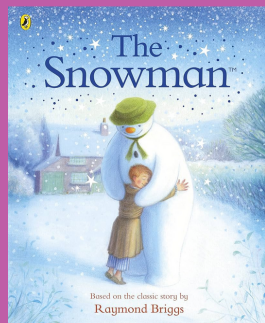
Journey by Aaron Becker

Journey is a gorgeous wordless book that takes children on a magical adventure. As they follow the girl through colourful, detailed scenes, you can encourage them to talk about what's happening, guess what might happen next, and make up their own story.



The Snowman by Raymond Briggs

We have all grown up watching The Snowman at Christmas with the iconic song, and the book is just as magical. Its gentle, wordless story encourages children to explore the illustrations, talk about the characters' adventures, and use their imagination to create their own version of the story.



Comprehension Questions for Toddlers

It can be very difficult to know what to ask your child when reading, so check out these example questions:

Observation Questions:

- Where is the [object/animal] on this page?
- Can you point to the [colour/shape] you see?
- What is the [animal/object] doing?

Imagination and Engagement Questions:

- What sound does the [animal/object] make?
- Can you show me what happens next?
- How do you think the character feels?

More Questions



Interaction Questions:

- Can you find the [object/animal] again?
- What would you do if you were the [character]?

These questions are designed to be short, playful, and interactive, helping toddlers start noticing details, connecting ideas, and building early comprehension skills, all while enjoying books and shared reading.



Comprehension with School- Aged Children



Once your child has learned to read using phonics, they will take the phonics screening check in the UK. After passing, usually in Year One, assessments focus mainly on reading comprehension.

While some schools still administer the Year Two SATs, these are now primarily used for school analysis rather than national data.

From that point onwards, children are taught to answer comprehension questions throughout their English curriculum, continuing up to secondary school.

This makes reading comprehension an **essential skill for academic success**.

So, what can you do as a parent to support your school-aged child?

By encouraging discussion about stories, asking questions, exploring characters and events, and making reading enjoyable, you can help your child develop strong comprehension skills.

Building these skills at home supports confidence, understanding, and a lifelong love of reading, not just for tests, but for learning in all subjects.

Children with strong reading comprehension do better in school than their peers, regardless of academic attainment or socio-economic status.

What does it look like?



A reading session with your child can be simple and enjoyable. Start by letting your child read aloud. For example, if they read, “The dog was red,” you could ask, “What colour was the dog? Why do you think it was red?” Remind your child there are no wrong answers.

As they continue, for example, “He was at home,” you might ask, “What does ‘home’ mean?” Ask questions immediately after your child has read each section, and encourage predictions: “What do you think will happen next?”

If your child becomes frustrated with questions, let them read in peace this time and try again next session. Avoid overloading your child with questions.

At the end, ask if your child liked the book. It’s okay if they don’t, especially with school books, but also allow your child to choose a book that interests them. This helps children see reading as fun rather than a chore.

During reading sessions, try to keep the atmosphere relaxed and positive. Praise your child for effort, not just accuracy, and celebrate when they make connections or predictions about the story. Use the pictures to support comprehension, asking them to describe what they see or what might be happening. Short, frequent sessions are often more effective than long, tiring ones.

Reading Routines



A regular reading routine nurtures more than just literacy. By sharing books daily, children develop attention, memory, and listening skills, while building a sense of security and connection. Over time, these routines foster curiosity, imagination, and a lifelong love of stories.

How to Make Reading Part of Your Routine

Making reading a consistent, joyful part of everyday life shows children that books are fun, rewarding, and worth returning to again and again.

Practical Tips for Parents

- **Pick short, consistent times.** Even 5–10 minutes before bed, mealtime, or in the car counts.
- **Create a cozy spot.** A comfortable chair, soft lighting, or a little reading corner helps make it inviting.
- **Follow your child's interests.** Let them choose the book sometimes; engagement matters more than length.
- **Keep it relaxed and fun.** Laugh, point at pictures, or use silly voices; enjoyment is more important than perfection.
- **Use everyday moments.** Read signs, labels, or menus together to reinforce that reading happens everywhere.
- **Be consistent.** The more predictable your routine, the more children look forward to it and build a habit.

