

## Comprehension: The Phantom Skill

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In reading instruction, comprehension (understanding) is sometimes called the “Phantom Skill”. It is treated as the premiere skill of skills in reading and talked about all the time in classrooms across the year levels. It is referenced as part of narrative and informational text exercises, and comprehension is certainly the centrepiece of reading tests, and often the missing piece in domain-specific tests. Yet, explicit instruction in the skill of comprehension often does not dissect the many micro-skills that good readers use, to fully understand what they are reading.

Good readers treat reading as an action verb. They go beyond word calling. They know they must break the code of meaning as they read. They *ask questions* as they read, they *visualise* and *make inferences* by “reading between the lines”; they *summarise* as they grasp for understanding and they have critical “*fix-it*” *strategies* to recover when they sense confusion.

These are the components of “comprehension” that provide what non-readers believe is some mysterious “magic” called reading. These struggling readers believe some kids are lucky and have the magic and that some are not as lucky and don’t have the magic. Thus, as much as they try, they don’t get it. They read, but they don’t know what they’ve read and in many cases they don’t have a real awareness that they don’t know that they don’t know. It’s all a mystery and they, literally, don’t have the keys to deciphering the meaning of the written words.

It’s time to tell them: there is no magic. Comprehension is not a phantom skill. Everyone has the ability to go beyond word-calling and to read with understanding. They just need to learn how to use the cues and clues to reading with skill and confidence. That’s when the real magic begins.

*What is, The Take Away? What is the gist; your understanding about the Phantom Skill?*