How Is Comprehension Developed in Superkids®?

What is good comprehension instruction for beginning readers?
To understand text, readers must employ both word recognition and language comprehension. In early grades, when children are just beginning to unlock the alphabetic code, particular attention must be given to teaching word recognition. Once the process of decoding becomes automatic and fluent, more brain energy can be devoted to comprehension. In fluent reading, language comprehension develops and expands, enabling children to constantly broaden their understanding of more sophisticated text.

Superkids is a comprehensive, phonics-based reading program that explicitly and systematically teaches children how to become fluent, automatic readers. The strength of Superkids’ instruction in automaticity and fluency provides the essential foundation children need for comprehension, building confident readers able to focus on the meaning of complex texts without stumbling over words. At the same time children are learning to develop automaticity and fluency in word recognition, they begin to develop comprehension skills appropriate to each stage of their development as readers.

Word recognition automaticity paves the way for understanding texts.
Why is word recognition automaticity so important? Printed words cannot be interpreted unless they are accurately recognized. A fluent reader carries out this process of word recognition automatically. To achieve automaticity, neural pathways in the brain must be established to link phonological processing (sound) to orthographic processing (letter recognition). This happens when beginning readers are taught the alphabetic code and develop the ability to connect sound and symbol. Fluency in word recognition frees up the reader’s brain energy to focus on comprehension. Research is clear that word recognition automaticity is highly correlated with good reading comprehension.

The Superkids program paves the way for comprehension with rigorous decoding instruction. Children are taught letters first. Then they learn letter-sounds. They are then taught to blend those letter-sounds to decode words. The text they read in Superkids grades K–1 is written using only letter-sounds children have already been taught, so the decoding habit is being constantly strengthened. Fiction in Student Books and Readers, nonfiction in Super-Duper Mini-Magazines, and both fiction and nonfiction in Library books provide consistent practice with engaging text. By second grade, decoding comes effortlessly. This frees children to draw meaning from more challenging texts while automatically decoding new vocabulary that has not been explicitly taught.

Fluency is the bridge to comprehension. As children acquire basic word-recognition skills, they must have ample opportunities to practice reading text in order to build decoding automaticity and reading fluency. Once automaticity and fluency are achieved, the brain is able to focus on comprehending content—the purpose of reading.

Research shows us that decodable text is critical for developing fluency in beginning reading. Decodable text is reliably accessible. It allows children to apply letter-sounds they know to unlock new words and thus to succeed in their early reading attempts. In kindergarten and first grade, children are given only decodable text that matches the phonetic
controls they are learning in the program. They have the phonetic tools to unlock every word they encounter and do not have to guess at meaning from illustrations or context.

All Student Books and Readers, as well as all of the kindergarten and first grade Superkids Libraries, use this same reliable, decodable text. Specific lesson steps teach fluency skills: observing punctuation, reading with expression, reading dialogue, and more. Audio recordings are provided for all of the decodable text so that children can hear models of fluent reading. All of this instruction leads to the ultimate goal of freeing children's brain energy to focus on meaning.

Vocabulary and oral language skills underlie good comprehension.
A robust vocabulary and proficient oral language skills are two key factors in a child's ability to understand text read at the listening comprehension level and subsequently at the reading comprehension level. Research powerfully demonstrates that the development of oral language must precede and continue throughout early reading instruction.

Listening comprehension builds the foundation for reading comprehension.
While children are developing automaticity in decoding, Superkids deliberately provides many opportunities for listening comprehension. This instruction lays an aural foundation for comprehension, so children have a strong base for print comprehension to build on once they begin reading.

Listening comprehension instruction begins in kindergarten, where children practice following directions using audio recordings. Specific teacher read-aloud lessons that continue from kindergarten through first grade focus on modeling and practice of listening comprehension strategies. Narration of stories from the kindergarten Student Books, first and second grade Readers, and the Superkids Libraries are all available as audio recordings. And for kindergarten and first grades, Super Smart informational digital read-alouds provide listening comprehension instruction with rich texts in science and social studies subject areas. These exercises work hand in hand with reading comprehension instruction in each grade to strengthen overall skills.

In the Superkids Reading Program, activities and pages in children's workbooks are devoted to building these skills. In kindergarten, children learn about each Superkid character's interests and the objects and activities associated with them. In first and second grade, Words to Know Cards introduce children to challenging new vocabulary words through explicit instruction in each unit. Super-Duper and SUPER informational magazines expand beyond the world of the Superkids to include science and social studies content with even more rich vocabulary. Explicit instruction for these texts works to develop concepts, vocabulary, and oral language—the building blocks of reading comprehension.
**Comprehension strategies are the tools to unlock meaning.**

Low levels of fluency are correlated with low levels of reading comprehension. However, fluent reading alone does not guarantee good reading comprehension. The more mature the reader, the more important strategic reading becomes. But formulaic teaching of comprehension strategies in isolation is not an effective way to teach reading comprehension. Because the goal is to engage students in deep thinking about text, the skills involved in comprehension vary according to the text being read, the author's intent, and the reader's purpose for reading. Effective instruction guides the way, through a text, provides a platform for discussion, and asks probing questions in order to foster active response.

In the Superkids Reading Program, all lessons involving text reading are done in small, ability-level groups. The focus of these groups is not only to develop automaticity and fluency, but also to teach comprehension strategies through explicit instruction, think-alouds, questions, and graphic organizers. Children learn to navigate their way through text and become metacognitive readers, aware of how they are reading as they are reading. Detailed lesson plans and other resources for these differentiated groups are provided in the Superkids Teacher’s Guides.

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**Set children on the road to reading success by the end of second grade.**

The Superkids Reading Program combines deliberate, research-based word recognition instruction with comprehension instruction using fully-decodable texts in kindergarten and first grade. This readies children to draw meaning from increasingly complex texts by the time they are in second grade. For second graders, the program provides:

**Book Clubs.** Small-group literature circles encourage a love of reading and are designed to focus on teaching children to comprehend fictional text of varied genres and multicultural relevance. Created by well-known authors and illustrators, these beloved chapter books are presented in their original trade-book format.

**SUPER Magazine.** This magazine provides nonfiction reading experiences for small groups, teaching important strategies for understanding nonfiction using features such as captions, charts, maps, and diagrams. The magazine expands children’s core knowledge of the world around them, giving them rich background information to take with them into the intermediate grades. It is “real-world reading” with recipes, advice columns, and humor, as well as serious articles about science, social studies, and world cultures.

Superkids is based on pedagogically sound instructional principles for developing and teaching comprehension that are supported by research. This comprehensive, well-integrated core curriculum provides primary students with the best possible start on the road to reading success.
References


