

# Reading: Developing comprehension and inference



## Driver Youth Trust

### What's the idea?

We know that the use of phonics is hugely important, but this alone does not lead to great scores in reading. Learners also need to develop skills in comprehension and inference. So, how do we move on from decoding so that learners can understand the text, picking up on what is happening along with the underlying themes?

### What does it mean?

Comprehension, in short, is the ability to understand something. This becomes a useful skill when learners have to pick out key information from a passage of text in order to answer questions.

The challenge is using approaches that will help us to find out if our learners are just decoding when reading, or whether they are picking up on what is actually happening in the text.

To check for comprehension, teacher can ask the following questions:

1. What is happening in the story so far?
2. Who is the main character in the story? How are they behaving?
3. How do you think X is feeling right now? Why do you think they might feel like that?
4. Where is the story set? What features can you pick out from the text?

All the answers should stem from the text. In some cases you may be able to use pictures as an aid for picking out what might be happening in a particular scene.

Inference is slightly more complex in that it requires learners to make judgements about things that do not feature on the page. It might

also be that you pick up on things in a picture through the body language/pose of the character or other imagery.

This is quite a more advanced skill to develop and will need lots of practice and opportunities for discussion. The discussion can help you pick up on thought processes so that you can adapt your questioning.

Questions to ask include:

1. I wonder why X did that?
2. How might they be feeling after that incident? What makes you think that?
3. What do you think might have happened before in order to make X fall over?

The answers might be hard to come by as they are not explicit within the text. It might be worthwhile talking through the text again and wondering aloud when reading.

**THE DRIVER YOUTH TRUST IS A CHARITY COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE OUTCOMES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE WITH LITERACY.**

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Kispal A (2008) Effective teaching of inference skills for reading: Literature review. NFER Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/EDR01/EDR01.pdf> (accessed 7 February 2020).
- » Lockyer S (2018) Things can only get meta – a case study of metacognition techniques in teacher inference. *Impact* 3: 37–38.