

CIERA

Center for the Improvement of
Early Reading Achievement

Back to the Future: Why has Comprehension Instruction made a comeback?

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Papers on which my talk is based

 Go to www.ciera.org

 Then access my website:





<http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/pearson/>

 See working papers:


-  **Linda Fielding and P. David Pearson, *Balancing Authenticity and Strategy Awareness in Comprehension Instruction* (in archives)**
-  **Nell Duke and P. David Pearson, *Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension* in press in new edition of *What Research Says to the Teacher***

An all too brief history of comprehension instruction

Last Turn of the Century


-  Simple view of reading was dominant
 - ⇒ Comp = Decoding times Listening Comprehension
-  Teach decoding via the alphabetic approach
-  Kids could then understand to the degree that their knowledge and oral language skill permitted
-  The best way to improve comprehension is, therefore, to increase knowledge

The first paradigm shift

 While the seeds of demise for the alphabetic approach began in the 1840s, they did not bear fruit till about 1910.

 Two major movements

 Testing (an outgrowth of the scientific movement in education)


 Silent reading (the transparent evidence from oral reading was no longer available)


Developments from 1915-1970

 The expansion of comprehension assessment

 Open ended

 Multiple choice

 The development of skills to match the assessments and the workbook (1930-1970)

 The final straw (skills management systems--codified the skills)

The Comprehension Revolution: 1970-1990

- 📖 Impact of Chall's book on early reading
- 📖 A gnawing feeling that there was something more to reading than decoding
- 📖 Durkin's embarrassing little study (1978)
 - 👉 Some 4,000 minutes of classroom observation
 - 👉 A grand total of 11 minutes devoted to comprehension instruction
 - 👉 Lots of testing and lots of questioning during discussion



