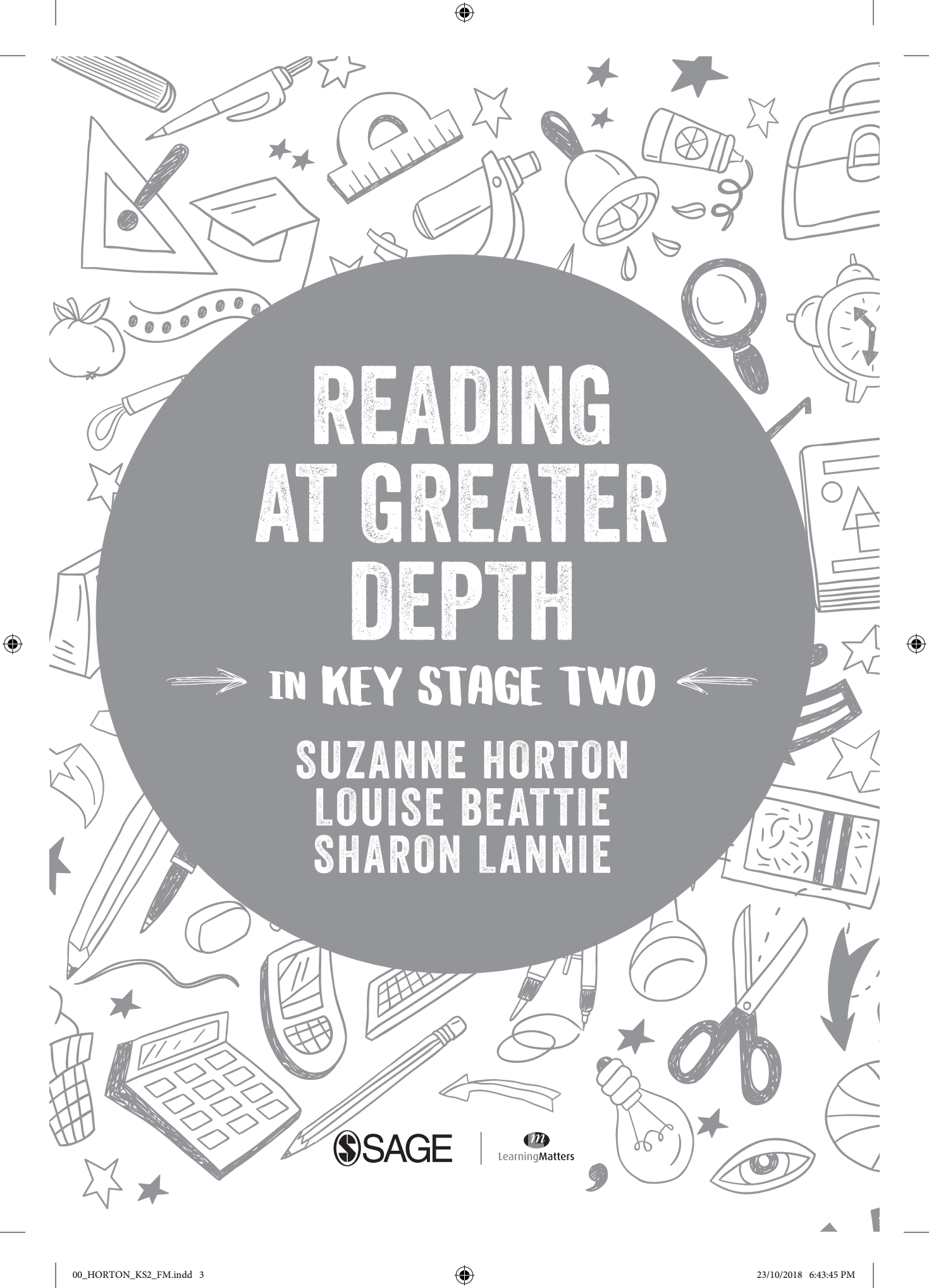


READING AT GREATER DEPTH

→ IN KEY STAGE TWO ←





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1

READING AT GREATER DEPTH

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

This chapter will allow you to achieve the following outcomes:

- Develop an overview of the theoretical approaches to teaching reading;
- Appreciate the complexities of defining a 'higher-level reader';
- Understand some of the challenges associated with teaching higher-level comprehension skills.

