



GUIDE TO READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

An **OMNI LEARNING CENTER** Educational Guide



LORRAINE GERSTL



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OMNI LEARNING CENTER EDUCATIONAL GUIDES

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INTRODUCTION

“I know I should read more, but I’m so busy, it takes *time* to read, and so much of what I try to read doesn’t really make that much sense to me ...” Those can be the words of a third grader or, just as easily, the words of an adult. In our hurry-up world of bits and bytes, and the need for instant gratification, the sad and simple truth is that people don’t read as much as they used to and, more tragic, they understand what they read far less than in the past.

In this practical, hands-on Guide, the author, a Master Teacher with more than thirty-five years of practical success teaching both children and adults of all ages, shares her ideas on teaching reading comprehension strategies! The underlying message she delivers is: **Comprehensive Strategies are important because Reading is an Active, not a Passive, Process.**

Reading can seem incredibly complicated. It involves not only making sense of the squiggles on a page – deciphering the alphabetic code and figuring out the words, but reading also entails giving meaning to, understanding, and thereby *enjoying* what we read.

Reading comprehension is absolutely critical to communication, whether it involves a doctor healing a patient, a lawyer presenting an argument in court, an astronaut needing to know how to repair a malfunction when he is thousands of miles above the earth, or, most important, enriching and widening the scope of your life! In fact you cannot think of one area of learning or practice where understanding what you read is not absolutely essential.

The more you *understand* what you read, the less of a drudgery and the more of a joy it becomes. *Reading is the key that unlocks the door to the universe.*

In this book, I teach you the underlying *secrets* I’ve gleaned from *decades* of successfully watching as students of all ages glow when they first discover the wonder of, “I can *understand* it and I can *do* it – and I never thought I could!”

Get ready to start a great adventure – and to grab hold of the key that will unlock the door to *your* universe!

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

What is done *before* reading is extremely beneficial for students to understand text. This preparation work is what helps students connect new information to what they already know.

Sample pre-reading activities may include:

- Examining the pictures and captions to learn more about what the text is going to say.
- Asking students what they know about the topic.
- Looking at the subtitles and asking students to consider anything they know about them.
- Checking the graphs and maps to discover how they might add meaning to the text.
- Looking at the boldface words.
- Asking students to write a question they anticipate will be answered in the text.
- Discussing new vocabulary and trying to attach it to something students already know.

SOME GOOD PROBES TO USE BEFORE YOUR CHILD STARTS TO READ

- What do you think this text will be about?
- What would you like to know about _____?
- What does this (text feature) make you wonder about?
- What are some questions you expect the author to answer?
- Why do you suppose the author chose _____ for the title of the text?
- What questions could you ask just from the title alone?
- Why do you think the illustrator used the feature she or he did in this picture?
- How does this picture make you feel? Why?
- Do the subtitles seem to fit within the major title? Do any of them surprise you and/or make you wonder about something?

PROBES TO USE LATER IN THE TEXT

- What do you think will happen now? What makes you think so?
- What further questions would you ask the author if you could?
- What would you ask the main character if she or he stepped out of the book right now?

FIRST STRATEGY – SCHEMA AND CONNECTIONS

SCHEMA: WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW AND HAVE IN YOUR BRAIN



Our **schema** is like our personal mental filing cabinet. It contains all the information we have in our brains. Within our “filing cabinet” we have “folders” holding all our *known* information. There may be a “folder” for books we have read, for sports, for movies, one about pets, our recipes, and games we play. **As we read and learn, we connect new information to the existing information in our brains.**



To introduce Schema to students, pretend you are inviting them to your home for a party. Even though they have never been to your home, their schema - the knowledge in their mental filing cabinet - will help them think about what they may see in your home – a living room with furniture, books, bedrooms, bathrooms, a kitchen, birthday treats, a pet, etc.

To brainstorm on a topic and activate schema, students can use Concept Webs. This is especially useful when reading nonfiction.

Concept Web

The concept web, which is ideal for brainstorming, helps you activate your schema on a topic you are reading about. Write the topic of your book (or a vocabulary word from the book) in the center circle. Use the web extensions, or file folders from your schema to show what you know about the topic.



