Building Bridges

About the Programme

Building Bridges of Understanding is a whole school approach to the teaching of reading. Its primary focus is the teaching of comprehension, with the ultimate aim of enabling children to become self-regulated strategic readers. This comprehension programme is currently implemented in our school from Junior Infants right through to Sixth Class.

The nine key strategies of the programme are:

Prediction

Visualisation

Making Connections

Questioning

Clarifying *

Declunking*

Determining Importance*

Inferring*

Synthesising*

By learning about these strategies, children can become more involved in the text they are reading and deepen their understanding of the text. Each strategy is explicitly modelled through a think aloud process using high quality fiction and non-fiction picture books which were purchased with the programme in mind.The strategies with an asterix involve higher order thinking and consequently are only taught in the senior classes.

Comprehension Processing Motions

The children are taught a specific hand signal to accompany each strategy; these are known as comprehension processing motions. These hand signals are in use in some classes depending on the age group in question.As children develop confidence and competence in strategy use they will be eager to share during read aloud sessions. CPMs alert the teacher that your child is engaged in using a strategy and the teacher may then ask your child to share with the class.

CPMs also ensure that all children are actively involved in the lesson and are constantly aware of their own and other children's strategic thinking. There is a gallery of each CPM below for you to practice with your child if you so wish.

Strategies and Corresponding Hand Signals (CPMs)

Strategy 1: Prediction

Prediction is thinking about what might happen in the story, using the information you have amassed so far to make a sensible guess as to what might happen next. It can occur before, during or even after reading. The clues for predictions can come from a variety of sources such as the title, illustrations, prior knowledge and experiences and key events in the story. By making predictions the reader becomes more engaged with the text and has a purpose for their reading. It is important that pupils are aware that their predictions will not always be right. As we read we constantly revise and adapt our predictions to suit the context of the story.

PREDICTING

Thinking about what might happen.....

Children make a 'P' sign with their fingers to indicate when they want to make a prediction. Good readers make predictions about what might happen next in the story, using information they have gathered so far.
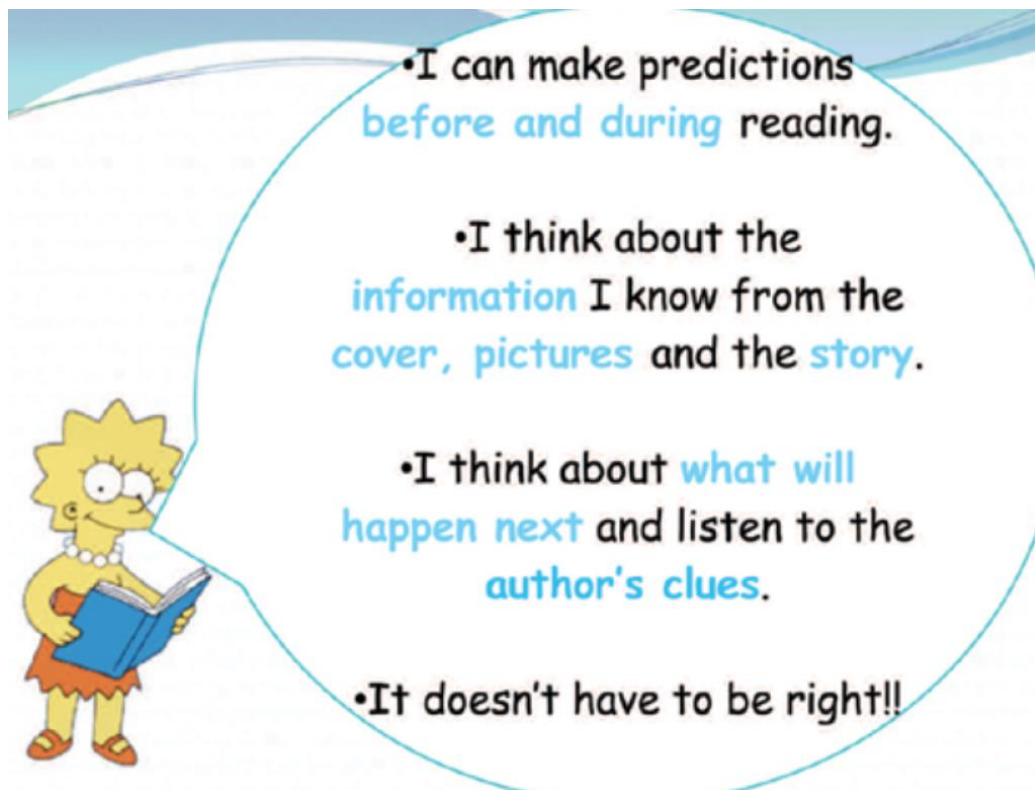
Strategy 2: Visualizing

