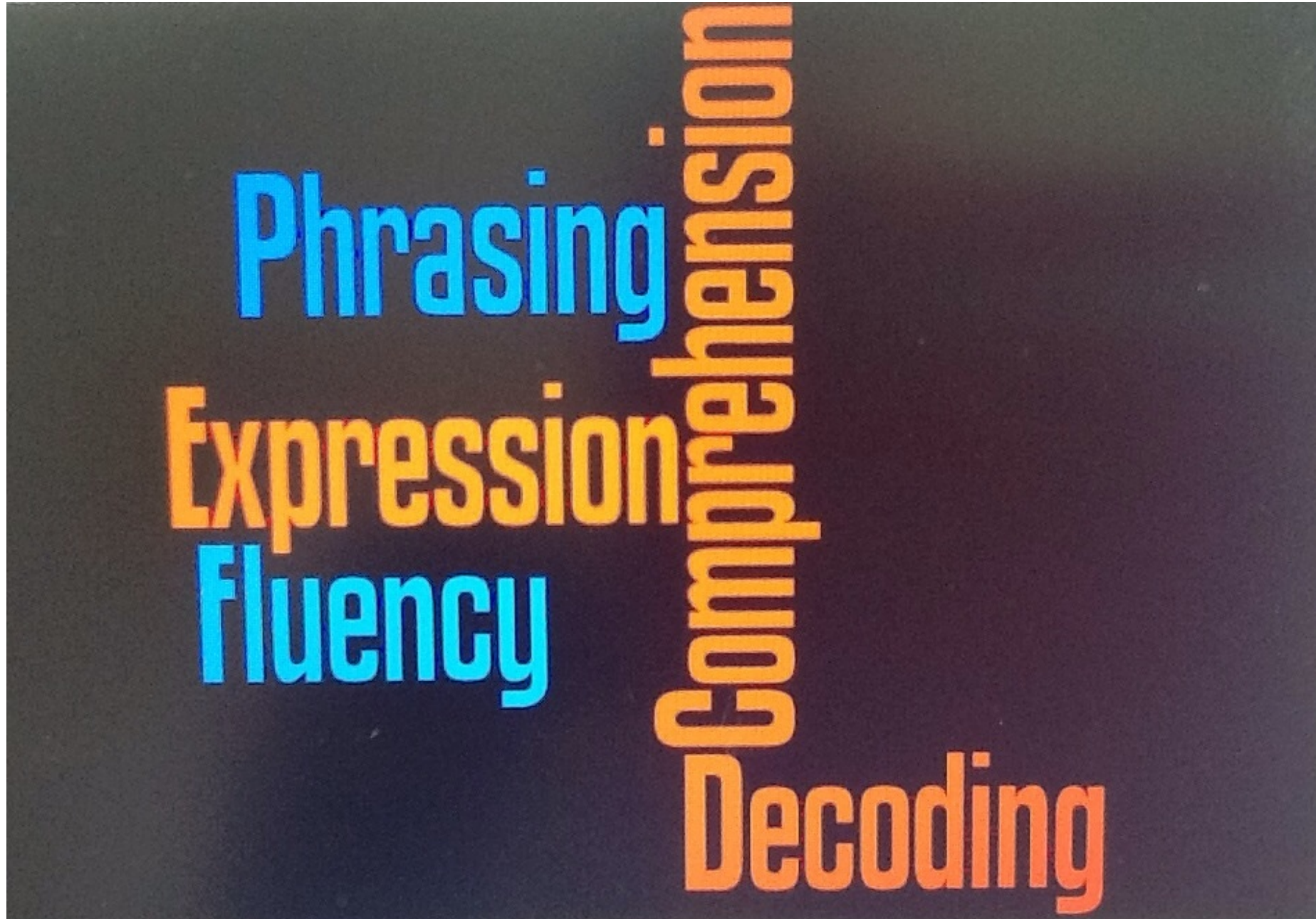# Comprehension Strategies

By Brianna Rees & Judith Prowse

Reading

Students who are good comprehenders of text ....

....are purposeful and active readers.
They don't just read the words but actively think and reflect on what they read.

