

Developing Reading Comprehension Skills

Because COMPREHENSION is the purpose of reading, most of the short sentences in this book contain ideas, allusions, and references that very definitely are NOT “Look, Dick! Look! See the bunny rabbit” or “Look, Jane! Look! See the pretty red balloon.” Instead, we have short sentences such as: “My sister Lynn gets under my skin.” Although this sentence, like most, rates as 2.3 on a readability index, it is not a turn-off to adults. But are they too advanced for early elementary readers? We think not. We believe that you can treat children like adults, but you should never treat adults like children. These sentences quite often do challenge the gifted children. But, at the same time, the average students do develop more reading skills with these more sophisticated sentences than they would with traditional. Likewise, there are many reasons why this form of spelling/reading/writing exercise develops better reading comprehension skills than traditional exercises that require the student to first read a story and then to answer a set of questions.

The most important reason is that comprehension is an active process that should take place **AS** a person is reading—not afterwards. Too many students get in the habit of just hearing a voice in their heads talking at them as they call out in a deadly monotone the words in front of them. After they finish reading the paragraph, the page, or the story, they can’t remember what they’ve read. Why? Because their minds were not actively engaged while they were reading. They were just hearing the words in their heads—they were not listening and thinking at the same time. On the other hand the short sentences in *Word Families in Sentence Context* challenge the students and their minds are subtly being trained to think **as** they are reading.

Another reason why our *Word Families in Sentence Context* is better than traditional exercises at developing comprehension skills, is that getting the right answer to a question isn’t the same as comprehending what you are reading. Typical comprehension exercises are really practice exercises in taking comprehension tests—not in the act of comprehending while reading.

If you do want more traditional and individualized reading comprehension exercises, AVKO does recommend, SRA’s Reading for Understanding by Thelma Gwinn Thurston. No, this isn’t the SRA Reading Program/s that you might be acquainted with. This is different. RFU (Reading for Understanding) is, as Tony the Tiger would say, “G-G-GREAT!” And, AVKO is not being paid to endorse this product. One set lasts for years and years. We have used ours at the AVKO Reading Clinic since the late 60’s. Perhaps that’s why you rarely find this set at the SRA exhibits and why it’s almost impossible to find in SRA’s catalog. But, it’s there! It’s awfully expensive—but, we feel it’s a good buy for any school.