LINKS TO THE TEACHERS' STANDARDS

Working through this chapter will help you meet the following standards:

3. Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge

Reading

The more that you read, the more things you will know.

The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.

(Dr Seuss, *I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!*)

Reading is a multi-layered experience which necessitates interaction with print in order to extract meaning. It draws upon a number of skills: being able to recognise letters, match letters to sounds

and then blending phonemes to formulate words. It also demands an understanding of sentence structure, the meanings of words and the world around us to fully engage with the author's intent. Those readers who are able to use context to help read new and unfamiliar words will demonstrate greater understanding. It is important that we, as the class teacher, nurture this practice and continue to challenge our pupils by facilitating access to texts which allow for the development of higher-level thinking. By reading widely, children will extend their reading repertoire and develop those higher-level skills of analysis, criticality and evaluation – while also increasing their knowledge and understanding of the world and society as a whole.

What do we mean by a 'higher-level reader'?

Throughout this book, we outline many ways to develop readers and challenge thinking. Reading at a 'higher level', 'developing mastery within reading', 'extending thinking' and 'reading at greater depth' are all terms with which we are becoming familiar but what does this look like in terms of learning gain for pupils and how do we define a 'higher-level reader'?

If we start with the discussion around what might be considered reading at an advanced level, we can begin to explore the various ideas and opinions that surround this concept. This is somewhat problematic as a survey of the literature around higher-level readers suggests that there is no one definition (Brighton *et al.*, 2015). However, there is some consensus as to the attributes one might expect a higher-level reader to demonstrate. These include a more sophisticated vocabulary development, an enjoyment of reading, the ability to analyse, evaluate and synthesise effectively together with the ability to be critical yet creative in their approach to texts (Reis *et al.*, 2004). Reiss *et al.* also cite advanced language skills as an important characteristic of an advanced reader which suggests the importance of the social aspect of reading. Reading is not a solitary activity but one which demands that we discuss ideas, challenge each other in terms of knowledge held, argue, debate and rationalise our thoughts. Indeed, according to Cremin *et al.* (2014, p5) *the act of reading remains profoundly social*. If we also consider Aidan Chambers' work around 'Booktalk', the importance of being able to articulate thoughts and co-construct knowledge through a shared response is another obvious indicator of a higher level of reading. As teachers, we must enable our pupils to become advanced readers by providing opportunities to build the aforementioned characteristics while teaching the skills to achieve this. The following chapters will examine the rationale behind this approach and offer some practical teaching, learning and assessment strategies to develop this effectively within your own classroom.

CASE STUDY: TOM – AN ADVANCED READER

Tom is a Year 6 pupil, looking forward to transitioning to high school at the end of the year. His teacher has categorised him as an advanced reader, based on teacher assessment, his SATs reading score and her knowledge of Tom as a reader. While success in statutory tests should not and does not define a 'good' reader, Tom's teacher had worked extensively with a group of higher-level readers to develop and extend their comprehension skills throughout the year and

was able to identify the characteristics which suggested that he was working at greater depth. These included:

- a wide and varied vocabulary - Tom understood the nuances of language and was able to draw upon an expansive vocabulary to articulate his point;
- an ability to explain what words meant and offer synonyms as alternatives;
- an understanding of the subtleties of humour within texts and being able to comment on authorial intent;
- being able to use a range of inference skills across a wide variety of genres;
- making insightful predictions based on what had been read;
- the ability to visualise the scene, making links between what was stated and what was implied in order to have the overall picture;
- effective analysis of texts based on information within the text and making links between events;
- evaluation of the significance of events within a text from different perspectives;
- an acute understanding of characters' motives and actions;
- the ability to ask questions of the text in order to extend understanding;
- an obvious love of reading.

When asked what made him such a good reader, he explained that he had access to many books at home and at school, enjoyed opportunities to talk about what he was reading with peers and adults and loved learning new words.

We know from research that a good level of vocabulary contributes positively to reading comprehension (Clarke *et al.*, 2010) and that young people who read for pleasure demonstrate higher attainment (Clark and Teravainen, 2017). The positive classroom environment that Tom's class teacher had cultivated almost certainly contributed to his success in reading. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all homes have access to books in the same way that Tom did, therefore it is imperative that class teachers find ways to ensure their classroom library is fully stocked and that links with local libraries remain strong. With the decrease in school budgets and the demise of local libraries, it is easy to become disheartened when trying to maintain a comprehensive reading area. Twitter provides an excellent forum for connecting with authors, charities and proponents of reading in order to replenish stocks. You could also visit charity shops and second-hand book shops for a wide and varied range of children's books. Book swaps work successfully in school as does the sharing of online texts which can reduce the need to purchase multiple copies of texts. Building partnerships with other local schools or connecting via Twitter may lead to class sets being swapped at different times of the year. Be creative!

