

# Introduction

## Why is reading comprehension important?

Reading comprehension opens up a whole new world for children, helping them to explore people, places, thoughts, ideas and feelings that were previously unknown to them. Playing a vital part in education across all school subjects – and with its importance fully acknowledged in the National Curriculum for English – comprehension fires children’s interest in the content and meaning of their reading and further develops this through discussion and written activities.

If children’s early experiences of reading comprehension are positive, and if the question content is rigorous and thorough, their vocabulary will rapidly increase. In addition, the children will develop an infectious enthusiasm for reading, a curiosity for the new information that non-fiction can provide, a voracious appetite for stories and a fascination for the magic and variety of poetry.

## Developing comprehension skills

### Children who cannot yet read

As soon as children begin to listen to stories and poems, instructions or information, they begin to process what they hear and quickly learn to understand it. This is the case long before they begin to read for themselves.

Assessing a child’s level of comprehension in the early years is achieved largely through observation and oral prompting. For example, you, the teacher, might take note of whether the child:

- laughs or grimaces appropriately at events in a story that is read aloud
- can explain a character’s actions or predict an ending to a chain of events
- is able to follow a set of instructions accurately
- anticipates patterned language and joins in with poems and nursery rhymes.

Informal assessment of all these basic levels of comprehension continues orally on a daily basis and in a natural, informal way through:

- eliciting reactions to texts (*What did you like about that poem?*)
- testing recall (*How many teddies were sitting on the wall?*)
- assessing inferential understanding (*Where would you go to look for caterpillars?*)
- eliciting explanations in the child’s own words (*Tell me why it gets dark at night.*)
- encouraging children to recognise incongruity (*Are cats usually green?*)
- helping them to empathise by drawing on experience (*Have you ever been lost?*).

### Reading comprehension with discussion

Discussion-based comprehension skills (as above) remain essential throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. Even after children have learned to read, they should continue to develop their skills in listening to texts that are read aloud and answering questions on the content. This provides excellent preparation for responding to written questions with written answers. Continuing to read aloud to children and discussing the content of what you read will:

- motivate children to read for themselves
- encourage them to acquire and strengthen their ability to interpret texts