Daily reading routines give children confidence with language, strengthen early literacy skills, and make books a natural, joyful part of life.

Wordless Books



Wordless or mostly-wordless books are a fantastic way for school-aged children to think creatively, explore stories, and practise comprehension skills. By studying the pictures, children can sequence events, make predictions, describe actions, and retell the story in their own words.

How to Use Wordless Books

I go on about wordless books a lot, but that's only because of the impact they can make on children's reading and comprehension.

- Start with books that have **clear, engaging illustrations** and a story that can be interpreted through the pictures.
- **Encourage discussion.** Ask your child to describe what's happening, name characters, actions, and emotions, and explain their thoughts about the story.
- **Let your child take the lead.** Follow their observations and ideas; if they want to linger on a page, explore it fully. Ask

- questions like, "What do you think happens next?" or "Why do you think the character did that?"
- Encourage them to retell the story in their own words or even add dialogue. .

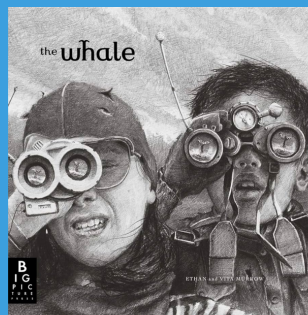
Over time, this strengthens critical thinking, comprehension, and vocabulary, while helping your child see that stories can be interpreted in many different ways.

Wordless books become a space for creativity, discussion, and confident reading.

More of My Favourite Wordless Books

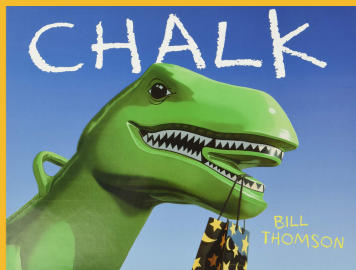
The Whale by Vita and Ethan Murrow

I absolutely love this book, and it's one I've used in classrooms. Children are fascinated by the rich detail in every illustration and often tell the story themselves, exploring the drama, characters, and themes just by looking at the pictures. It's a wonderful way to encourage imagination, observation, and storytelling skills.



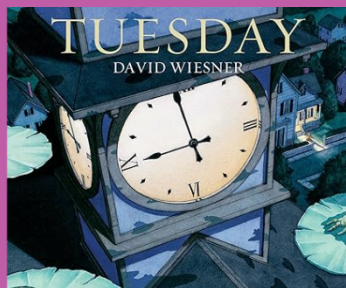
Chalk by Bill Thomson

This book is simply magical! The illustrations are vivid and full of detail, allowing children to explore the story entirely through the pictures. They love imagining the chalk drawings coming to life and telling the story in their own words. Chalk is perfect for encouraging creativity, observation, and narrative skills, making it a favourite for shared reading and discussion.



Tuesday by David Wiesner

Tuesday is a wonderfully imaginative book that tells its story almost entirely through stunning, detailed illustrations. Children are captivated by the flying frogs and the unusual events, often retelling the story in their own words. It's perfect for encouraging creativity, prediction, and discussion, helping children practise comprehension while exploring a truly unique and engaging narrative.



Comprehension Questions for Babies

Here's a list of comprehension questions designed for non-verbal babies, where the focus is on observation, pointing, gestures, or eye contact rather than verbal answers:

Observation:

- Where is the [object/animal]?
- Can you point to the [colour/shape] you see?
- What is happening on this page?

Imitation & Interaction:

- Can you show me [action] like the character/animal?
- Can you wave/point/touch what the character is touching?
- Can you clap/tap like the [animal/object] is moving?

Prediction & Attention:

- What do you think happens next? (Adult models possible answers)
- Can you find that [object/animal] again?
- Which picture do you like the most?

