

More About the Levels of Comprehension

Level One: FIND IT

Message to the Students: The answer is clearly stated and is all in one place in the passage. You can find the answer in one sentence or two sentences. There may be clue words to help you.

Information for the Teacher: Students answer questions at the most concrete/literal level. The answer information is all in one place in the text (in one sentence or in two consecutive sentences), clearly stated, with clue words if appropriate; students merely need to find the answer.

FIND IT—Bloom: Knowledge, Comprehension

FIND IT—Marzano: Knowledge

Level Two: CONNECT IT

Message to the Students: The answer information is there in the passage, but it probably isn't all in one place. And there probably aren't any clue words. You have to find pieces of information and put them together to answer the question.

Information for the Teacher: Students answer questions at a literal/analytical level, which requires finding and organising related pieces of information. The answer information is in the text, directly stated in language similar to that in the question. But the answer information is not usually located in one place in the text, and there are usually no clue words. Students must find the relevant pieces of information (disregarding any unrelated information) and then put the relevant pieces together to figure out the answer.

CONNECT IT—Bloom: Comprehension

CONNECT IT—Marzano: Knowledge, Organising, (Applying), Analysing

Level Three: ADD TO IT

Message to the Students: The answer information is there in the passage, but it isn't directly stated. There are hints, though. You have to use clues or other details in the passage, along with what you already know, to figure out the answer.

Information for the Teacher: Students answer questions at an inferential level (conclusions, inferences, predictions, unstated main ideas, for example). The answer information is not directly stated in the text, but it is implied. Students must apply prior knowledge to clues in the text to figure out the answer, which expands on what is directly stated in the text.

ADD TO IT—Bloom: Application, Analysis, Synthesis

ADD TO IT—Marzano: (Applying), Analysing, Generating, Integrating

Level Four: GO BEYOND IT

Message to the Students: You won't find the answer information stated directly or indirectly in the passage, but the answer is based on information in the passage. You need to apply what you already know to what you've read in the passage. Then you can come up with an answer that goes beyond what is given in the passage.

Information for the Teacher: Students answer questions at a critical/creative level. The answer is not stated directly or indirectly in the text, but the answer is based on or supported by information in the text. Students apply various types of prior knowledge (content, experiential, etc.) to what they have read in the text to come up with an answer that goes beyond, or extends, what appears in the text.

GO BEYOND IT—Bloom: Synthesis, Evaluation

GO BEYOND IT—Marzano: Generating, Integrating, Evaluating

While Bloom’s taxonomy and Marzano’s new taxonomy have significant similarities and differences, they share a common thread that connects them to the levels of comprehension featured in *Building Levels of Comprehension*. The common thread among the taxonomies and the levels of comprehension is the cognitive demand that comprehension questions can require of readers.

WHY ARE LEVELS OF COMPREHENSION IMPORTANT TO TODAY’S READING CLASSROOMS?

Effect on Students’ Achievement Scores

Students’ mastery of the levels of comprehension is related to the types of questions they are able to answer. **The way the answer information is attained from the passage text determines whether literal, analytical, inferential or critical thinking is involved.** Research has shown that limited mastery of levels of comprehension is equal to poor reading scores.

- We can define a proficient reader in the following manner: Year 8 students performing at the Proficient level should be able to show an overall understanding of the text, including inferential as well as literal information. When reading text appropriate to year 8, they should be able to extend the ideas in the text by making clear inferences from it, by drawing conclusions and by making connections to their own experiences—including other reading experiences (Lutkus, Rampey & Donahue, 2005).
- “A broad, general finding from the research base is that nearly all of the thinking skills programs and practices investigated were found to make a positive difference in the achievement levels of participating students” (Cotton, 1991).

Providing students with practice of various levels of comprehension will help them become proficient readers and will result in higher reading scores.

Marzano (1993) found that questioning is the most popular technique teachers use to stimulate students’ thinking. This technique is followed by writing techniques and general information processing strategies.

Effect on Reading Experience

High mastery of the levels of comprehension indicates that students are able to experience a much greater appreciation of the materials they are reading. “Many children who can understand what they read at a literal level, find it difficult to understand a writer’s underlying meaning and intentions. There is a tendency for them to interpret only what the words say, not what they mean” (Fisher, 1990). Moving a student beyond the literal or concrete level will provide a richer, meaningful reading experience.

Effect on Teacher Instruction

There is continuing documentation about the positive effect of higher-order thinking on students’ achievement scores. Standards also call for higher-order thinking experiences to take place in the classroom.