Students need to have a bank of strategies that they can use to understand what they have read.
These strategies can be taught.

Students won't learn to be good comprehenders just by having questions asked of them.

What do good readers do?

1.Activate prior knowledge - what do I already know about this topic?

Prior knowledge includes -
- what the child knows about the reading process
- their vocabulary knowledge
- their knowledge of the topic or concept
- their knowledge of the text type/genre and the language used in these.

2. Make connections - I know what it feels like because...

Children make connections when they think about what they are reading and link it to prior experiences or prior knowledge.
- link to prior experiences e.g. Link a story about moving house to their own experience of moving
- link to another text e.g. Link a story about a character who plays tricks to another story that had a character who also liked to play tricks.
- link to the world e.g. Link an idea in a text to what they know about the wider world

An example of activating prior knowledge & making connections

From a story about the experiences of two men who rowed across the Atlantic Ocean.

I know the Atlantic Ocean is between England and America but I'm not sure how many kilometres that would be. Sounds like a pretty long way. I think the Atlantic Ocean is where the Titanic sunk. It hit an iceberg so it must be pretty cold in the Atlantic Ocean.

Another example of making connections.

I remember going on a canoe when we were on holiday once. It was quite hard to row because the oars were a bit big for my hands. My hands got really sore. I can't imagine how it must feel to row for such a long time.

# Helping children make connections and use their prior knowledge

Use think-alouds to :

- remind children of an event/ experience that is similar to what you are reading e.g. Remember when...

- remind children of books with a similar character e.g. That character is a bit naughty, just like ...in the book we read the other day

- remind children of knowledge they already know that links to the book e.g. When we watched that DVD we saw that penguins like to eat fish...

- remind children how they felt when...link those feelings to a character in the book

3. Predict - I predict this book will be about ... because ...

Children use clues such as...
- the title
- the illustrations
- the author
- the text type
- what they have read so far
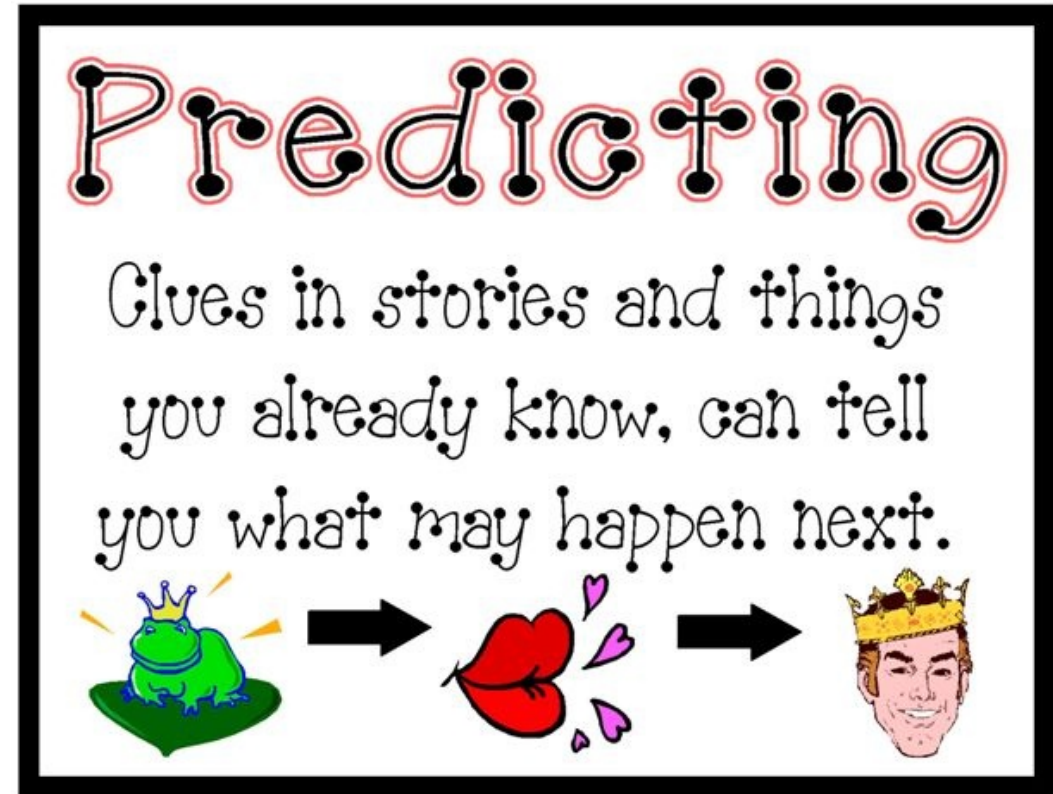
...in order to make sensible guesses.
Making predictions and confirming or revising them throughout the reading process makes children become active readers.