New intellectual tools

 Psycholinguistics

 Cognitive Science

⇒ Text analysis

⇒ Schema theory

Old instructional ideas

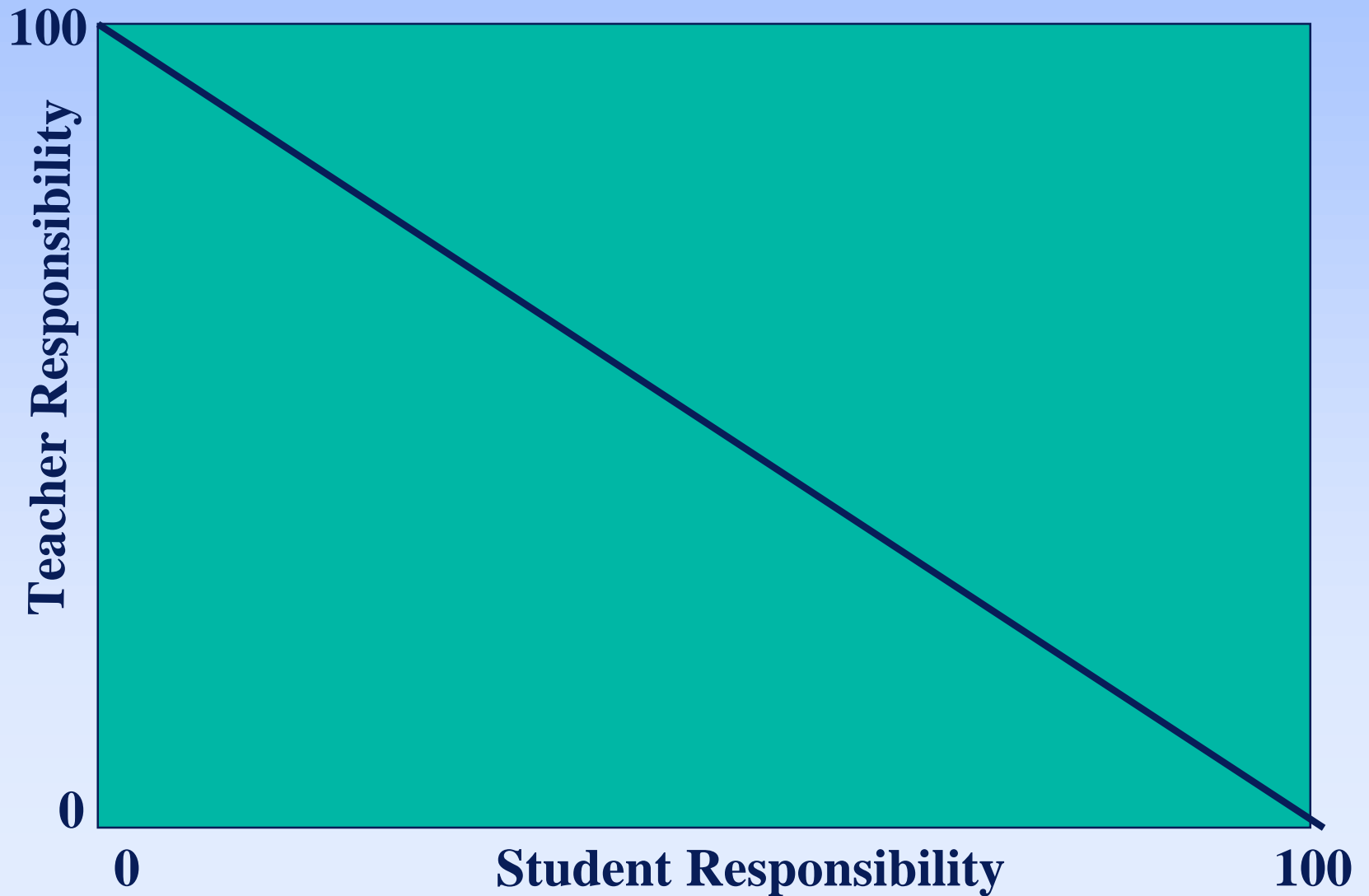
 Direct instruction

 Model-guided practice-independent practice

Comprehension Revolution, cont.

Comprehension Revolution, cont.

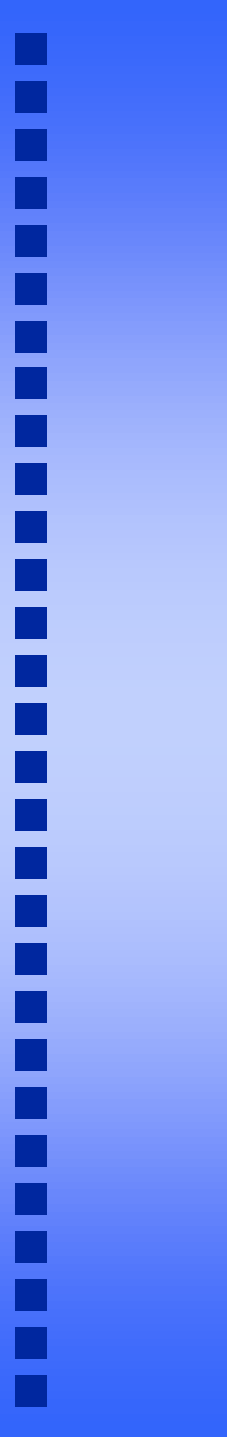
Gradual release of responsibility




Attempts to achieve a research-based approach to comprehension instruction

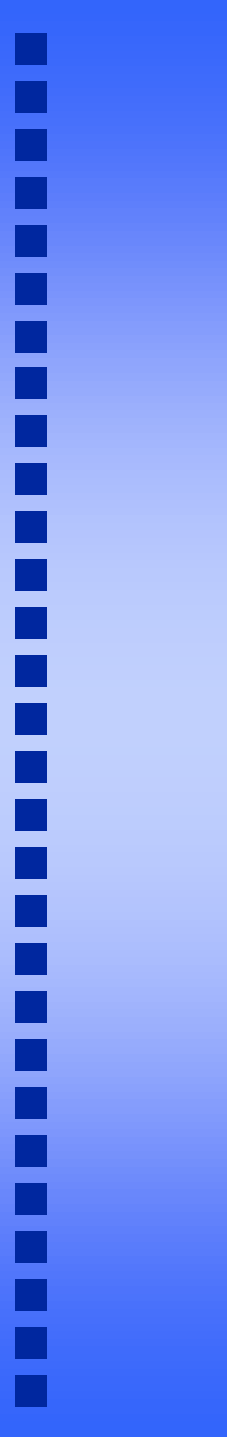
- 📖 Determine the skills that are associated with skilled reading
- 📖 In small scale experiments, teach the skills to kids who do not excel at them and determine whether learning them leads to improved comprehension for that skill and for comprehension more generally construed.
- 📖 Build a streamlined comprehension curriculum of mainline skills/strategies

Comprehension Revolution, cont.



