



---

# **Reading Comprehension in the Elementary Grades**

**Before Passage Reading Practices**

1



---

**Anita L. Archer, Ph.D.**

Educational Consultant

[archerteach@aol.com](mailto:archerteach@aol.com)

503-295-7749

2



## Before Reading Practices

---

- Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words.
- Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.
- Teach or activate any necessary background knowledge.
- Preview the story or article.



## Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words.

---

**BIG IDEA:** If students can read the words in a passage accurately and fluently, their reading comprehension will be enhanced.

5




## Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words. Why

---

- Word recognition and decoding skills are necessary, though not sufficient for reading comprehension.
- Systematic and explicit decoding instruction improves students' word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension. (National Reading Panel, 2000)
- Fluent reading in the primary grades is related to reading comprehension.
  - Variance in reading comprehension explained by oral reading fluency: 1st (61%), 2nd (61%), 3rd (50%) (Torgeson, 2007)

6



## **Video - Decoding Instruction** (Segment 4: Primary Decoding Instruction)

---

- Carefully and systematically teach and review decoding skills introduced in the core reading program.

As you watch this short video, note any good instructional practices.



## **Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words.** How

---

- Teach the pronunciation of words before a passage is read when:
  - indicated by the program.
  - preparing students to read difficult text. (*See Example 1*)
  - introducing reading material outside of the core reading program (e.g., science, social studies, magazine articles). (*See Example 2*)
- Preteach the difficult to read words to the lowest performing students in small group or tutorial setting. (*See Example 3*)
- Focus first on accuracy then fluency, rereading the list until “automaticity” is established.
- Blend this teaching with vocabulary instruction.

## Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words.

Selection of words for decoding instruction.

### Selection of words

1. Use the list of difficult to read words provided in your program.
2. If list of words is not provided or inadequate for your students, preview the passage selecting the difficult to read words.
3. Divide the difficult to pronounce words into two categories for instructional purposes:

**Tell Words** (irregular words, words containing untaught elements, and foreign words)

**Strategy Words** (words that can be decoded when minimal assistance is provided)

## Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words.

Teaching the pronunciation of words.

### Tell Words

*This word is \_\_\_\_\_.*

*What word? \_\_\_\_\_*

*Spell and read the word.*

\_\_\_\_\_

**there    along    upon    woman**

## Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words.

Teaching the pronunciation of words.

### Strategy Words - Single syllable words

**Precorrect** the difficult part of the word.

*Look at the underlined letters.*

*What sound?* \_\_\_\_\_

*Sound out the word. (Pause)*

*What word?* \_\_\_\_\_

**rain**

**boat**

**seed**

11

## Teach the pronunciation of difficult to read words.

Teaching the pronunciation of words.

### Strategy Words - Multisyllabic

Segment the word into decodable parts. Indicate parts with loops under the word.

Guide students in reading each part of the word.

(Move your finger under each part of the word.)

*What part?* \_\_\_\_\_

*What part?* \_\_\_\_\_

*What part?* \_\_\_\_\_

*What word?* \_\_\_\_\_

**condensation**

**atmosphere**

**evaporation**

**Notes:** If any element is unknown, simply tell students the pronunciation of the element.

12



**Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.**

---

**BIG IDEA: If students understand the meaning of critical vocabulary in the passage, their comprehension will be enhanced.**

13



**Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.** Why

---

- Vocabulary is related to reading comprehension.
  - “Indeed, one of the most enduring findings in reading research is the extent to which students’ vocabulary knowledge relates to their reading comprehension.” (Osborn & Hiebert, 2004)
  - Variance in reading explained by vocabulary: 1st (20%), 2nd (31%), 3rd (36%) (Torgeson, 2007)

14

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Why

- **Children's vocabulary in the early grades is related to reading comprehension in the upper grades.**
  - **Preschool** - Children's vocabulary correlated with reading comprehension in upper elementary school. (Dickinson & Tabois, 2001)
  - **Kindergarten** - Vocabulary size was an effective predictor of reading comprehension in middle elementary years. (Scarborough, 1998)
  - **First Grade** - Orally tested vocabulary was a significant predictor of reading comprehension ten years later. (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997)
  - **Third Grade** - Children with restricted vocabulary have declining comprehension scores in the later elementary years. (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990)

15

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Why - Vocabulary Gap

- **Children enter school with different levels of vocabulary.** (Hart & Risley, 1995)
- **Cumulative Vocabulary (Age 4)**
  - Children from professional families 1100 words
  - Children from working class families 700 words
  - Children from welfare families 500 words
- Linguistically "poor" first graders knew 5,000 words; linguistically "rich" first graders knew 20,000 words. (Moats, 2001)