As we read, our mind creates images in response to details in the text. These images can be sensory in nature, including not only sight but also taste, smell, sounds and touch. Our ability to visualise is linked to our prior knowledge and experiences. It is important to note that no two readers will create the same images despite reading the same text. As we read, we generate images for the unwritten details such as colours and shapes. It is for this reason we are often surprised or even disappointed when we see a film adaptation of a book previously read. The on-screen image rarely matches the visualisation process we engaged in.

As we read we gather more information which may add richer detail to the image or may indeed change it dramatically. Good readers are always revising and refining their visualisations based on what they read.

Children can be encouraged to consider their visualisations to be like a cinema. When you close your eyes you can see the black movie screen. The text is like the script and you are the director. While you must be loyal and true to the script you can add other details and actions that you consider appropriate.
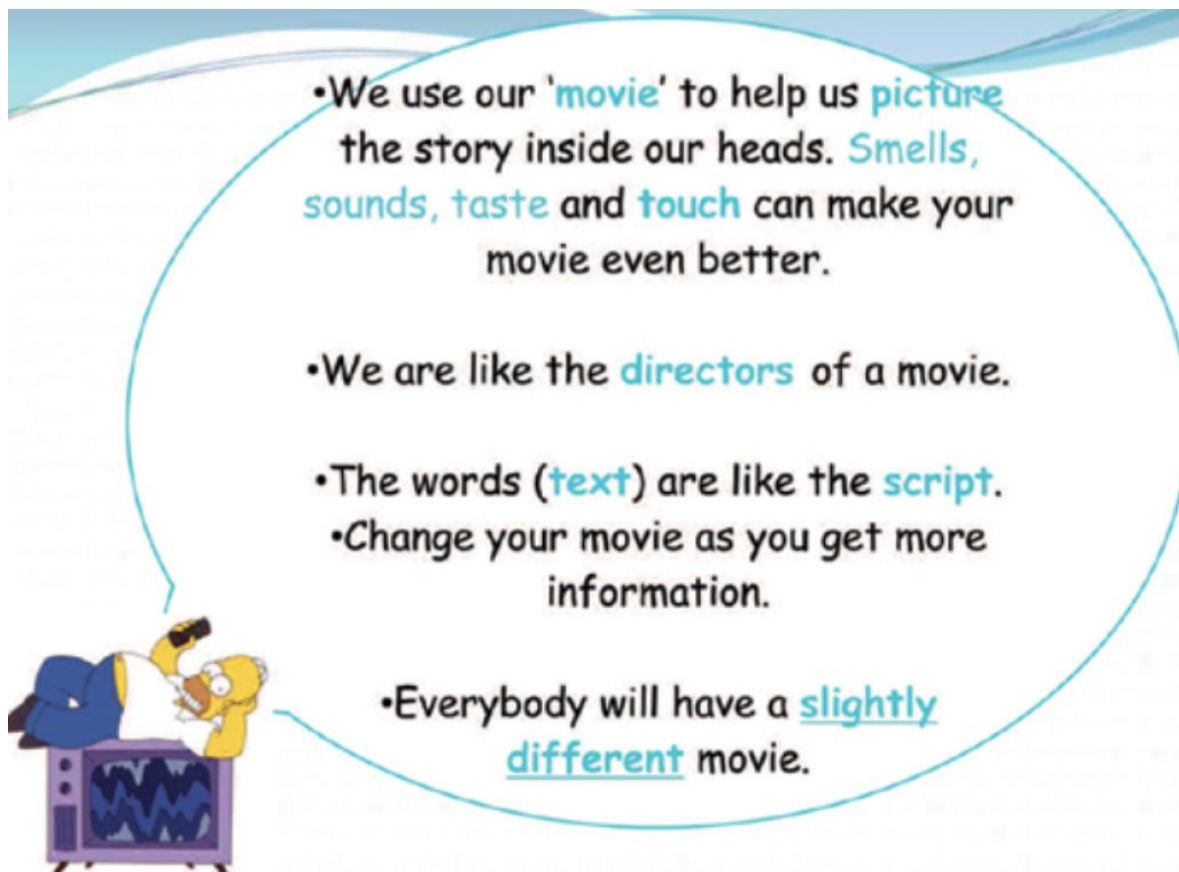
Visualizing CPM

Children clench their two fists in an outward motion to indicate that they are visualizing during a reading session as shown in the image above.

