Seven Keys to Comprehension

How to Help Your Kids “Get It”

To state the obvious, if students don’t understand their lessons, then they are not learning. If they cannot construct meaning during a lesson, then school is just boring babble and they will not enjoy their experience. So how is meaning unlocked?

In the 1980’s, a breakthrough occurred: researchers identified the specific thinking strategies used by proficient readers. They found that reading is an interactive process in which good readers engage in a constant internal dialogue with the text. These same strategies apply to all aspects of education and are not limited to reading – they are habits of good learners.

Good students use the following 7 keys to construct meaning.

1. **Create mental images**: Good students create a wide range of visual, auditory, and other sensory images during a lesson, and they become involved in the lesson.
2. **Use background knowledge**: Good students use their prior knowledge before, during, and after a lesson to enhance their understanding of what they are learning about.
3. **Ask questions**: Good students generate questions before, during, and after a lesson to clarify meaning, make predictions, and focus their attention on what’s important.
4. **Make inferences**: Good students use their prior knowledge and information they receive to make predictions, seek answers to questions, draw conclusions, and create interpretations that deepen their understanding of a lesson.
5. **Determine the most important ideas or themes**: Good students identify key ideas or themes during a lesson and they can distinguish between important and unimportant information.
6. **Synthesize information**: Good students track their thinking as it changes during a lesson to get the overall meaning.
7. **Use fix up strategies**: Good students are aware of when they understand and when they don’t. If they have trouble understanding what they are reading or learning about, they use a wide range of problem-solving strategies to repair their understanding.

Good students use the same strategies whether they are reading, listening to lecture, watching a video, or participating in an activity.

There is nothing fancy about these strategies. They are common sense. But to be a good learner, students must take responsibility and use them.

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