Engagement:

- Can you follow along with your finger?
- Can you look at the next picture when I turn the page?

These questions build comprehension, attention, and early language skills without expecting a verbal response.



Comprehension Questions for 1 - 2 year olds

These questions encourage early comprehension, vocabulary, and reasoning:

Observation & Identification:

- What is the [animal/object] doing?
- Who is in this picture?
- Can you show me the [object] we saw before?

Cause & Effect / Sequencing:

- What happens after [event]?
- Why is the [character/animal] doing that?
- What comes next?

Choices & Opinions:

- Which one do you like?
- Do you want the [red/blue] one?

Feelings & Reactions:

- How is the [character/animal] feeling?
- Can you make a happy/sad/scared face like them?

These encourage children to use words, connect ideas, and start expressing opinions, while still keeping it short, fun, and manageable.



Comprehension Questions for 2-3 year olds

Here's a list of comprehension questions for 2–3-year-olds, designed for children who can give short sentences and may start noticing letters or words:

Observation & Identification:

- Who can you see on this page?
- What is the [character/animal] doing?
- Can you point to the letter [A/B/C] you see?
- What colour is the [object]?

Sequencing & Cause/Effect:

- What happened first? What happens next?
- Why do you think the [character] did that?
- What might happen after this page?

Prediction & Imagination:

- What do you think the [character/animal] will do next?
- How would you feel if you were [the character]?

Feelings & Reactions:

- How is the character feeling? Why?
- Can you show me a happy/sad/scared face like the character?

These questions help children develop comprehension, vocabulary, reasoning, and early print awareness while keeping reading interactive and fun.



Comprehension Questions for 4 - 5 year olds

Here's a list of comprehension questions for children aged 4–5 who can read simple sentences:

Observation & Recall:

- Who are the characters in the story?
- Where does the story take place?
- What happened at the beginning/middle/end of the story?
- Can you point to the word [character/object] in the text?

Sequencing & Cause/Effect:

- What happened first? What happened next?
- Why did [character] do that?
- What might happen after this page?

Prediction & Imagination:

- What do you think will happen next?
- What would you do if you were [character]?

Feelings & Reactions:

- How is the character feeling? Why do you think that?
- Can you make a face like the character?

Engagement & Reflection:

- What is your favourite part of the story? Why?
- Can you retell the story in your own words?

These questions help children practise understanding text, thinking critically, and connecting events and emotions, while encouraging independent reading and discussion.



Comprehension Questions for 4 - 5 year olds

Here's a list of comprehension questions suitable for children aged 6+, including types similar to SATs-style questions:

Vocabulary & Inference:

- Find a word on this page that means the same as [happy/angry/scared].
- What word tells you that [character] is feeling [emotion]?
- Which word describes the [setting/animal/object] best?

Retrieval & Understanding:

- What happened at the start/middle/end of the story?
- Who did [action] in the story?
- Where did [character] go?

Prediction & Interpretation:

- What do you think will happen next?
- Why do you think [character] did that?
- How would you feel if you were [character]?

Evidence & Explanation:

- What tells you that [character] is [brave/sad/funny]?
- Which sentence shows that [event/action] happened?
- Can you find two pieces of evidence from the text to explain your answer?

Opinion & Evaluation:

- What is your favourite part and why?
- Did you like how the story ended? What would you change?

These questions build comprehension, inference, and textual evidence skills, aligning with KS1 and KS2 SATs-style reading tasks.



Useful Links



[BBC Nursery Rhymes](#)

[The Book Trust](#)

[The National Literacy Trust](#)

[Reading Fairy](#)

[My Website](#)

[Wordless Books](#)

Don't forget to check back to my website for more resources, tips, and book recommendations to support your child's reading journey.

If you have any questions, want to share your experiences, or need a little extra guidance, feel free to reach out on Threads, Instagram, or through the contact form on the site. I love hearing from parents and carers, and I'm here to help make reading a fun, joyful part of everyday life for you and your child.