

# How Is Comprehension Taught in Superkids?

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THE SUPERKIDS READING PROGRAM

## What is good comprehension instruction?

Reading is a product of two major sets of skills—word recognition and language comprehension.<sup>1</sup> Research on comprehension is clear that in the primary grades, comprehension depends on automaticity in word recognition while building vocabulary, oral language, and schema or background information.<sup>2</sup>

Why is word recognition automaticity so important? Printed words cannot be interpreted unless they are accurately recognized. A fluent reader carries out this process of word recognition automatically. To achieve automaticity, neural pathways in the brain must be established to link phonological processing (sound) to orthographic processing (letter recognition). In other words, beginning readers must be taught the alphabetic code and develop the ability to connect sound and symbol, which is called phonics. Fluency in word recognition frees up the reader's brain energy to focus on comprehension. Research is clear that word recognition automaticity is highly correlated with good reading comprehension.<sup>3</sup>

Superkids is a comprehensive, phonics-based reading program that explicitly and systematically teaches children how to become fluent, automatic readers. Simultaneously, as children work on developing decoding automaticity and fluency in word recognition, Superkids supports comprehension development appropriate to each stage of a child's development. In pre-school and early kindergarten, it is taught through listening comprehension and language-building activities. In kindergarten, the emphasis is on children becoming competent decoders. In first grade, Superkids provides an

array of challenging and rigorous decodable text to develop reading comprehension of fiction and nonfiction. In second grade, an engaging decodable text builds word recognition fluency. In addition, children read authentic fiction in trade books in the Book Club and nonfiction in SUPER Magazine, all written with open or uncontrolled vocabulary.

## Vocabulary and oral language skills underlie good comprehension.

A well-developed vocabulary and proficient oral language skills are two key factors in a child's ability to understand at the listening comprehension level and subsequently at the reading comprehension level. Research is clear that the development of oral language must precede and continue throughout early reading instruction.<sup>4</sup>



In the Superkids Reading Program, activities and pages in the Student Books are devoted to building these skills. For example, when kindergarten children first meet the Superkids characters, they learn about each one's interests—cooking, sports, games and puzzles, art projects, and so on—and the objects and activities associated with them. As the program moves into first and second grade, the stories move from the interests of the characters to the wider worlds of family, friends, their neighborhood, and beyond, providing explicit instruction to develop concepts, vocabulary, and oral language—the building blocks of reading comprehension.

## Listening comprehension precedes reading comprehension.

While children are developing automaticity in decoding, Superkids deliberately provides many opportunities for listening comprehension, in essence laying the blueprint for comprehension aurally so that print can be overlaid once children are reading.



Listening comprehension opportunities include storytelling and auditory discrimination in the reading readiness program, *Happily Ever After*, direction-following from CDs in the kindergarten program, and specific teacher-read-aloud lessons with the focus on modeling and practice of listening comprehension strategies in all levels of the program through second grade. Narration of all stories in the core materials and in the Superkids Libraries are provided on CDs in all levels of the program. These listening comprehension exercises prepare children to make a smooth transition into reading comprehension.

## Fluency is the bridge to comprehension.

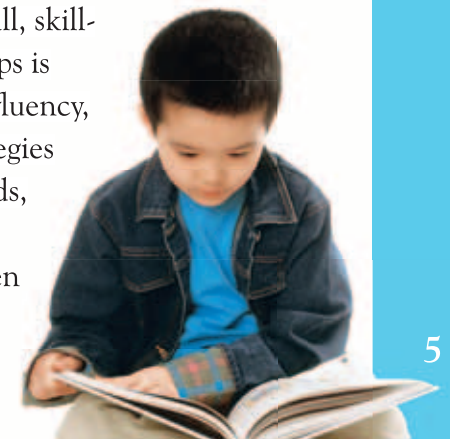
As children acquire basic skills in word recognition, they must have many and ample opportunities to practice reading text in order to build decoding automaticity and reading fluency. Once they reach automaticity and fluency, the brain is able to focus on comprehending content, which, of course, is the purpose of reading.

Research has shown that decodable text is critical for developing fluency in beginning reading.<sup>5</sup> Decodable text is reliably accessible. It allows children to apply letter-sounds they know to unlock new words and thus to succeed in their early reading attempts. In kindergarten and first grade, children are given only decodable text that matches the phonetic controls they are learning in the program. They have the phonetic tools to unlock every word they encounter and do not have to guess from illustrations or context.

All Student Books and Readers, as well as all of the kindergarten and first-grade Superkids Libraries, use this same reliable, decodable text. Specific lesson steps teach word-recognition automaticity as well as the attributes of fluency: rate, accuracy, and prosody. CDs are provided for all the decodable text so that children can hear models of fluent reading. All of this instruction leads to the ultimate goal of freeing children to put their focus on meaning.

## Strategies of reading comprehension

Although low levels of fluency are correlated with low levels of reading comprehension, it is clear that fluent reading alone does not guarantee good reading comprehension. The more mature the reader, the more important strategic reading becomes.<sup>6</sup> In the Superkids Reading Program, all lessons involving text reading are done in small, skill-ability groups. The focus of these groups is not only to develop automaticity and fluency, but also to teach comprehension strategies through direct instruction, think-alouds, prompts and questions, and graphic organizers. The goal is to guide children



to navigate their way through text and become metacognitive readers, aware of how they are reading as they are reading. Explicit lesson plans and other resources for these differentiated groups are provided in the Superkids Teacher's Guides.

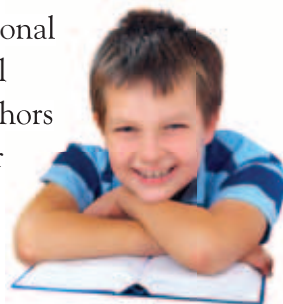
### Moving into second grade

Formulaic teaching of comprehension strategies in isolation is not an effective way to teach reading comprehension. Because the goal is to engage students in deep thinking about text, the skills involved in comprehension vary according to the text being read, the author's intent, and the reader's purpose for reading. Effective teachers guide the way through a text, provide a platform for discussion, and ask probing questions in order to foster active response.

A recent analysis of the five most widely used basal reading programs found that these programs teach many more skills and strategies than researchers recommend and that the emphasis on multiple strategies distracts from and dilutes the focus on content. In addition, none of their comprehension strategy instruction met the guidelines of explicit instruction recommended in a number of research studies.<sup>7</sup>

The Superkids Reading Program is different. By second grade, the program provides:

**Book Clubs.** Small-group literature circles encourage a love of reading and are designed to focus on teaching children to comprehend fictional text of varied genres and multicultural relevance. Written by well-known authors and illustrators, these beloved chapter books are presented in their original trade-book format.



**SUPER Magazine.** This magazine provides nonfiction reading experiences for small groups, teaching important strategies for understanding nonfiction using features such as captions, charts, maps, and diagrams. The magazine expands children's

core knowledge of the world around them, giving them rich background information to take with them into the intermediate grades. It is "real-world reading" with recipes, advice columns, and humor, as well as serious articles about science, social studies, and world cultures.

Superkids is based on pedagogically sound instructional principles for developing and teaching comprehension that are supported by research. This comprehensive well-integrated core curriculum provides primary students with the best possible start on the road to reading success.

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To learn more about  
the Superkids Reading Program,  
call 866-370-7323 or  
visit [www.superkidsreading.org](http://www.superkidsreading.org).



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*Rowland Reading Foundation is a nonprofit organization  
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