An example of making predictions and confirming or revising them.

I predicted that it would be really cold in the Atlantic Ocean but now I know they did their trip in summer so it was actually really hot.

Helping children to make predictions

Use think-alouds to :
- Model making predictions yourself - from the cover, title, text type
- Review, change, alter, confirm your predictions as you read

- Encourage children to make predictions and to review them as they read

4. Question - I wonder why... What is going to happen next? Do I already know something about this topic? What do I think I will learn from this text?

Questioning plays an important part in the self-monitoring process - children can ask themselves "does this make sense?"
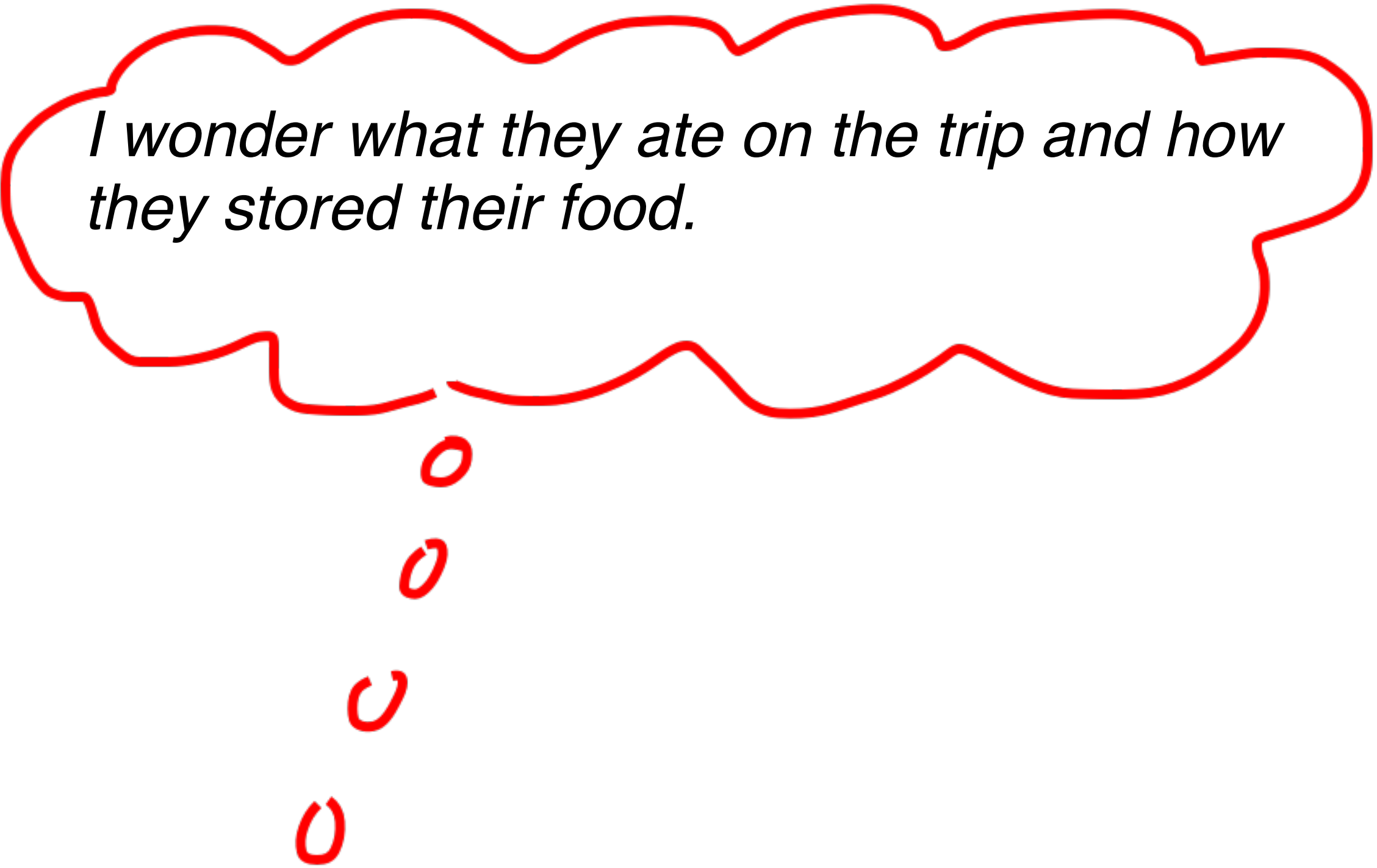Asking and answering questions helps to engage the reader with the text.