Reading comprehension

The following section will provide an overview of what we mean by reading comprehension and why it is important in developing and challenging readers.

RESEARCH FOCUS: APPROACHES TO READING

Lambirth (2011) outlines three approaches that have been influential in shaping educational policy over a number of decades. These theoretical models explore how reading can be taught and its effect upon comprehension. Through examining each approach, we are able to develop an understanding of the ways in which we can support pupils to enhance their comprehension skills. While common sense tells us that there is no 'one size fits all' panacea when teaching reading, there are elements of each theoretical model that may enhance practice. How does your classroom environment reflect each of the approaches?

The cognitive-psychological approach (CPA)

This is what may be termed as a 'bottom-up' approach to reading whereby readers start with the way in which sounds are represented, building up to words, sentences and then texts. There is a focus on grapho-phonetic cueing systems rather than contextual clues. Word identification is key within this approach and proponents of this method suggest that comprehension skills will be developed more effectively and more quickly through explicit instruction in decoding than by employing other approaches. Phonics - first and fast - has been synonymous with this approach as advocated by the Rose Review (Rose, 2006) with its emphasis on systematic synthetic phonics. While this is a much contested approach to reading, it dominates current educational policy.

The psycholinguistic approach

Ken Goodman is perhaps the most well-known academic associated with this approach. Sometimes known as the whole language approach, the psycholinguistic approach suggests that children have an innate ability to make meaning and should enhance this through authentic experiences. Rather than a series of skills to be taught, reading is seen as a holistic process which draws upon three cueing strategies to make meaning: semantic cues (making meaning), grapho-phonetic cues (GPCs) and syntactic cues (grammatical structures), and may be best represented as in Figure 1.1 below.

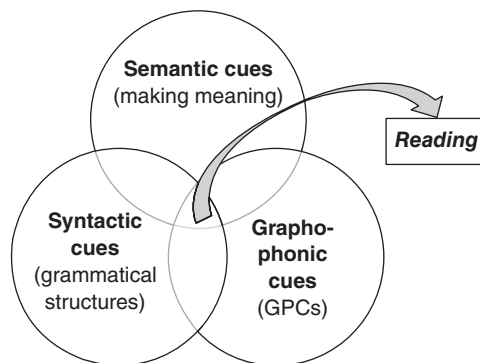


Figure 1.1 Cueing strategies for reading (Horton et al., 2015)

The sociocultural approach

Reading is seen much more as taking place within a sociocultural environment where the reader is an active constructor of their own learning. It requires active participation and interaction with

others therefore is not achieved through explicit technical instruction. According to Gee, a leading expert on the sociocultural approach to learning to read, children learn more effectively within a meaningful and purposeful context (Gee, 2004). A range of literacies are valued within the classroom as they have an impact upon developing reading and comprehension for the individual.

Guppy and Hughes (1999) outlined three levels of comprehension, each one necessary to derive meaning from the text:

- *Reading the lines* – meaning is made from what is explicitly stated in the text. It is the literal interpretation.
- *Reading between the lines* – the reader must infer meaning based on what is implied within the text.
- *Reading beyond the lines* – meaning is developed through reacting to the text and evaluating this with reference to the feelings that the author has evoked. It is an appreciation of the author's craft.

So, what does this look like in practice? Read the following extract taken from *The Explorer* by Katherine Rundell and answer the questions below.

It was ferociously hot, and he was still alive. Those were the first thoughts that came to Fred as he opened his eyes and found himself staring straight up at the Brazilian sun. Instinctively he looked down at his wristwatch, but the face was cracked and the minute hand had fallen off.

(Rundell, 2017)

- Where is Fred?
- What do you think may have happened?
- Why is it important that we know his watch has broken?

The first question is a closed question which requests information that is stated in the text. Answers may include Brazil, somewhere hot, another country.