- We use our 'movie' to help us picture the story inside our heads. Smells, sounds, taste and touch can make your movie even better.

- We are like the directors of a movie.

- The words (text) are like the script.
- Change your movie as you get more information.

- Everybody will have a slightly different movie.

Strategy 3: Making Connections

When good readers think about a text they consider how it relates to their own life experiences and knowledge. In doing so, they make connections with the text, deepening their own understanding. Struggling readers often move directly through a text without stopping to consider whether the text makes sense based on their own background knowledge, or whether their prior knowledge can be used to help them understand confusing or challenging materials. There are three types of connections that can be made:

Text to Self Connections – where a link is established between the text and the reader's own life. This is a highly personal connection.

Text to Text Connections – where a link is identified between two sections of the same book or another piece of literature.

Text to Wider World – a link between the text and knowledge derived from another source such as films, environment or newspapers.

There are many reasons why connecting to text helps readers:

It helps understand how characters feel and the motivation behind their actions.

It helps readers have a clearer picture in their head as they read thus making them more engaged.

It sets a purpose for reading and keeps the reader focused.

It forces readers to become actively involved.

It helps readers remember what they have read and ask questions about the text.
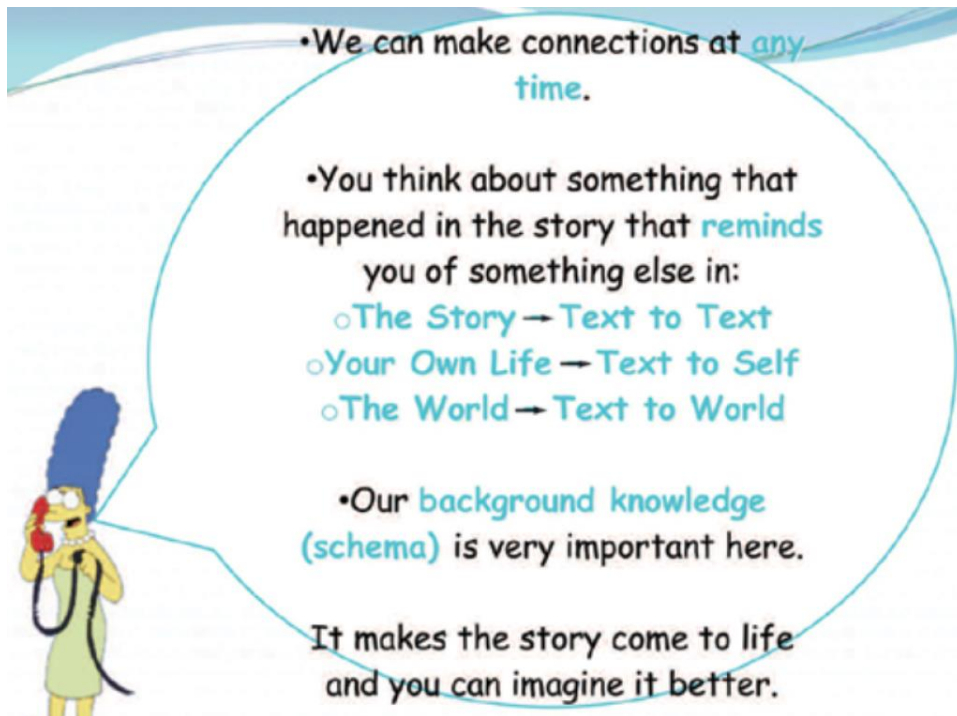
Making connections CPM

To make a 'Making Connections' CPM, children link their thumb and index finger on each hand and connect both of them.

•We can make connections at *any* time.

•You think about something that happened in the story that reminds you of something else in:
o The Story → Text to Text
o Your Own Life → Text to Self
o The World → Text to World

•Our background knowledge (schema) is very important here.

It makes the story come to life and you can imagine it better.

Strategy 4: Questioning

Questioning involves the reader generating questions before, during and after reading. The first questions a reader may have will be based on the title, the front cover and perhaps the blurb of the story. As the reader progresses through the story more questions will be generated based on the information they read. At the end of a story, the reader may be left with more questions in his/her head.

