

Florida Center for Reading Research

Elements of Reading: Comprehension

What is Elements of Reading: Comprehension?

Elements of Reading: Comprehension is a supplemental program intended to build reading comprehension strategies and content-area knowledge for all students in grades K-3. The comprehension program is one component of a modular reading program by Steck-Vaughn, an imprint of Harcourt Achieve. Each of the components: Phonics and Phonemic Awareness, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension have been designed to use together or separately for supplementing specific areas of need.

Elements of Reading: Comprehension contains four levels: K, A, B, and C with eight four-week units within each level. The content in the thematic science and social studies units is presented in both narrative and expository text. *Elements of Reading: Comprehension* recommends fifteen minutes of whole group instruction on Monday and Friday, with an additional twenty minutes of center activity most days of the week.

The lesson organization and comprehension strategies that are taught are consistent through out the grade level sequence. The Teacher's Guide is organized into thirty-two lessons that follow a 3-step format; however, the lesson plans for the initial reading of the selection do not clearly specify the teaching format (teacher read-aloud, a choral reading, or a silent reading). Step one begins with the introduction of the comprehension strategy and reading of the text. Using the teaching version of the student book, the teacher introduces the comprehension focus and asks the students to use the strategy as they read the grade-level text. Through out the reading, teachers pause to define new vocabulary words and ask questions that often differ from the comprehension focus of the lesson. During step two, the students independently practice applying the comprehension skill using the software, writing, and the science or social studies center activities. The independent weekly reading selection on CD-ROM is presented at three different reading levels with the option to use audio support. In addition, students can access definitions for the targeted vocabulary words, learn more about the content through short videos and fun facts, and assess their own comprehension by viewing the report on how many questions they answered while reading the text. The Teacher's Guide includes graphic organizers on blackline masters for students to use to reinforce the comprehension skill.



The third step provides assessment options intended to help the teacher evaluate student progress. Teachers create whole group discussions to review the comprehension and the content focus of the lesson, utilize the writing rubric to evaluate the student's writing center activity, or generate individual and whole-class reports from the software program. Teachers can view the reports to determine the student's response to questions from these categories: text features, language features, explicit meaning, implicit meaning, and conceptual meaning. However, a link is missing between these categories and the comprehension strategies taught in the lesson. Also included in each weekly lesson are Home Letters that state the comprehension focus and reading selection for the week in addition to a specific activity to reinforce the skill at home. A scope and sequence that specifies the standards for reading, writing, science, social studies, and technology is included in each of the grade level Teacher Guides.

Each grade level kit is stored in a tote box and contains the Teacher's Guide, 25 Interactive Meaning Builder Science Consumable Student Books, 25 Interactive Meaning Builder Social Studies Consumable Student Books, the Teaching Version of the student books, three Scaffolded Software CD-ROMs, and a Comprehensive Program Guide and Planner. The materials are well organized and error free.

How is Elements of Reading: Comprehension aligned with Reading First?

Dr. Scott G. Paris authored the *Elements of Reading: Comprehension* program based on his own reading research and the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000). It is not designed to address all five components of reading, but focuses on applying strategies that promote text comprehension. These strategies concentrate on identifying main idea and details, comparing and contrasting, author's purpose, cause and effect, predictions, sequencing, summarizing, inferences, identifying story structure, setting, plot, distinguishing fantasy and reality, and interpreting pictures, graphs, and charts. Several strategies may be incorporated into a single lesson. For instance, the first lesson in Level A includes retelling as well as making predictions, understanding text and images, comparing and contrasting, and drawing conclusions. This lesson format creates limited opportunities for students to practice a new strategy with support before they are expected to apply it independently.

The content of the program is consistent with current reading research in that it identifies effective comprehension strategies; however, it is not completely aligned with what we know about effective teaching techniques. During the initial reading of the text, students are expected to apply several comprehension strategies without explicit instruction on their purpose and application. There is an assumption that the student was taught the strategy through the core program. Each lesson begins by defining the focus skill using the same language through out the different levels instead of scaffolding the instruction to meet the varying needs of students. The teacher is prompted to question the students on the application of the skill rather than offering prompts to demonstrate how to use the strategy with text. In order to improve a student's reading comprehension, the National Reading Panel emphasizes the importance of teaching and modeling the use of cognitive strategies then guiding the student through the acquisition of the strategy (2000).

A sales representative provides a half-day professional development on implementing the program. The training encompasses an introduction of the materials, management, getting started, and a walk through. The trainer may also provide guidance on how to integrate the *Elements of Reading: Comprehension* program into the core curriculum. On-going support to facilitate fidelity of delivery by the teachers is not available. Additional professional development is available for a fee through their consultants at the Rigby Professional Development business. Schools contract with the professional development consultants to customize the presentation based on the needs of the school. District personnel may request specific adjustments, as program consultants will accommodate the needs while maintaining the integrity of the content in the program. Assistance is available for technical support. The program does not require specific levels of implementation for purchasing.

Research Support for Elements of Reading: Comprehension

Elements of Reading: Comprehension is a new program that was published in August, 2004. The content of the program is derived from a strong research base. A year-long study to evaluate the effectiveness of *Elements of Reading: Comprehension*

is nearing completion. An independent research firm implemented the program at four demographically different districts in the United States. It involved a randomized control group design with third grade students. A final report on the results of this study should be available by summer of 2006.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Elements of Reading: Comprehension*:

- Large flipbooks during the Kindergarten whole group lessons make it easy for all students to see the pictures and for teachers to guide the lesson.
- The text content offers interesting and informative topics.
- The content of the program is derived from research.

Weaknesses of *Elements of Reading: Comprehension*:

- All students must use the same CD-Rom in order for the teacher to create a class report for assessment. For individual student reports, students must use the same computer to record the results of their daily work.
- In the primary grades, the struggling reader may find the expository text too difficult to extract and integrate the comprehension skills.
- There is no clear connection between the types of questions on the progress report and the assessed comprehension strategy.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Elements of Reading: Comprehension?

Broward	754-321-2600	Okaloosa	850-833-3109
Charlotte	941-255-0808	Orange	407-317-3202
Dixie	352-498-6131	Osceola	407-870-4008
Duval	904-390-2115	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Hamilton	386-792-6501	Pinellas	727-588-6011
Hillsborough	813-272-4050	Polk	863-534-0521
Lake	352-253-6510	Suwannee	386-364-2604
Marion	352-671-7702		

For More Information

<http://harcourtachieve.com>

References

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching Children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C.



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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

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