Question two requires the reader to read a little more deeply into the text in order to answer. There is no definitive answer although the reader must use the clues from the text and their own knowledge and experience of the world to make an informed contribution. We start by inferring that the pronoun 'it' in the first sentence refers to the weather, the climate or the atmosphere. This cohesive device allows us to construct a meaningful representation of the situation. Knowledge-based inferences rely on the reader's experiences and understanding of the world therefore we have to know that by stating that 'he was still alive' means that something has happened whereby he might have died - this leads us to infer that Fred may be in a

(Continued)

(Continued)

dangerous situation. What we are doing is bridging the gap between what is stated and what is implied. There are a number of possibilities as to what may have happened and, through discussion with other readers, pupils will begin to refine their ideas as they explore the incidents that may have led to this situation. Discussions are beneficial as they allow children to re-think, re-shape and extend their ideas in light of other opinions. It is this critical thinking that defines an effective reader.

The last question is more demanding in terms of comprehension as it requires the reader to examine the significance of this sentence within a wider context - we are looking at the bigger picture. We are able to question the inclusion of this sentence within the extract and examine the reasons why the author has informed us of this at this particular moment in the narrative. This is a non-literal interpretation and relies on the reader connecting information within the text with their knowledge of the world: through identifying the watch as having symbolic meaning it is almost as if time has stopped still due to the magnitude of the situation in which Fred finds himself.

Children may begin to wonder why Fred is on his own or where his parents are. They may start to predict what might happen next or want to know more about Fred and his predicament. They may choose to ask why the author has used the word 'instinctively'? What does this tell us about the character, the situation? From a collection of three sentences and three questions, we have provided the reader with an opportunity to extend their thinking, articulate their views and apply prior knowledge - all attributes of a 'higher-level reader'.

Developing high-level reading skills: the challenge

There are a number of challenges when developing high-level reading skills with children which need to be explored in order to be able to effectively address this within the classroom. Some of these have already been explored above.

Challenging texts

As previously stated, not all schools and pupils have access to an endless supply of good quality texts although solutions have been proposed as part of Tom's case study. This is further compounded by a lack of texts which are challenging yet age appropriate in terms of content. According to Shanahan *et al.*, *just as it's impossible to build muscle without weight or resistance, it's impossible to build robust reading skills without reading challenging text* (Shanahan *et al.*, 2012, p52). The importance of providing challenging texts is crucial in continuing to enhance comprehension skills and so these should be chosen wisely. According to Fang and Pace (2013), text difficulty may be determined through the application of five linguistic sources of complexity:

- *vocabulary* – the inclusion of more complex vocabulary: tier 2 or 3 words (Beck *et al.*, 2013);
- *grammatical metaphors* – atypical ways of representing meaning which can be abstract;
- *cohesion* – where sentences do not link explicitly and there may be ambiguity;

- *lexical density* – a prevalence of content words with a number of expanded noun phrases;
- *grammatical intricacy* – long, complex sentences with multiple clauses.

Complexity may also be determined through the themes that are introduced and the level of criticality necessary to fully explore the text. This is examined in more detail in Chapter 9. The only successful way of knowing the right texts to use is by reading the text before introducing it to your class and by knowing your pupils and their backgrounds. You, as the teacher, are best placed to judge the suitability of content and themes.

Ten challenging texts for developing high-level comprehension skills:

Where the World Ends by Geraldine McCaughrean

Lord of the Rings by JRR Tolkien

Skellig by David Almond

Sky Song by Abi Elphinstone

Beyond the Bright Sea by Lauren Wolk

La Belle Sauvage: The Book of Dust Volume One by Philip Pullman

Welcome to Nowhere by Elizabeth Laird

Animal Farm by George Orwell

The Coral Island by RM Ballantyne

Small Steps by Louis Sachar

The national curriculum

Throughout this book, there are numerous references to the national curriculum with reference to statutory requirements and the programmes of study. If we look closely at the expectations for upper Key Stage 2, we can clearly see the scope of learning that should be evident in order to develop comprehension skills and prepare pupils to be ‘secondary ready’.

Pupils should be taught to:

- understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by:
 - checking that the text makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and explaining the meaning of words in context;
 - asking questions to improve their understanding of a text;
 - drawing inferences such as inferring characters’ feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying those inferences with evidence;

1 Reading at greater depth

- predicting what might happen from details stated and implied;
- identifying main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph and summarising these;
- identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning.