WHY DO GOOD READERS QUESTION?

Generating questions helps pupils to clarify meaning, to think more deeply about what they read, to organise their thinking, to locate specific information and to move deeply into the text. Ultimately, using questioning as a strategy helps to focus a reader's attention on a text.

Questioning CPM

 Children make a 'W' sign for 'I wonder why….' Good readers ask themselves questions before, during and after reading. These questions can be generated by what they have read or seen in the book, or sometimes what is not shown or said in the text. Some questions can be left unanswered by the author and then good readers will use their own interpretation of the story to come up with their own answers.
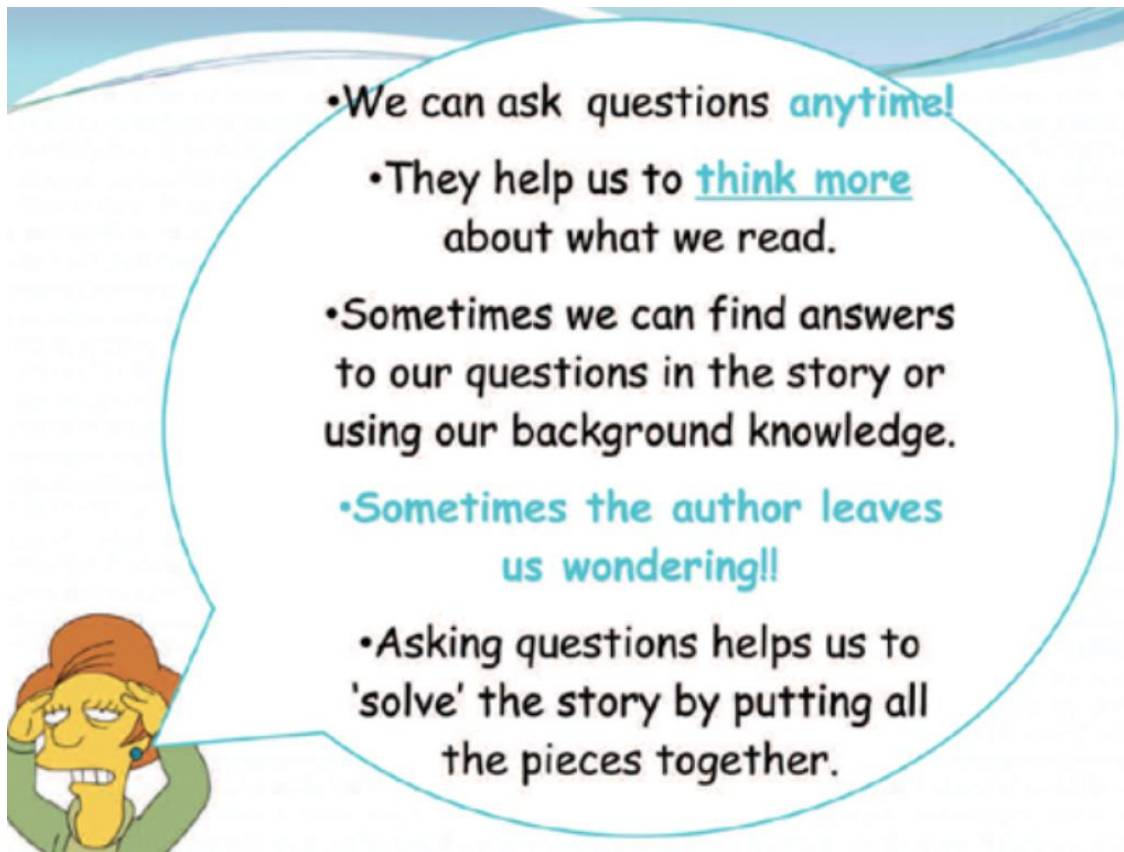
Strategy 5: Clarifying

During reading, children can struggle to make sense of the text. Proficient readers have a vast array of skills to repair and revise their comprehension once it breaks down. Explicit instruction in the comprehension strategy Monitoring Comprehension – Seeking Clarification involves equipping readers with that vast array of ways to actively repair any comprehension problems they may have. It involves assisting readers to become flexible, adaptive and independent in monitoring their understanding.