- “[New developments have] spurred a calling for tests. These tests have been studied by national education experts and are said to be assessments of basic skills. And yet, even basic skill questions may require higher levels of comprehension or thinking skills” (Guthrie, 2001).
- “Virtually every standards document makes explicit or implicit reference to the fact that thinking and

reasoning should be reinforced in the context of authentic tasks within their content areas” (Marzano, 1998).

While there is a recognised demand to have higher-order thinking practised in the classroom, there is also a recognised instructional struggle with bringing higher-order

thinking to life in the classroom. “Teachers see higher-order thinking tasks as difficult and highly demanding. Therefore, they refrain from assigning higher-order thinking tasks to students whom, the teachers believe, will find such tasks hard and frustrating. Despite good intentions, this creates a vicious cycle: Precisely those students whose thinking skills need the most care and teacher attention get less attention from teachers than their high-achieving peers. Exposing teachers to empirical findings regarding this particular issue may contribute to changing their beliefs and habits” (Zohar & Dori, 2003).

Building Levels of Comprehension provides a practical, accessible and nonthreatening tool for bringing higher-order thinking into the reading classroom. *Building Levels of Comprehension* provides teachers with a format for building and strengthening students' level of mastery at various levels of comprehension.



“Although basic skills have their place in pedagogy, critical thinking skills are essential.”

— Wenglinsky, 2004



WHY DOES BUILDING LEVELS OF COMPREHENSION PRESENT QUESTIONS IN TWO FORMATS—MULTIPLE CHOICE AND SHORT RESPONSE?

Questions are the vehicles that ignite conversations and discussions. Marzano (1993) determined that questioning is the most popular technique to stimulate students' thinking. Questioning in today's classroom appears primarily in two written formats—multiple choice and short response.

Multiple Choice Format

While multiple choice questions generally are not seen as the typical springboard for higher-level thinking, this generalisation and format cannot be ignored. According to Winerip (2006), forty-two per cent of students are now taking reading and maths tests that are entirely multiple choice format.

As teachers already know, students need to be aware that multiple choice items oftentimes require higher-level thinking. The multiple choice format does not always require simple factual recall. Students need the awareness that multiple choice answers may not always be obvious. They need to reflect upon the question, the text and the offered answer choices before selecting a response. *Building Levels of Comprehension* will positively emphasise questions that require higher-order thinking to attain the answers. The question-unpacking process is a tool for students to use to understand all questions and to uncover the deeper thinking that some multiple choice questions elicit.

Short Response Format

The short response question format is a true vehicle for stimulating higher-order thinking. And while multiple choice question formats are gaining prominence in the testing arena, short response question formats continue to stake a claim in assessment situations. “[Changes in] assessment suggest a shift, albeit a gradual one, from objective to more open-ended responses to text (Sarroub & Pearson, 1998). Open-ended items better measure students' ability to think about a story and to use the information in a story to explain their thinking. Thus a combination of objective and open-ended questions in any given assessment may make it possible to gather more specific information about a reader's thought processes” (Applegate, Applegate & Quinn, 2002). *Building Levels of Comprehension* incorporates the short response question format to enhance students' attainment of answers and to showcase students' mastery of higher-order thinking.

SUMMARY

Building Levels of Comprehension is designed to help students arrive at reading-comprehension answers, both in multiple choice format and in short response format. These differentiated test-taking experiences will provide teachers with a clear view of students' comprehension abilities. Cooperative learning will strengthen the participation rate of students with diverse needs.

Through an understanding of students' level of mastery at the levels of comprehension, teachers effectively build each student's level of comprehension. *Building Levels of Comprehension* can help students become successful and effective readers.

Reading is thinking cued by written language.

- Effective readers think within the text.
- Effective readers think beyond the text.
- Effective readers think about the text.

—Scharer, Pinnell, Lyons and Fountas (2005)

PART TWO: SHORT RESPONSE

Modelled Practice, page 46: Adam and the three boys will probably begin to chop more logs to build the family cabins. (M/P)

Guided Practice, page 47: “And that’s the worst thing that can happen” expresses an opinion. The statement contains the clue word worst. You can’t prove that something is or isn’t the worst. Someone else might have another opinion or belief. (F/O)

Explain It: To answer this question, I thought about the idea that an opinion is a statement that can’t be proven. I looked for clue words that signal an opinion. I found the clue word worst in the statement “And that’s the worst thing that can happen.” I knew that not everyone would agree with the statement. It’s what the writer believes. So it’s an opinion.

