

Say What?

Susan Ramsay, Early Literacy Specialist HLF&A (613) 354-6318 (ext 32)

Did you know?

- 25% of all reading is made up of only 12 words (a, was, that, the, I, it, of, and, in, to, is, he).
- Of the remaining words we most frequently use, 70% have multiple meanings.
- Budding readers need books with fewer than 3 unknown words per page.
- It is possible to teach children to read without them understanding the words.

Comprehension, though, is the reason for print. Without comprehension there is no motivation to read.

We can teach children how to read for meaning. Comprehension of written words develops through listening, talking and questioning.

According to internationally acclaimed literacy consultant, Miriam Trehearne, the ear of a typical young boy processes sound more slowly than the ear of a young girl. For children under 6 years of age, the meaning of a sentence that is more than nine words long can be lost. Justin is much more likely to wriggle under the couch for his lost teddy bear if we tell him, "Teddy is under the couch in the living room." than if we say, "I saw that teddy of yours under the couch yesterday when I was vacuuming up before Grandma came for supper last night."

Typically, parents and caregivers watch the eyes and reactions of young children for evidence of understanding. Especially when a child is an infant or toddler, adults speak in short, simple, repetitive phrases – perfect for helping children learn new words. As children mature adults speak in longer phrases and more complex sentences.

Current research shows that using picture books to prompt children to talk and then giving children enough time to respond are significant to the development of reading comprehension skills. Five to ten seconds of silence may seem like a long time to a parent who is waiting for an answer, but many young children need this long to formulate their thoughts into spoken words.

For comprehension skills to develop, children need to make connections from print to their own lives, to other books, and to the world.

After reading "Franklin in the Dark" a comment and question like, "Franklin the turtle sure was afraid of the dark! Do you feel afraid in the dark sometimes too?" can help children make connections between printed words and their own experiences.

After reading Franklin in the Dark but **before** reading "Franklin is Lost", a comment like, "I wonder if Franklin will feel afraid in this story too." can help children make connections between different books.

During the reading of a familiar story such as "Franklin Plays a Game" pausing to study the pictures and asking, "What would the ball look like if Franklin was playing Australian Football instead of soccer?" can help children make connections between information in books and a broader knowledge about the world.

Commenting, asking questions and listening - before, during and after reading: Simple ideas that can motivate children to read.