When the texts stops making sense it is vital that the reader acknowledges this and stops. The first step is to identify the issue impeding comprehension. Generally they fall into two categories:

There is a word/ phrase/ idea that is confusing me – I need it clarified.

There is a word I cannot read/decode – I need this declunked.

Clarification is where the reader identifies an element in the text which needs further explanation. It may be a concept or a word or phrase.

WHY DO GOOD READERS CLARIFY?

Good readers monitor their comprehension during reading to ensure they are reading for meaning. They know when the text they are reading is making sense, when it is not making sense, what part

does not make sense and whether or not the unclear part is critical to the overall understanding of the text.

Clarifying CPM

Children make a 'C' sign to indicate they need something clarified. This could be a word, phrase or idea that is confusing and needs further explanation. Good readers make sure that what they are reading makes sense to them, and stop to clarify if not.
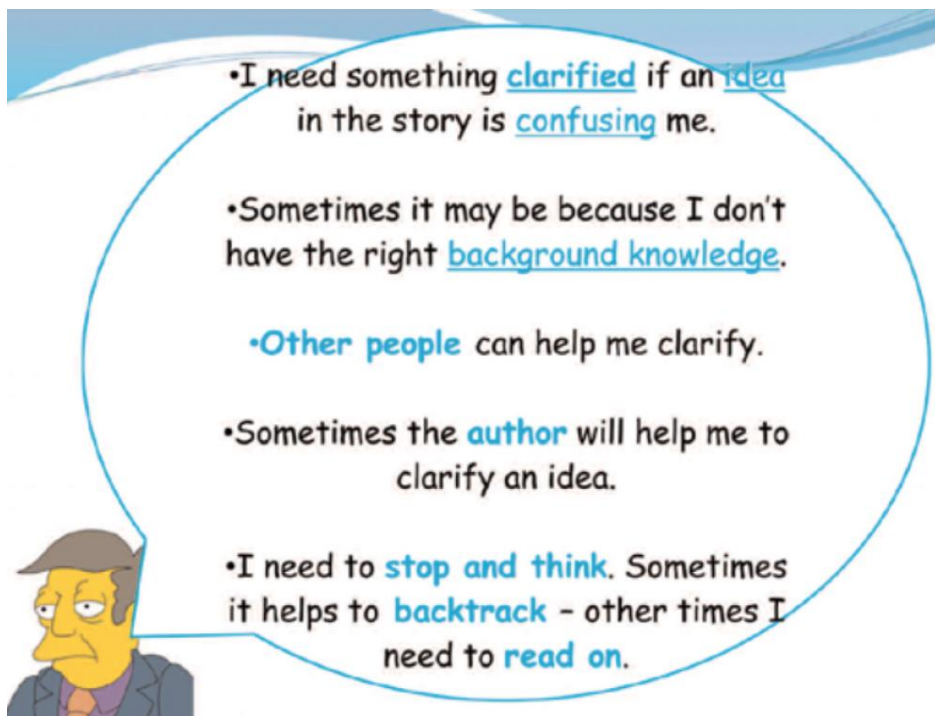
Strategy 6: Declunking

When good readers read a text, they often come across a word that they find difficult to pronounce or decode. This difficult word is referred to as a 'clunk'. When a reader meets a 'clunk', they have to 'declunk' it so that it makes sense. This Comprehension strategy involves providing pupils with explicit instruction on what to do when they meet a 'clunk'.

Two approaches are used in developing 'declunking' as a strategy:

Developing decoding skills – sounding out, looking for letter blends, prefixes and suffixes in words etc.

Extending vocabulary

DECLUNKING

A difficult word can be called a 'clunk'. Declunking involves the different things you can do to figure put the

