Select texts purposefully to support comprehension development

Choosing a text to develop reading comprehension is never a "one-size-fits-all" proposition. Exposing students to different types of texts early on builds their capacity to understand the wide variety of reading material they will encounter during their school years and beyond. In exposing students to a variety of texts, teachers should also ensure that a selected text (1) contains rich ideas and information, (2) is at an appropriate difficulty level for students' word-reading and comprehension skills, and (3) aligns with the purpose of the lesson. Although there are no specific texts considered more appropriate than others for strategy training, texts and instruction should require students to make inferences or check their understanding as they read.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Teach reading comprehension with multiple genres of text.

2. Choose texts of high quality with richness and depth of ideas and information.

3. Choose texts with word recognition and comprehension difficulty appropriate for the students' reading ability and the instructional activity.

4. Use texts that support the purpose of instruction.

Potential roadblocks

1. Some school systems have a set curriculum or program in place, and teachers believe that they have little choice in the texts used for teaching comprehension.

2. The range of word-reading and comprehension levels in the classroom makes it difficult to select appropriate texts.

3. There are a lot of texts available to choose from, which makes it hard to know where to start.

Reference: Shanahan, T., Callison, K., Carriere, C., Duke, N. K., Pearson, P. D., Schatschneider, C., & Torgesen, J. (2010). *Improving reading comprehension in kindergarten through 3rd grade* (NCEE 2010-4038). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/14

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How to carry out the recommendation

1. ***Teach reading comprehension with multiple genres of text.***
   Teachers should use both literary and informational texts in reading comprehension instruction, including both printed and digital texts, because a student's mastery of one does not necessarily transfer to the other. State standards may provide additional guidance on which genres students should be able to comprehend at a given grade level.

   > **Narrative texts** portray a story, or sequence of related fictional or nonfictional events involving individuals or fictional characters; in the elementary grades, narrative texts can include historical fiction, fables, and autobiographies.
   >
   > **Informational texts** include expository writing, pieces that argue in favor of one position or another, and procedural texts and documents. In the elementary grades, informational texts can include news articles, speeches, and timelines.

   Note. Taken from page 17 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

2. ***Choose texts of high quality with richness and depth of ideas and information.***
   Stories with strong literary value and informational texts that are accurate, well-written, and engaging are consistently good choices for teaching reading comprehension. When selecting texts, teachers should look for characteristics such as rich content (e.g., character development in literary text or elaborate detail in informational text), strong organization, and variation and richness in word choice and sentence structure.

3. ***Choose texts with word recognition and comprehension difficulty appropriate for the students' reading ability and the instructional activity.***
   When selecting a text, teachers should consider textual/linguistic demands (e.g., word decoding, sentence complexity and text organization, layout/formatting) and content demands (e.g., how complex, abstract, or subtle the information is), keeping in mind that these two aspects of difficulty can vary within the same text. Teachers should provide students with opportunities to read texts that are appropriately challenging and consider activities, such as shared reading or guided reading, in which more challenging texts might be appropriate, as support from the teacher is more available. Additionally, selecting texts that align with student interest and background knowledge may also increase their motivation to persevere in comprehending a more challenging text.

Summary of Recommendation 4 from the WWC practice guide *Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade*. Full reference at the bottom of first page.

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4. Use texts that support the purpose of instruction.

Reading comprehension lessons should be focused on (1) increasing students' ability to apply reading comprehension strategies; (2) expanding their knowledge of specific genres, structures, and texts; or (3) developing their ability to engage in higher-order discussions about the text. The table below provides some evidence-based suggestions for teachers.

Planned Activity	Suggestion
Giving a lesson on text structure	Start instruction using a text about a topic familiar to students and one in which the structure is easy to identify. Then progress to a text on a less familiar topic and with a somewhat more complex structure.
Introducing a strategy to students	Select a text where the strategy is easily applied. Once students have had time to practice, select a more challenging text.
Building students' depth of understanding	Avoid texts that simply reinforce a student's knowledge of sound-letter relationships, as these are more suitable for practicing decoding and word recognition.
Teaching students to make predictions	Select a text that is unfamiliar to them or one in which many outcomes are possible.
Reading with students	Select a text that is just above the students' reading level.
Reading to students	Select a text that is well above the students' reading level but at their listening comprehension level.

Summary of Recommendation 4 from the WWC practice guide *Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade*. Full reference at the bottom of first page.

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Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
Some school systems have a set curriculum or program in place, and teachers believe that they have little choice in the texts used for teaching comprehension.	Using a core program often does not preclude making necessary adjustments or supplementing particular units (e.g., using district content-based materials to teach reading comprehension). Additionally, resources such as a school or public library, local literacy council, or book drive can provide appropriate supplemental resources. Teachers should discuss any concerns about appropriate texts with administrators or appropriate building/district personnel.
The range of word-reading and comprehension levels in the classroom makes it difficult to select appropriate texts.	Providing different texts to different students is important and dependent on the student, as well as on the teacher's instructional goals. For instruction, teachers can place students in groups according to their interests or to the reading lesson objective. Alternatively, if there is content that all students need to learn, a selection of texts that address the same content at different levels of complexity can be used.
There are a lot of texts available to choose from, which makes it hard to know where to start.	Administrators and other colleagues are great resources for suggestions on appropriate texts. Teachers can also consult literacy coaches and lead teachers who may be familiar with texts for a particular grade level about meeting a certain instructional objective. Over time, finding the appropriate text may become less of a challenge as teachers build their personal "library" of texts to suit different instructional goals and purposes.

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For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.

Summary of Recommendation 4 from the WWC practice guide *Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade*. Full reference at the bottom of first page.

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