



PODCAST LISTENING GUIDE:

Comprehension Essentials



Hi Teacher Friends!

Welcome to the Podcast Listening Guide!

We know the Science of Reading can sometimes feel big and overwhelming. That's why we started the Melissa & Lori Love Literacy podcast. Each week, we talk with researchers, teachers, and literacy experts who break down the research and share ideas you can try right away.

This guide pulls those conversations together around one focused topic. Use it for:

- **your own learning**
- **team discussions**
- **school-wide PD**

You'll find:

- **episodes grouped by theme**
- **conversation starters and classroom takeaways**
- **space to jot down notes or next steps**

There is never enough time in a teacher's day. Between lessons, kids who need you, and stacks of grading, it is a lot. Podcasts make learning feel doable. You can listen in the car, while setting up your room, or when you finally have a quiet moment to yourself at home.

However you use it, we hope this guide helps you feel encouraged, supported, and ready to try something new.

We can't wait to keep learning with you,

♥ *Melissa & Lori*



Comprehension

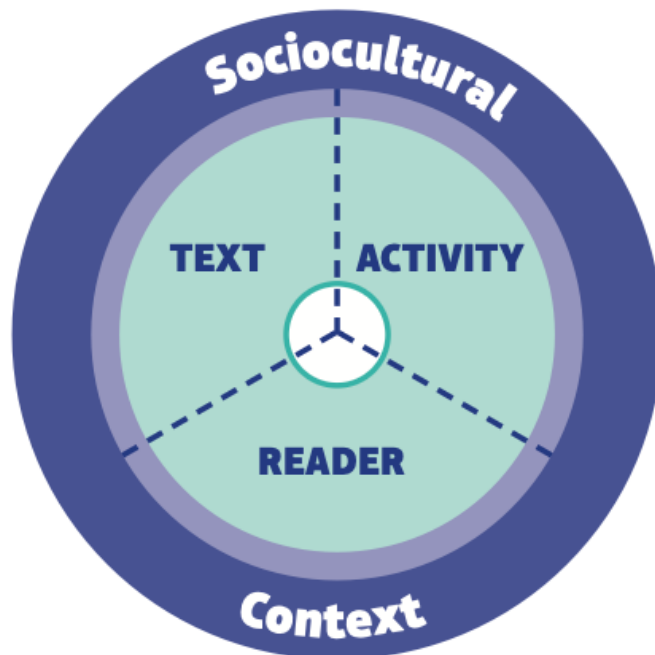
How Can We Teach Comprehension?

Comprehension isn't a checklist of strategies or a one-time lesson. It's a dynamic interaction between the reader, the text, and the purpose for reading. Students make meaning when they bring knowledge, vocabulary, language, and reasoning to rich, complex texts.

Text-Reader-Task

This framework explains that reading comprehension depends on three things working together:

- the text itself,
- what the reader brings to the text,
- and the activity or purpose for reading.



LISTEN: [Ep. 179: The RAND Reading Model with Hugh Catts](#)

The Comprehension Essentials Guide focuses on episodes that help to:

- Reframe how we define and understand comprehension
- Recognize the essential role of background knowledge
- Center texts instead of isolated strategies
- Understand how cognitive science informs instruction

Comprehension

Here are three big takeaways about comprehension instruction straight from the voices of researchers and real classrooms:

1 Make Meaning from Text

Reading comprehension isn't a set of isolated skills or weekly strategies. It's a dynamic process that happens when the reader, text, and purpose come together. True understanding grows when we move beyond "strategy of the week" instruction and anchor learning in rich, meaningful texts.

2 Build Knowledge for Understanding

Background knowledge, vocabulary, and oral language are the fuel for comprehension. Students can't make sense of what they read without something to connect new ideas to. Building coherent, knowledge-rich content across subjects helps all readers access and retain meaning.

3 Scaffold to Support Complex Texts

Instead of simplifying challenging material, support students through it. With purposeful scaffolds, like think-alouds, discussion, and pre-reading supports, students can tackle grade-level texts, deepen understanding.



Comprehension is about building deep understanding over time. When we center instruction on rich texts, connect ideas and build student knowledge, and provide scaffolded supports, all readers can access complex material and grow as thinkers. Teaching comprehension means helping students make meaning!

Rethinking Reading Comprehension

with Hugh Catts



EPISODE: 118

Rethinking Reading Comprehension

with Hugh Catts



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Researcher Hugh Catts discusses his influential article *Rethinking How to Promote Reading Comprehension*. He describes **reading comprehension as “thinking with a book in your hand”** and explains how it depends on the interaction of the reader, the text, and the task. He highlights the role of knowledge in comprehension and the implications for instruction and assessment.

Episode Resources

Read the article behind the podcast episode *Rethinking How to Promote Reading Comprehension* for a deeper dive into the ideas we unpacked.

Choose a recent text you used in class.
Reflect on the topic knowledge required to understand it.

What knowledge did students already have? What knowledge did they lack?

How will you fill in knowledge gaps?

Science of Reading Beyond Phonics

Episode 158

The Ultimate Goal of Reading

with Doug Fisher



EPISODE: 158

The Ultimate Goal of Reading


with Doug Fisher



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Literacy expert Doug Fisher explains how **vocabulary, knowledge, and comprehension work together** to move students from decoding to making meaning. He busts a few myths (looking at you, “letter of the week!”) and explores why oral language, writing, and content-rich texts matter so much. You’ll walk away a better understanding of what powerful comprehension instruction can look like.