Declunking CPM

'I have a CLUNK'. When a reader comes across a word that they cannot understand, then they need to 'declunk'. To indicate they this, they make the letter c on both hands and join them.
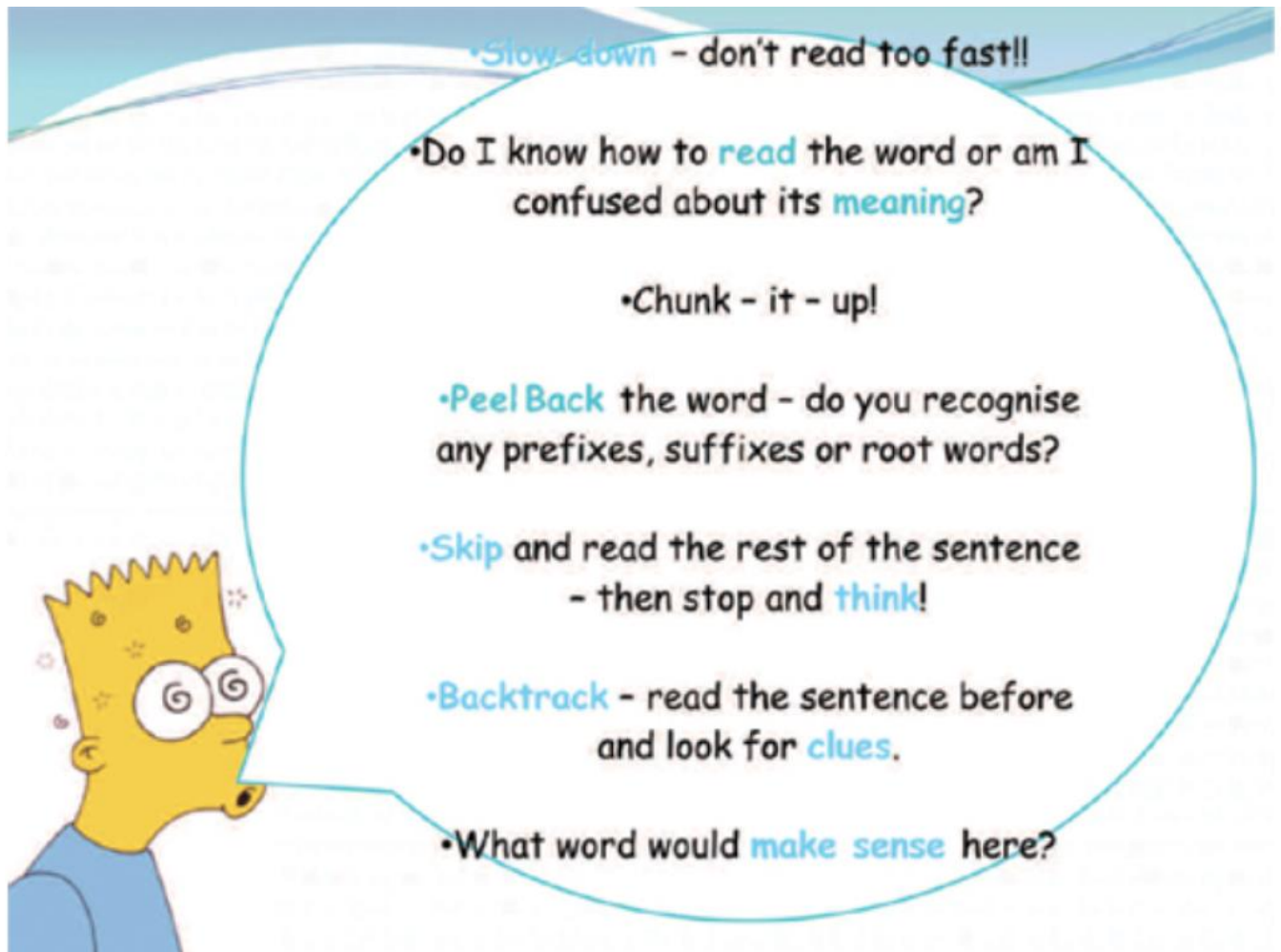
Strategy 7: Inferring

Inference is a process whereby a proficient reader blends information from the text with his/her schema and prior knowledge to create opinions that are not explicitly stated by the author but are inferred through hints etc. In essence, inference is 'reading between the lines'. It is the creation of the implicit meaning of the text by the reader.