16

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Why - Vocabulary Gap

- Children who enter school with limited vocabulary knowledge grow more discrepant over time from their peers who have rich vocabulary knowledge. (Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1997)
- Gap in word knowledge persists though the elementary years. (White, Graves, & Slater, 1990)
- The vocabulary gap between struggling readers and proficient readers grows each year. (Stanovich, 1986)

17

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. How

- **High-quality Classroom Language** (Dickinson, Cote, & Smith, 1993)
- **Reading Aloud to Students** (Elley, 1989; Senechal, 1997)
- **Explicit Vocabulary Instruction** (Baker, Kame'enui, & Simmons, 1998; Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003; Beck & McKeown, 1991; Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002; Biemiller, 2004; Marzano, 2004; Paribakht & Wesche, 1997)
- **Word-learning Strategies** (Buikima & Graves, 1993; Edwards, Font, Baumann, & Boland, 2004; Graves, 2004; White, Sowell, & Yanagihara, 1989)
- **Wide Independent Reading** (Anderson & Nagy, 1992; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987; Sternberg, 1987)

18



## **Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.** How

---

“Until schools are prepared to emphasize vocabulary acquisition, especially in the primary grades, less advantaged children will continue to be handicapped even if they master reading written words.” (Biemiller & Boote, 2006)

19



## **Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.** How - Robust, Explicit Vocabulary Instruction

---

- **Attributes of good vocabulary instruction**
  - Multiple exposures
  - Definitional information and contextual information
  - Sufficient amount of instructional time to insure understanding of words
  - Active engagement in instruction

20

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Preparation - Selection of vocabulary

- Select a **limited number** of words for robust, explicit vocabulary instruction.
- **Three to ten words** per story or section in a chapter would be appropriate.
- Briefly **tell students the meaning of other words** that are needed for comprehension.

21

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Preparation - Selection of vocabulary

- Select words that are **unknown**.
- Select words that are **critical** to passage understanding.
- Select words that students are likely to encounter in the **future** and are generally useful. (Stahl, 1986)
  - Focus on Tier Two words (Beck & McKeown, 2003)
  - Academic Vocabulary

22

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Preparation - Selection of vocabulary

- Tier One - Basic words
  - chair, bed, happy, house
  
- **Tier Two - Words in general use, but not common**
  - concentrate, absurd, fortunate, relieved, dignity, convenient
  
- Tier Three - Rare words limited to a specific domain
  - tundra, igneous rocks, weathering

(Beck & McKeown, 1985)

23

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Preparation - Selection of vocabulary

- “Goldilocks Words”
  - Not too difficult
  - Not too easy
  - Just right

(Stahl & Stahl, 2004)

24

**Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.** Select 4 words for robust explicit instruction.

Second Graders (Read Aloud)	First Graders (Read Aloud)
<b>Enemy Pie</b> by Derek Munson	<b>Honk!</b> By Pamela Duncan Edwards
perfect	swan
trampoline	ballet
enemy	perfect
recipe	crazy
disgusting	figures
earthworms	graceful
ingredients	practiced
horrible	love
nervous	amazing
invited	furious
relieved	collector
boomerang	opera house

**Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.** Select 3 words for robust explicit instruction.

Reading Level: 2nd      Passage: Lemonade for Sale Series: Harcourt Trophies		
announced	members	neighborhood
arrived	rebuild	lemonade
glum	squawked	clubhouse

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.

Preparation - Selection of words.

- Also, teach idioms (*A phrase or expression in which the entire meaning is different from the usual meaning of the individual words.*)

“The car rolling down the hill caught my eye.”

“Soon we were in stitches.”

“The painting cost me an arm and a leg.”

“The teacher was under the weather.”

27

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.

Preparation - Student-friendly explanations.

- **Dictionary Definition**
  - **relieved** - (1) To free wholly or partly from pain, stress, pressure.  
(2) To lessen or alleviate, as pain or pressure
- **Student-Friendly Explanation** (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2003)
  - **Uses known words.**
  - **Is easy to understand.**
  - When something that was difficult is over or never happened at all, you feel **relieved**.

28

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.

Preparation - Student-friendly explanation.

- **Dictionary Definition**
  - **Attention** - a. the act or state of attending through applying the mind to an object of sense or thought  
b. a condition of readiness for such attention involving a selective narrowing of consciousness and receptivity
  
- **Explanation from Dictionary for English Language Learners**  
(*Elementary Learner's Dictionary* published by Oxford)
  - **Attention** - looking or listening carefully and with interest