 By 1985, we had documented the efficacy of a whole set of instructional routines and strategies...

 But...



Why did comprehension take a back seat for a decade?

📖 Did not really fit either of the big movements of the late 80s/early 90s.

Why did comprehension take a back seat for a decade?

- 📖 Whole language found the tradition of explicit instruction in comprehension strategies a little too “skillsy” in feel.
- 📖 Preferred to have comprehension emerge from genuine encounters with authentic, engaging texts.
- 📖 Provide good texts and good assignments and it will happen (and if it doesn’t, well at least . . .)

Why did comprehension take a back seat for a decade?

📖 Does not really fit the zeitgeist of the new phonics renaissance either

📖 Those who champion phonics first and fast tend to hold a “simple view” of reading

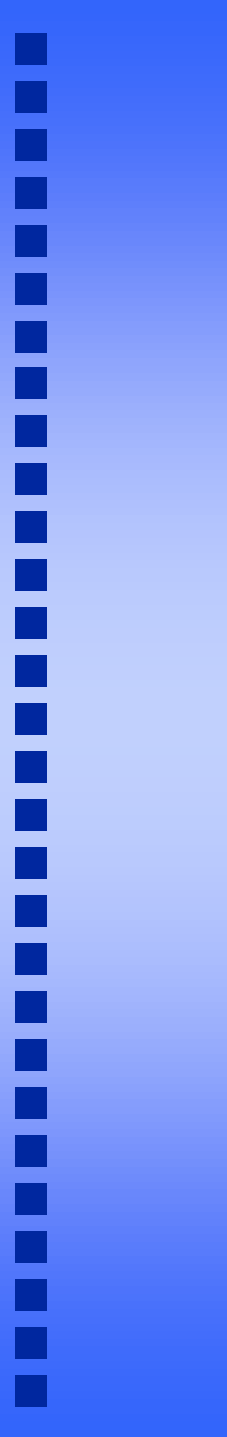
✍ Reading Comprehension equals the product of listening comprehension and decoding prowess

$$✍ RC = [LC * Dec]$$

📖 If you want to build oral language, fine. But comprehension strategies don't really matter

We seem to be ready for a comprehension renaissance

- 📖 Realization that no matter how important the code is, it is not the point of reading
- 📖 Suspicion that the simple view ($RC = LC \times Dec$) will not get us where we want to go
- 📖 That we will have to work on strategies directly.
- 📖 $RC = [(LC \times Dec) \times CompStrat]$
- 📖 So how do you design a comprehension curriculum?



What would it take to re-energize our K-12 comprehension curriculum?