This raises an interesting question – what is the difference between prediction and inference? Prediction is making a 'guess' about what might happen next. It may or may not be right. Inferring is piecing together clues from the text and your own life to draw a conclusion that is correct. Children can find it difficult to distinguish between these two strategies initially and need support to do so.
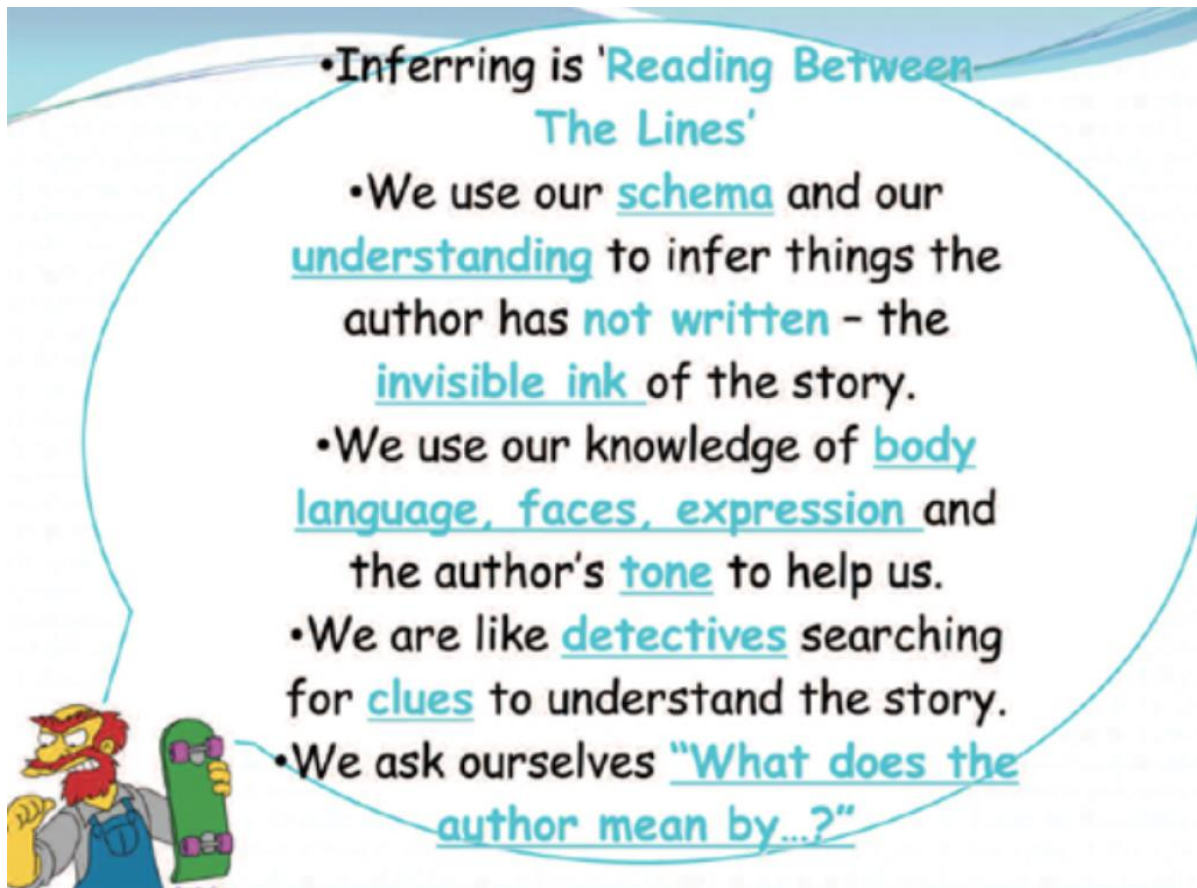
Inferring CPM

Children make an 'i' symbol to show they want to infer. Through the inferring strategy, children learn how to read the 'invisible ink' of the story, reading between the lines to determine what the author is hinting at, but not saying.

- Inferring is 'Reading Between The Lines'
- We use our schema and our understanding to infer things the author has not written – the invisible ink of the story.
- We use our knowledge of body language, faces, expression and the author's tone to help us.
- We are like detectives searching for clues to understand the story.
- We ask ourselves "What does the author mean by...?"

Strategy 8: Determining Importance

When proficient readers read a piece of text, they unconsciously separate the essential from the non- essential information they determine what is important in the text. Non proficient readers fail to do this and count any and all information as important. In essence, one could describe this skill as a sorting and ordering one as children need to:

Identify all key pieces of information or facts

Sort this information into categories according to the task

Order the facts in an appropriate way.

In order to determine importance:

Readers use their background knowledge and beliefs to decide what is important

Readers must consciously and unconsciously separate the essential from the non-essential information

Readers must ponder self or group generated questions to direct their reading.