MAKING CONNECTIONS:

There are *three ways* to make connections between existing knowledge and newly acquired information. I have included charts to help students record their connections. It is important for them to record on these charts how these connections have helped their understanding of what they are reading, supported by evidence from the text.

1. *Text-to-Self Connections* - make a connection to your personal life.

Connection Stems students may want to use:

- This reminds me of...
- I remember a time when...
- I have had a similar experience to...
- I know how the character feels because...
- How is this different from anything that has ever happened to me?
- Do I know a person like the main character in the story?
- Have I visited any place like the setting in the story?



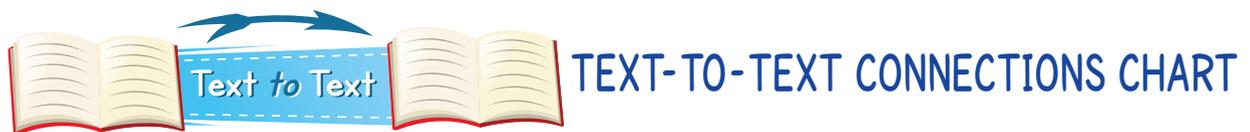
TEXT-TO-SELF CONNECTIONS CHART

 Title: <i>Wemberly Worried</i> by Kevin Henkes 	
MY TEXT-TO-SELF CONNECTION	HELPED ME UNDERSTAND BECAUSE
"Wemberly worried about everything." P.1	Wemberly reminds me of myself, because I worry about everything. I feel I understand Wemberly.
"On her birthday, Wemberly worried that no one would come to her party." P.12	When I give a party, I always worry that everything may not turn out well.
"Wemberly had a new worry: school." P.17	I understand. I worry that each day may not be special for our students.

2. Text-to-Text Connections - make a connection to another book.

Connection Stems students may want to use:

- How is this book similar to other books I have read?
- How is it different from other books I have read?
- Do the characters remind me of characters in another book?
- Does the setting remind me of settings in other books



Title: *Wanted Dead or Alive: The True Story of Harriet Tubman* by Ann McGovern

MY TEXT-TO-TEXT CONNECTION

Reading *Wanted Dead or Alive: The True Story of Harriet Tubman*, made me think of another text called *If You Traveled on the Underground Railroad*.

HELPED ME UNDERSTAND BECAUSE

If you Traveled on The Underground Railroad, gave me a lot of background information, and many examples of runaway slaves and how they were treated. So I was able to sympathize with Harriet Tubman and it made it easier for me to understand how badly she felt and how difficult her life was.

3. Text-to-world Connections - make a connection to an event happening in the world.

Connection Stems students may want to use:

- Does this remind me of something happening in the outside world now?
- Are there links in the news to this?
- Has someone else mentioned something about this to you?



**Title: *Malala, A Brave Girl from Pakistan*
by Jeanette Winter**

MY TEXT-TO-WORLD CONNECTION

When I read this book, it reminded me of articles I have read and television news I have seen about girls who are discriminated against and who are unable to receive the same educational opportunities as boys.

HELPED ME UNDERSTAND BECAUSE

I felt I could understand Malala's situation more clearly; that despite violence against her, she would not give up her fight for equal rights for all people.

Books to use to teach Schema and Making Connections

- *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes
- *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes
- *Alexander and the Terrible Horrible No Good Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst
- *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco
- *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco
- *Come on Rain* by Karen Hesse
- *Lightning* by Seymour Simon
- *The Wall* by Eve Bunting
- *My Great Aunt Arizona* by Gloria Houston

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Lorraine Gerstl is truly a woman for all seasons! She taught deaf children in her native South Africa before emigrating to the United States, where she raised her own children, then recommenced her teaching career at Briarcliff Academy / Robert Louis Stevenson before moving to Santa Catalina for nearly three decades as its beloved third-grade teacher. Since her “retirement” in 2017, she formed a partnership with Margie Lotz, a colleague from Santa Catalina: Omni Learning Center, which provides educational enrichment for homeschoolers. Lorraine has produced, directed, and acted in plays, musicals, variety shows, picked up a National Disney Teacher of the Year nomination, and traveled a good slice of the world in the process. An editor and internationally published writer, who won’t hesitate to stretch her students’ reach to the stars, she still revels in her favorite title – “Mom.”



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