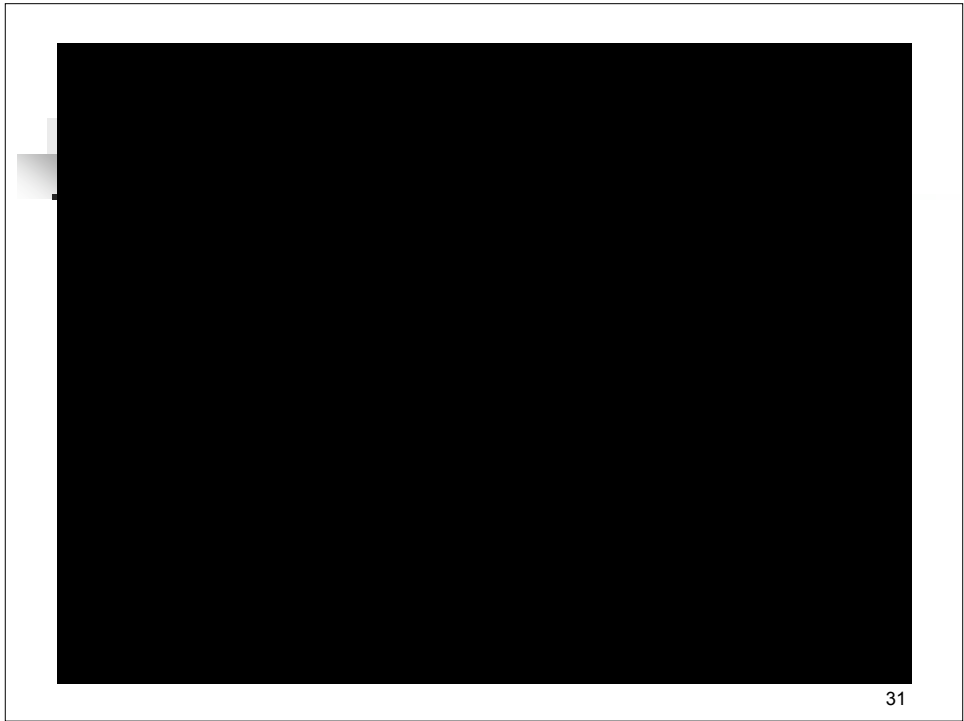
29

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.

Preparation - Selection of Vocabulary

Dictionary Definition	Student-Friendly Explanations
disgusting - to cause to feel disgust; be sickening, repulsive, or very distasteful to	
fragile - easily broken, damaged, or destroyed	
gratitude - a feeling of thankful appreciation for favors or benefits received	
loitering - to linger in an aimless way; spend time idly	

30



## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.

Video Example

---

- What other good practices did you observe?

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Instructional Routine

(Note: Teach words **AFTER** you have read a story to your students and **BEFORE** students read a selection.)

### Step 1. Introduce the word.

- a) Write the word on the board or overhead.
- b) Read the word and have the students repeat the word. If the word is difficult to pronounce or unfamiliar have the students repeat the word a number of times.

*Introduce the word with me.*

***“ This word is relieved. What word?”***

33

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Instructional Routine (continued)

### Step 2. Present a student-friendly explanation.

- a) Tell students the explanation. OR
- b) Have them read the explanation with you.

*Present the definition with me.*

***“When something that is difficult is over or never happened at all, you feel relieved. So if something that is difficult is over, you would feel \_\_\_\_\_.”***

34

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Instructional Routine (continued)

### Step 3. Illustrate the word with examples.

- a) Concrete examples.
- b) Visual representations.
- c) Verbal examples.

*Present the examples with me.*

***“When the spelling test is over, you feel relieved.”***

***“When you have finished giving the speech that you dreaded, you feel relieved.”***

35

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Instructional Routine (continued)

### Step 4. Check students' understanding. Option #1. Ask deep processing questions.

*Check students' understanding with me.*

***When the students lined up for morning recess, Jason said, “I am so relieved that this morning is over.” Why might Jason be relieved?***

***When Maria was told that the soccer game had been cancelled, she said, “I am relieved.” Why might Maria be relieved?***

36

**Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.** Instructional Routine (continued)

- Step 4. **Check students' understanding.**  
Option #2. **Have students discern between examples and non-examples.**

*Check students' understanding with me.*

***“If you were nervous singing in front of others, would you feel relieved when the concert was over?”***

Yes ***“Why?”***

***“If you loved singing to audiences, would you feel relieved when the concert was over?”*** No ***“Why not?”*** *It was not difficult for you.*

37

**Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.** Instructional Routine (continued)

- Step 4. **Check students' understanding.**  
Option #3. **Have students generate their own examples.**

*Check students' understanding with me.*

***“Tell your partner a time when you were relieved.”***

38

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Instructional Routine (continued)

- Step 4. **Check students' understanding.**  
Option #4. **Provide students with a "sentence starter". Have them say the complete sentence.**

*Check students' understanding with me.*

***Sometimes your mother is relieved. Tell your partner when your mother is relieved. Start your sentence by saying, "My mother is relieved when \_\_\_\_\_."***

39

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words.