Determining Importance CPM

The determining importance strategy enables children to identify, sort and order the key pieces of information in the text. Children point their index finger to show that they are determining importance in a piece of text.
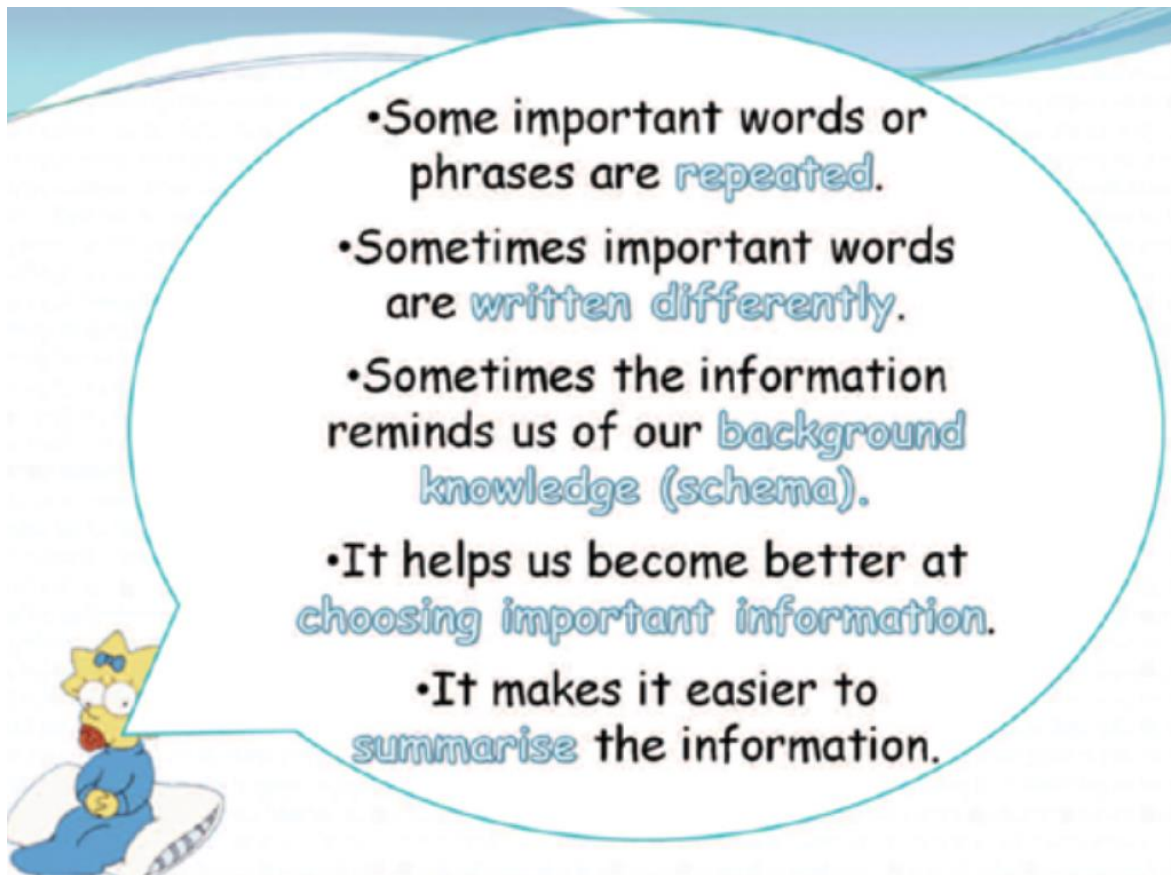
Strategy 9: Synthesis

Synthesis is a complex, evolving process where a reader constructs and manipulates meaning during and after reading. For teachers, synthesis should be described as when children use all their comprehension skills, that have been explicitly taught and modelled, to construct their own individual meaning from a piece of text. Synthesis cannot be described simply as a skill – rather synthesis is an understanding that reading is not the deployment of a sole skill but the need to use a variety of strategies continuously in order to construct meaning from text.

If one was to simplify synthesis, it may be described as summarization whereby readers retell the story. However, this oversimplifies what synthesis is. In a way, while the end product is important, synthesis is more about the process.

Synthesis CPM

The synthesis CPM involves pupils joining their index finger on one hand to their thumb on their other hand.

- Synthesising is like piecing together all the pieces of a jigsaw. On their own each piece will only give a little insight. You need to use all the pieces/strategies together to fully understand the story.
- We need to stop and think - to give our brains time to sort all the information we have gathered by using our strategies.
- Synthesis is the glue that holds all the strategies together.

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What you can do as parents

Allow time for reading every day at home.

Ask your child about the strategies above

Encourage the use of these strategies in reading in all subject areas during homework or even during paired reading before bedtime.