 A goal

 A supportive context

 A model

 A comprehension
curriculum

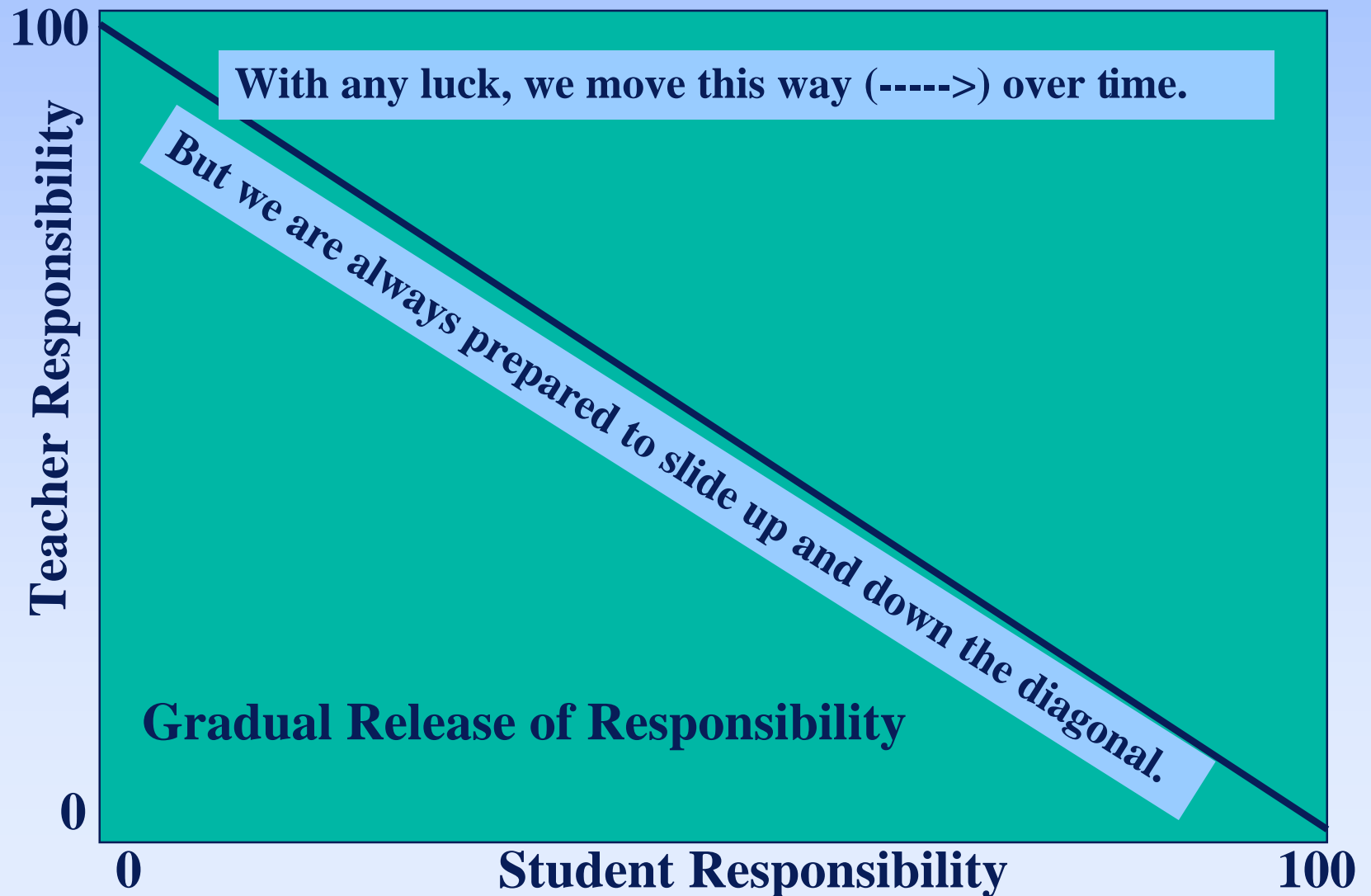
1. You need a goal: what is an expert reader

- 📖 Active
- 📖 Purposeful
- 📖 Monitor for goal achievement
- 📖 Size things up
- 📖 Attend selectively
- 📖 Revise meaning models
- 📖 Integrate text with PK
- 📖 Infer word meanings
- 📖 Evaluate text quality
- 📖 Fit strategies to text genre
 - 👉 Plot, setting, character
 - 👉 Evolving summaries
 - 👉 Structural representations

2. You need a supportive classroom context

- 📖 Opportunity: large amounts of time for actual text reading
- 📖 Authenticity: reading real texts for real reasons
- 📖 Range: reading THE range of text genres
- 📖 Talk: talking about text, with a teacher and one another
- 📖 Words: Conceptually driven vocabulary development
- 📖 Enabling Skills: solid base of decoding, monitoring and fluency
- 📖 Writing: writing texts for others to comprehend

3. You need a model: Cognitive apprenticeship




4. You need a comprehension curriculum: sure fire strategies and routines.

Individual Strategies

 Making predictions

 Think-alouds

 Uncovering text structure

 Summarizing

 Question-generation

Routines

 Reciprocal Teaching


 SAIL/Transactional Strategies Instruction

 Questioning the Author



Examples of routines that can be used prior to middle school

 Palincsar: Reciprocal Teaching

 Pressley and colleagues: SAIL-
Transactional Strategies Instruction

 Beck and McKeown: Questioning the
Author

Reciprocal Teaching

- 📖 Premise: teachers who guide students in the acquisition of a routine that can be applied iteratively to text segments help them get to and through texts that would otherwise baffle them.
- 📖 Pick a small set of key strategies and apply them again and again.
- 📖 Gradual release of responsibility