Did the teacher:

1. Introduce the word?
2. Present a student-friendly explanation?
3. Illustrate the word with examples?
4. Check students' understanding?

40

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Review

- After teaching the group of vocabulary words, review the words using a “word association” activity.
- Words written on board or overhead:

**enemy, disgusting, invited, relieved**

*“Tell me the word that I am thinking about.  
Someone that hates you might be called an \_\_\_\_\_.  
If you didn’t like a food, you might say it is \_\_\_\_\_.  
When a test is over, you often feel \_\_\_\_\_.  
When you are asked to a party, you are \_\_\_\_\_.”*

41

## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Review

- After teaching the group of vocabulary words, review the words using a “choice” activity.
- Words written on board or overhead:

**enemy, disgusting, invited, relieved**

- *If you felt **relieved** after a test, was the test probably easy or difficult?*
- *If an **enemy** gave you the answers before a test, would you believe the answers to be correct or incorrect?*
- *If the food was **disgusting**, would you ask for more or spit it up?*
- *If you were **invited** to a party, would you be asked to come or to stay away?*

42






## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Word Walls

---

- Create a word wall in your classroom.
  - Post a reminder of the context.
    - Copy of the cover of the read-aloud book
    - Copy of the first page in the story
    - The topic in science or social studies
  - Post the vocabulary words.
  - Incorporate the words into your classroom language.
  - Encourage students to use the words when speaking and writing.

45



## Teach the meaning of critical, unknown vocabulary words. Vocabulary Logs

---

- Have students maintain a log of vocabulary to facilitate study and review.
- What can be recorded on a vocabulary log?
  - Word
  - Student-friendly explanation
  - Any of these options
    - A sentence to illustrate the word's meaning
    - Examples and non-examples
    - An illustration
- In lower grades, create a group log on a flip chart.
- (*See Examples 4, 5, and 6.*)

46



**Teach or activate necessary background knowledge.**

---

**Big Idea: If students have the background knowledge required by a passage, their comprehension will be enhanced.**

47



**Teach or activate necessary background knowledge.** *Why*

---

- Background knowledge is related to comprehension.
- Students from low-income homes may have fewer life experiences and literacy-promoting activities resulting in less background knowledge and fewer *schemas* for supporting comprehension.

48

## Teach or activate necessary background knowledge. How

**Teach** the background knowledge that is required for passage comprehension.

### Strategy #1

- Introduce background knowledge as outlined in your reading program. Actively engage the students.

### Strategy #2

- “Front load” passage reading by teaching additional background knowledge needed to better understand the passage.

### Strategy #3

- Prior to passage reading, select and read aloud a book that provides necessary background knowledge.

49

## Teach or activate necessary background knowledge. How



### Strategy #3 Example

- Prior to passage reading, select and read aloud a book that provides necessary background knowledge.
  - **Passage:** *Me and Uncle Romie*
  - **Background Knowledge Needed:** Life in a big city (New York City)

50

## Teach or activate necessary background knowledge. How

### Activate background knowledge using a research-validated strategy.

#### Strategy #1

- Ask students questions and engage them in a discussion to activate their background knowledge.

#### Strategy #2

- Activate prior knowledge using KWL strategy.
- To increase student success, “front load” before having students respond to KWL chart. If this is done, students will “know” something and will have a basis for formulating questions about they want to find out.

#### Strategy #3

- Brainstorm the topics/questions that might be covered. This will strengthen or activate schema.

51

## Teach or activate necessary background knowledge. How (Olson & Gee, 1991)

<b>K</b> What I <b>know</b>	<b>W</b> What <b>want</b> to find out	<b>L</b> What I <b>learned</b>

52



## **Preview the story or article.**

---

**Big Idea: If students preview a passage, their comprehension will be enhanced.**

53



## **Preview the story or article.** Why

---

- As students preview a selection, they:
  - discover what content will be covered or what the story will be about.
  - learn what information will be emphasized.
  - see how the information is organized.
  - activate background knowledge that will assist in comprehension.
  - become more interested in the passage.

54



## Preview the story or article. How

---

### **Narrative Passages.**

- Read the title. Predict the content of the story.
- Preview the illustrations/pictures. Predict the content of the passage.

### **Expository/informational/factual passages**

- Read the title. Predict the content of the passage.
- Read the introduction. Ask, "What will we learn in this passage."
- Read the headings and subheadings. Predict the passage's content from the headings and subheadings. - Read the summary .

55



## Preview the story or article. Strategy

---

### **Warm-Up**

Before you read a chapter or a section of a chapter in your science, social studies, or health book, Warm-up. Get an idea of the chapter's content by previewing these parts.

#### **BEGINNING**

- Title
- Introduction

#### **MIDDLE**

- Headings
- Subheadings

#### **END**

- Summary
- Questions

Curriculum Associates, *Skills for School Success*

56