I wonder....

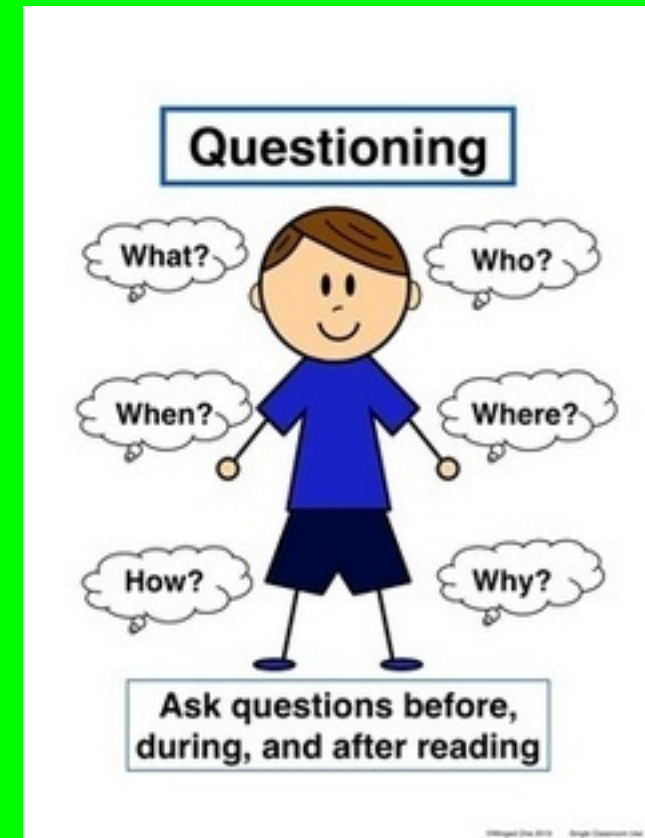Ask QUESTIONS to help you think deeper about the story.

An example of asking questions.

I wonder what they ate on the trip and how they stored their food.

Helping children to ask questions about texts

- model asking questions of yourself as you read e.g. I wonder....
- prompt children to 'wonder' and ask questions about the books they read

5. Visualize - I can make pictures in my mind.

Visualizing occurs when the reader creates a mental image in their head.
They can use all 5 senses to make the story come alive.

Visualizing helps the reader to become a part of the story and to understand what they are reading.
Visualizing is good for self-monitoring. If the 'movie in your head' stops, meaning may have been lost and you will have to regain meaning.

An example of visualizing.

I have a picture in my mind of these two men in this tiny canoe with huge waves towering over them.

Helping children to visualize what they read

- identify key words/phrases in a paragraph that help us to make a picture in our mind

She was a selfish grumpy old woman. She had pale brown teeth and a small puckered up mouth like a dog's bottom. She spent all day and every day sitting in her chair by the window. Never once, even on her best days, had she smiled at George.
               Roald Dahl

- read books to your children that don't have many pictures e.g. novels

6. Make inferences - I think what the author is trying to tell me...

Inferring is being able to 'read between the lines' when the author implies something but doesn't exactly state it.