Reciprocal Teaching: The strategies

 Summarize

 Ask and answer a good question

 Clarify puzzling parts

 Predict the next bit

The evidence

📖 Really helps improve comprehension

📖 Works across the grade levels: K-12

📖 Pretty easy to apply

📖 Pretty biased toward a

👉 Cognitive emphasis

👉 Meaning-is-in-the-text perspective

Transactional Strategies Instruction

Basic Goals

1. Using strategies in a flexible and opportunistic manner (problem-solving).
2. Acquiring strategies while engaged in authentic reading
3. Exploring the strategy environment that is created by both teacher and student.
4. Broadening strategies to include both cognitive and interpretive strategies.

For a full treatment of SAIL, a curricular approach to TSI, see several articles in *Elementary School Journal* [1992, 94 (2)]

Basic Components of TSI

Cognitive strategies

- 📖 Thinking Aloud
- 📖 Constructing images
- 📖 *Summarizing*
- 📖 *Predicting (prior knowledge activation)*
- 📖 *Questioning*
- 📖 *Clarifying*
- 📖 Story grammar analysis
- 📖 Text structure analysis

Italics = also in Reciprocal Teaching

Interpretive Strategies

- 📖 **Character Development:**
Imagining how a character might feel; identifying with a character
- 📖 Creating themes
- 📖 Reading for multiple meanings
- 📖 Creating literal/figurative distinctions
- 📖 Looking for a consistent point of view
- 📖 Relating text to personal experiences
- 📖 Relating text to other texts
- 📖 Responding to certain text features-
-point of view, tone, mood

Comparison with Reciprocal Teaching

Feature	Reciprocal Teaching	Transactional Strategies Instruction
Philosophy	Cognitive apprenticeship	Cog appren & Explicit teaching
Goal	Cognitive strategies	Cognitive and interpretive strategies
Questions	Text-based and content specific	Text-based and content free
Metaphor	Routine	Tool kit

The evidence for TSI

 Solid evidence of improvement on

 specific strategies

 content of the lessons

 more general comprehension

 Used in 1-9, but most of the research in 2-4

Questioning the author

- 📖 Work by Beck, McKeown and colleagues
- 📖 Basic premise: Try to get inside the author's head to ask why (s)he might have said things the way (s)he did.
- 📖 Critical, but within the boundaries of the intended message.
- 📖 Basic strategy: Ask questions that goad the reader into questioning the author's goals and motives.

Questioning the Author





Goal	Candidate Questions
Initiate the discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the author trying to say?• What is the author's message?• What is the author talking about?
Help students focus on the author's message	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That is what the author says, but what does it mean?
Help students link information	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How does that connect with what the author already told us?• What information has the author added here that connects to or fits in with?
Identify difficulties with the way the author has presented information or ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does that make sense?• Is that said in a clear way?• Did the author explain that clearly? Why or why not? What's missing? What do we need to figure out or find out?
Encourage students to refer to the text either because they've misinterpreted a text statement or to help them recognize that they've made an inference	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did the author tell us that?• Did the author give us the answer to that?

The evidence for QtA

- 📖 Teachers can learn the techniques
- 📖 Students double their participation in discussions
- 📖 Students increase their performance on higher order comprehension and monitoring



Teacher-Directed Instruction in Comprehension Strategies

 Some key aspects of strategy instruction

-  Authenticity of strategies (things that real readers use)
-  Demonstration by teachers (what, why, when, and how): making thinking public
-  Genuine apprenticeships: gradual release of responsibility, learning from one another
-  Authenticity of texts (essential that it be applied to real texts)




Teacher-Directed Instruction in Comprehension Strategies

Embedding Strategy Instruction in Text Reading

-  the paradox of generalization: to get strategies that generalize, we have to focus on the particular text at hand.
-  situated cognition: what we have to guide us in new situations are more like precedents than general routines

The use of visual displays and other “structural” devices.

