

The information in this handout comes from 7 Keys to Comprehension: How to Help Your Kids Read It and Get It! By Susan Zimmermann and Chryse Hutchins, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2003.

The 7 Keys

How is meaning unlocked? Researchers identified the specific thinking strategies used by proficient readers. Reading is an interactive process with a constant internal dialogue with the text.

1. **Create mental images**: Good readers create a wide range of visual, auditory, and other sensory images as they read, and they become emotionally involved with what they read.
2. **Use background knowledge**: Good readers use their relevant prior knowledge before, during, and after reading to enhance their understanding of what they're reading.
3. **Ask questions**: Good readers generate questions before, during, and after reading to clarify meaning, make predictions, and focus their attention on what's important.
4. **Make inferences**: Good readers use their prior knowledge and information from what they read to make predictions, seek answers to questions, draw conclusions, and create interpretations that deepen their understanding of the text.
5. **Determine the most important ideas or themes**: Good readers identify key ideas or themes as they read, and they can distinguish between important and unimportant information.
6. **Synthesize information**: Good readers track their thinking as it evolves during reading in order to get the overall meaning.
7. **Use "fix-up" strategies**: Good readers are aware of when they understand and when they don't. If they have trouble understanding specific words, phrases, or longer passages, they use a wide range of problem-solving strategies including skipping ahead/then returning to the sentence, rereading, asking questions, using a dictionary, and reading the passage aloud.

Good readers use the same strategies for all that they read. They apply all the strategies without giving them much thought. They use the 7 Keys unconsciously and fluidly. There is nothing fancy about these strategies. They are common sense.