To infer, readers need to use both the clues in the text and their own prior knowledge. This helps them interpret what the author is really trying to say.

An example of making inferences.

It doesn't say exactly but I think the men were finding it hard to get along near the end of the trip because the book says they didn't talk to each other for three days.

Inference card activity

We can make inferences at word level too, by reading around a word and using our prior knowledge to infer what a word might mean.

I'm not sure what this word fatigue means - it says "after 120 days of constant rowing and lack of sleep, we were feeling the effects of fatigue". Fatigue must be something to do with tired because that's how I'd be feeling if I had rowed a canoe for 120 days and had not had much sleep.

Helping children to infer meaning from what they read

- model how by using key words or phrases, meaning can be made from the text e.g. I know hot air balloons move slowly because it says 'the wind pushed it gently'
- encourage children to infer from the text. Encourage them to show you evidence for their thinking e.g. How do you know? What word/s tell you?

7. Self Monitor

Self- monitoring is being aware of your own thinking when you read.

Good readers are aware when they have stopped understanding. It may be that they are not sure what a word, sentence or whole paragraph means.

Good readers recognise when this happens and act on it by re- reading the text.

Helping children to learn to self-monitor as they read

- model the skill of monitoring what you read e.g. I'm just going to re-read that, I didn't understand it
- encourage children to self-monitor
- it sometimes helps to get children to 'listen to themselves read' as this can help children hear their mistakes

Vocabulary

Good readers also have a large range of oral and print vocabulary. Vocabulary can present problems when
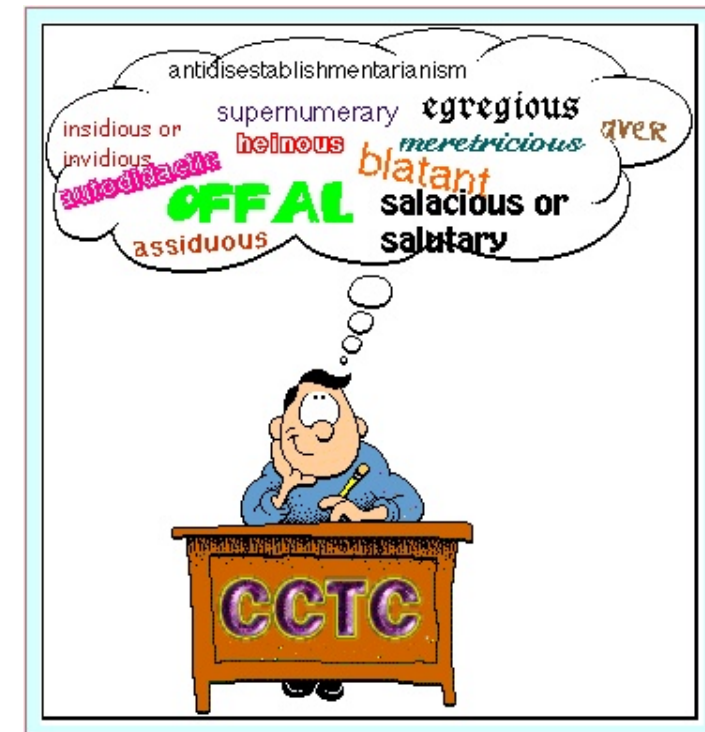
- a word is new, the reader hasn't come across it before
- a word has a different meaning in a different context e.g. In Science the words 'table' and 'material' take on new meanings

Research shows people need to come into contact with a word 12 times in different contexts in order to 'know' the word.

Supporting children's vocabulary development

- the best way to increase print vocabulary is to read and be read to
- quality talk around books also support this
- increase the word consciousness of students - their awareness and interest in words. Encourage them to notice words, in particular words they don't know
- tell jokes, riddles, puns etc (having fun with words)
- use a wide variety of interesting vocab with your children
- encourage children to ask you what a word means if they don't understand
- model 'reading around a word' to work out what it could mean