Why they work



-  Help students “see” relationships and structure (render the structure of the text transparent)
-  They carry an implicit syntax (help students see relationships)
-  Allow for active “transformation” of information (REpresentation)--a summary yes, but an “interpreted” summary

Example Visual Displays

Matrices

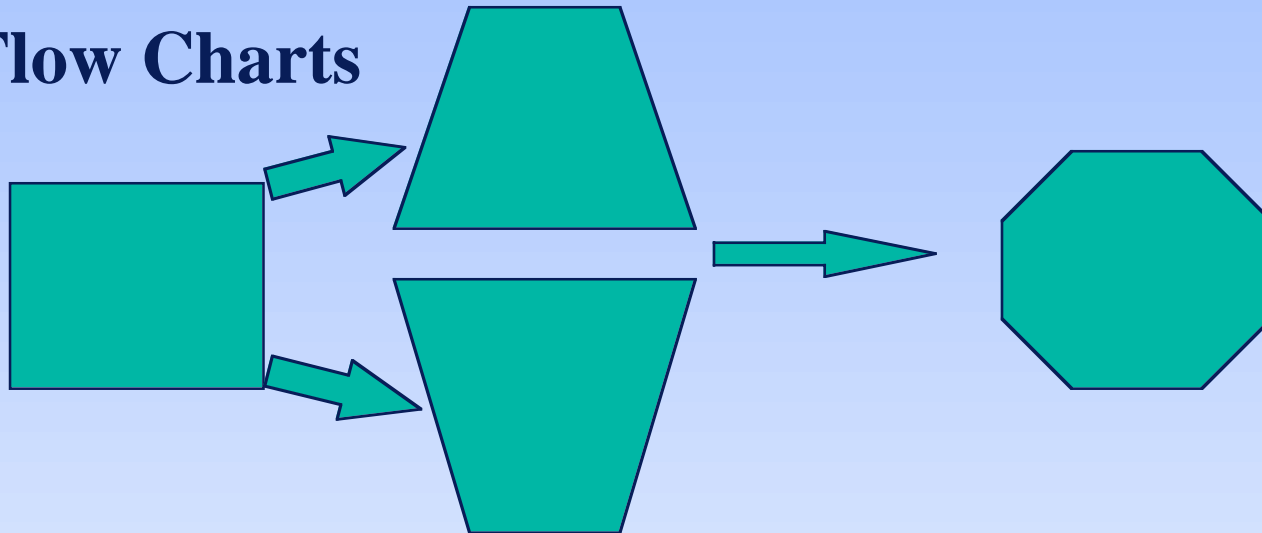
	Home	Food	Enemy	Communication
Ants	Hills	Omni		
Bees	Hive	Nectar		
Termites		Wood		

Uses:

-  Compare/Contrast situations (the economy, politics, and geography of the countries of Africa)
-  Successive descriptions of members of a common category (game animals, edible plants)