Episode Quote

As Doug Fisher reminds us: *you can’t predict your way through a text you can’t actually read.* How does this show up in your classroom? Share your thoughts in the comments [on this post.](#) 

Use a knowledge-building warm-up before reading your next text: pictures, short videos, or a quick concept sort.

How will that knowledge help students make sense of the text they’re about to read?

Science of Reading Beyond Phonics

Episode 157

Reading Comprehension Blueprint

with Nancy Hennessey



EPISODE: 157

The Reading Comprehension Blueprint

with Nancy Hennessey



[LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Nancy Hennessey, author of *The Reading Comprehension Blueprint*, walks us through the Blueprint and helps us unpack **what's really happening in students' minds as they read**. We explore how knowledge, text, and task interact and how small shifts in planning can make a big difference for students. You'll come away with a flexible framework, new ideas for designing instruction, and a clear roadmap for how to help students become thoughtful, independent meaning-makers.

Explore the Blueprint

A clear roadmap for teaching comprehension

- build knowledge
- teach vocabulary & language
- support students as they make meaning of texts

Choose a recent lesson and map it onto the Blueprint.

Which strands are present?

Which need strengthening?

LISTEN AGAIN

Placing Text at the Center of the ELA Classroom

with Meredith Liben & Sue Pimentel



EPISODE: 37


Placing Text at the Center of the ELA Classroom

with Meredith Liben & Sue Pimentel

 [LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Meredith Liben and Sue Pimentel, authors of *Placing Text at the Center of the ELA Classroom*, unpack the real intentions behind the Common Core State Standards and how things sometimes got lost in translation. They share what they've seen in classrooms with **strong, text-centered materials** and tackle big questions about assessment, data-driven instruction, and what actually helps us teach comprehension.

Episode Resources

Read the article that inspired this episode! 

[Placing Text at the Center of the Standards-Aligned ELA Classroom](#)

Check out the [Short Guide to Placing Text at the Center of Learning](#).
What is one thing you can do or stop doing in your own classroom?



**MELISSA
& LORI
LOVE
LITERACY**

with Daniel Willingham & Barbara Davidson



Check out Daniel Willingham's article "[How Knowledge Helps](#)" to learn why background knowledge is your students' comprehension superpower!

What background knowledge and vocabulary are important for students to have? How will it help?

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Noticing the #KnowledgeGap

with Natalie Wexler



EPISODE: 10

Noticing the #KnowledgeGap

with Natalie Wexler



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Author Natalie Wexler shows why strategy-heavy, knowledge-light instruction leaves many students struggling and what we can do to fix it. She connects the research to real classrooms and highlights how **building knowledge helps all students access grade-level texts**. You'll get practical steps for closing the "knowledge gap" along with ideas that may just change the way you think about ELA instruction!

Episode Resources

Natalie Wexler's book, The Knowledge Gap, is a must-read that uncovers why so many students struggle with comprehension. Be sure to check out the Official Discussion Guide.

Reflect on this quote from The Knowledge Gap:

"We have lots of evidence that having knowledge of the topic really helps with reading comprehension."



What the Research Says about Difficult Texts

with Kristin Conradi-Smith, John Strong, and Steve Amendum



EPISODE: 230

What the Research Says About Difficult Texts

with Kristin Conradi-Smith, John Strong, & Steve Amendum

[LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

This episode unpacks **what makes a text difficult** and why scaffolding (not simplification) allows students access to complex material. Three experts explain the difference between text complexity and text difficulty and share practical strategies for meeting diverse student needs. You'll walk away with clear, research-based ideas to support all learners.

Episode Resources

Read STOP Write is a research-based intervention designed for grades 4-9 that integrates foundational reading skills with comprehension and writing instruction using authentic informational texts.



Watch this 30 second clip from the podcast to hear how students can work their way up to complex texts. By starting with easier texts on the same topic, students build knowledge and vocabulary along the way.

Strategies & Knowledge Building

with Tim Shanahan



EPISODE: 26

Strategies & Knowledge Building

with Tim Shanahan



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Literacy researcher Tim Shanahan clarifies that **comprehension strategies are useful but only when they serve the text**. Strategies alone won't work unless readers already have enough background knowledge. Tim urges teachers to combine strategy instruction with knowledge building rather than teaching them in isolation. Knowledge and strategies go hand-in-hand.

Episode Resources

Read more on Tim's blog:
[Knowledge or Comprehension Strategies - What Should We Teach?](#)



Consider an upcoming lesson. How could you help students build knowledge through vocabulary, discussion, or even a concept map?

Bringing It All Together...



1 How does understanding the role of background knowledge shift your thinking about comprehension instruction?

2 How can you help students use strategies within the text? What does instruction that centers the text look like in practice?

3 Which insight from these episodes do you want to try in your classroom first?

Learn More: Comprehension



Melissa & Lori Blog

Why Comprehension Strategies
Shouldn't Be Taught in Isolation

Great Minds Blog

Unlocking Reading Comprehension:
The Power of Activating Prior
Knowledge

Resources We Love

No More "Strategy of the Week":
Connecting Comprehension
Instruction Back to the Book

- Read the article
- Listen to the podcast



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[The Literacy 50 Book](#)