(DfE, 2013)

Vocabulary development, explanation, analysis, prediction, reasoning, justifying, summarising and presenting are all key skills outlined above. Through the implementation of successful reading programmes, pupils will develop comprehension skills effectively. The challenge for teachers lies with unpicking the objectives above so as to ensure manageable steps of progression for readers while ensuring coverage of the content domains, the areas of reading that are tested on the SATs papers for Key Stage 2. These were not introduced as a replacement for the previous assessment focuses, nor are they intended to replace the content in the national curriculum. By using these to underpin the teaching of reading while teaching specific skills, we are preparing pupils to be life-long readers. Table 1.1 maps the skills from the Key Stage 2 reading curriculum against the content domains to ensure coverage while demonstrating progression as pupils move into Key Stage 3.

Table 1.1 Mapping of KS2 reading curriculum against content domains and KS3 subject content

	Content domain KS2	Skills - national curriculum upper KS2	Subject content - national curriculum KS3
2a	Give/explain the meaning of words in context	Vocabulary development	Understand increasingly challenging texts through: learning new vocabulary, relating it explicitly to known vocabulary and understanding it.
2b	Retrieve and record information/identify key details from fiction and non-fiction	Observation, summarise, decode, skim, scan	Refer to evidence in the text.
2c	Summarise main ideas from more than one paragraph	Make links, summarise, justify	Know the purpose, audience for and context of the writing. Read critically through making critical comparisons across texts.
2d	Make inferences from the text/ explain and justify inferences with evidence from the text	Infer, deduce, empathise, justify, reason, explain, adjust, provide evidence	Understanding increasingly challenging texts through making inferences and referring to evidence in the text.
2e	Predict what might happen from details stated and implied	Predict, infer, evaluate, analyse	Understanding increasingly challenging texts through making inferences and referring to evidence in the text.
2f	Identify/explain how information/narrative content is related and contributes to meaning as a whole	Explain, make links, conceptualise, vocabulary use, infer, evaluate, synthesise	Read critically through studying setting, plot and characterisation, and the effects of these.

	Content domain KS2	Skills - national curriculum upper KS2	Subject content - national curriculum KS3
2g	Identify/explain how meaning is enhanced through choice of words and phrases	Visualise, vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of literary devices, reason, justify	Read critically through knowing how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice, grammar, text structure and organisational features, presents meaning
2h	Make comparisons within the text	Evaluate, analyse, synthesise, compare, justify	Read critically through making critical comparisons across texts.

Although there is no expectation that pupils dip into the KS3 subject content, it is perhaps useful to have an overview as to expectations, particularly when considering how to develop higher order skills in reading.

Time

Allowing pupils time to read more complex texts, together with providing opportunities to engage in rich discussions, has a time implication. If we consider the requirements of a busy Year 6 classroom and the demands of the curriculum, finding time to ensure pupils engage with texts is difficult. Sharing texts through whole-class reading sessions may provide one solution although this must be followed up by small group reading conferences as explored in Chapter 6. There is little to be gained from children listening to a whole-class text if it is not supplemented by reading discussions which allow pupils to develop the skills that we have outlined in this book. Questioning, providing opinions, justifying answers and building upon existing knowledge are all important components of developing higher-level comprehension skills. The use of peer support groups or reciprocal reading circles or the deployment of additional staff may also go some way to creating time and space to explore challenging texts. There are no quick fixes or easy answers; however, the classroom ethos that is cultivated as part of a reading environment may encourage readers to continue their exploration of texts at home and, as we know from recent research, children who read outside of the classroom are more likely to read above the average reading level for their age (Clark and Teravainen, 2017).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced the concept of developing higher-level comprehension skills using challenging texts. Through the exploration of theoretical models which underpin the teaching of reading, you will have a greater understanding of how to teach elements of reading comprehension to best support the development of critical thinking. This chapter serves to position the authors' beliefs and values around what constitutes an advanced reader while providing some examples of what this might look like in practice. By having a more explicit overview of the links between the content domains and the Key Stage 2 and 3 curriculum, you will be able to reflect upon how this may impact upon your own professional practice when supporting and challenging those readers at greater depth.

Further reading

Goouch, K and Lambirth, A (2011) *Teaching Early Reading and Phonics: Creative approaches to early literacy*. London: Sage.

This book provides a comprehensive overview of teaching reading within a broad and balanced curriculum while exploring the research that informs best practice.

www.schoolreadinglist.co.uk/

This is a useful website for providing lists of books suitable for particular age ranges. There is a balance of old and new texts which would enrich any classroom.

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