Example Visual Displays

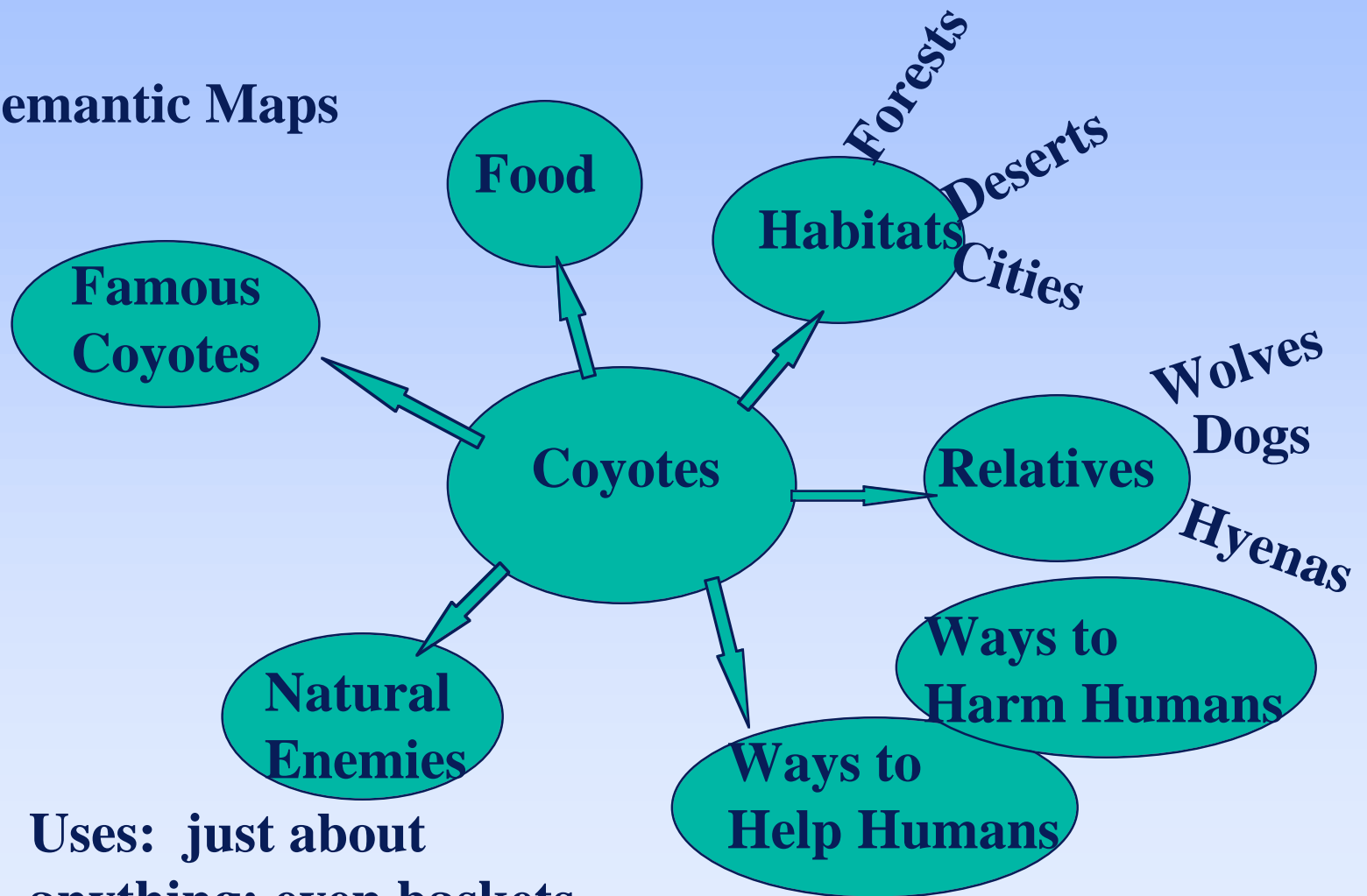
Flow Charts



Uses: Processes, Narratives, Event structures

Example Visual Displays

Semantic Maps



Uses: just about
anything: even baskets
of facts

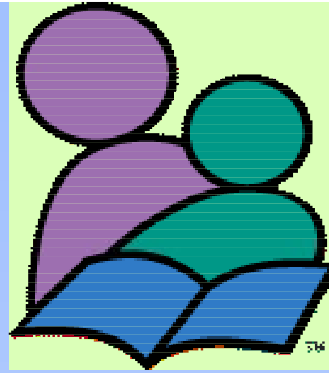
Assessing Comprehension

- 📖 Writing in response to reading
- 📖 Portfolios and performance tasks
- 📖 Formal assessments: Since we are not likely to get rid of standardized tests, we need to teach test passages as a genre

Summary: Comprehension improves when

- 📖 We support it with other types of instruction (vocabulary, word identification, fluency, writing)
- 📖 We teach strategies and routines explicitly.
- 📖 We provide lots of opportunities for just plain reading
- 📖 We contextualize it with engaging discussions that embrace ideas, feelings, and insights embedded in clear purposes for reading

References



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- 📖 Palincsar, A. S., & Brown, A. L. (1986). Interactive teaching to promote independent learning from text. *The Reading Teacher*, 39, 771–777.
- 📖 For a full treatment of SAIL, a curricular approach to TSI, see several articles in *Elementary School Journal* [1992, 94 (2)]
- 📖 Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, Rebecca L. Hamilton, and Linda Kucan. (1997). *Questioning the Author: An Approach for Enhancing Student Engagement With Text*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- 📖 For research on comprehension instruction generally see, Pearson, P. D., Roehler, L., Dole, J., & Duffy, G. (1992). Developing expertise in reading comprehension. In S. J. Samuels & A. E. Farstrup (Eds.), *What research says to the teacher* (2nd Ed) (pp. 145–199). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.