Independent Practice, pages 49–50:

1. The main idea of the story is that Alice had lost a lot of confidence since her latest illness. Tutoring Faith with her maths homework helped bring some of Alice’s confidence back. (M/I)
2. In the story, the word compassion means “a feeling of sympathy or sadness that one person feels for another”. Ms Little felt compassion for Alice because the girl had lost a lot of confidence since her latest illness. When someone sees that someone they care about is not doing well in some way, they often feel compassion. That’s how Ms Little felt about Alice. (Voc)
3. When Faith said that she got “as twisted as a rat in a maze”, she meant that she felt confused when she tried to solve word problems. If a rat is in a maze, it can get confused or twisted around, not knowing which way to turn. When Faith did word problems, her thoughts got all twisted and confused. (F/L)
4. The first statement that Alice made that expresses an opinion is the very first statement in the story. “But I could never do that, Ms Little.” The clue word never signals that this is an opinion. It is how she feels at the time. (F/O)
5. When Faith and Alice work together tomorrow, Alice will probably be able to help Faith work through her problems by giving her more strategies for solving word problems. It worked today, so it will probably work tomorrow. Faith’s ability to solve word problems will probably improve the more the two girls work together. (M/P)

6. Alice probably agreed to help Faith again because Alice liked helping someone else. Also, it gave her confidence a boost when Faith said how much she appreciated Alice’s help. Alice probably wanted to be more like her old self but hadn’t had a reason to feel very confident until then. People like to feel confident and tend to do things that make them feel that way. (C/I)

Summing Up, page 51: Student responses should reflect the following key ideas from the Introduction page: Sometimes the answer to a question isn’t clearly stated in one place, and you can’t find pieces of the answer to put together. But don’t give up. You can still answer the question. The answer isn’t directly stated in the passage, but there are hints. You can look for clues or other details that will help you figure out the answer. Then you use the clues, along with what you already know, to figure out the answer.

Levels One–Three REVIEW

PART ONE: MULTIPLE CHOICE

FIND IT, page 54:

1. D (Seq)
2. B (C/E)
3. D (C/C)

CONNECT IT, page 54:

4. B (Sum)
5. A (Seq)
6. A (MI)

ADD TO IT, page 55:

7. D (M/I)
8. C (M/P)
9. A (C/I)

PART TWO: SHORT RESPONSE

FIND IT, page 57:

1. At the beginning of the story, Rosa was compared to “any good detective”. (C/C)
2. Elena was collecting money for the class trip during homeroom. (Det)
3. The emergency teacher refused to take the money that Elena had collected, so Elena put the money in her backpack and went to the principal’s office after school to put the money in the school safe. (C/E)

**FINAL REVIEW 5: MULTIPLE CHOICE
AND SHORT RESPONSE**

page 102:

1. C (FI) (Voc)
2. D (CI) (Seq)
3. C (FI) (C/E)
4. D (ATI) (F/L)
5. A (CI) (C/C)
6. A (GBI) (Cor)

page 103:

7. You could look for more information about Sherwood Forest and Nottingham in an encyclopedia article. Then you could search the Internet to find out more information about these places in England. If you wanted more information or pictures of these places, you could probably find a book about places in England or even travel to England and look for information about Sherwood Forest and/or Nottingham. (GBI) (Res)
8. That Rob's heart overflowed with joy, meant that Rob was extremely happy, or "overflowing with happiness". When a cup overflows with water, it has so much water that the water flows over the cup's side. Because he was sure he'd win the contest and a position as a Forester, Rob felt so full of joy that it seemed like it was more than his heart or his whole being could hold. (ATI) (F/L)
9. If Rob had not encountered the Foresters in Sherwood Forest, he probably would have gone into Nottingham without any disguise because he would not have been an outlaw with a price on his head. He would have spoken openly to Maid Marian because she was his dear friend from childhood. Because he was such a good archer, he probably would still have won the prize. Then he probably would have given the golden arrow to Marian. (ATI) (M/P)

page 104:

10. Rob told the Sheriff that he didn't want the job as a Forester because Rob knew he'd be arrested as soon as someone recognised him. (FI) (C/E)
11. When Rob Fitzooth's parents died, Rob went to live with his uncle. On his way to an archery contest, Rob ran into the enemy of his family. When the man tried to kill Rob, Rob defended himself and became an outlaw. In disguise, Rob won the archery contest. Rob gave the prize arrow to his childhood friend, Maid Marian. Then he returned to the forest and became the leader of a group who took from the rich and helped the poor. He became known as Robin Hood. (CI) (Sum)
12. The author wrote this story to entertain readers. It is a fictional legend, and readers are meant to enjoy the passage, not to learn from it or change behaviour or beliefs because of it. As in most legends, the character of Robin Hood is based on an actual person. Over the years, the story of Robin Hood's life and his accomplishments probably have been exaggerated. Readers read this legend quickly and for fun, not to learn facts about life in England long ago. (GBI) (A/P)