

# Thinking Pads: Supporting Comprehension in the Primary Grades



# **Thinking Pads: Supporting Comprehension in the Primary Grades**

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*“Reading furnishes the mind only with materials for knowledge;  
it is thinking that makes what we read ours.”*

*~ John Locke ~*

# Introduction

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## Effective Practices of Comprehension Instruction

*“In reading, there is a sort of half and half mixture.  
The book must be good, but the reader must also be active.”*

*~Ralph Waldo Emerson~*

All teachers want active readers: readers who are engaged in understanding the text before them. An active reader conducts two reading processes simultaneously. He or she employs word-reading strategies of searching, monitoring, and self-correcting, while at the same time applying comprehension strategies. These processes occur instantaneously, with little conscious effort, for most mature readers during the vast majority of their encounters with text.

For some readers, however, the road to effortless reading is filled with roadblocks. Some falter at the decoding stage whereas others fail to grasp comprehension strategies. It is this latter difficulty that is the focus of *Thinking Pads: Supporting Comprehension in the Primary Grades*. For various reasons, students who comprehend poorly have failed to become active readers. In order to apply the comprehension strategies, they need instruction that is explicit and focused in conjunction with modeling and guided practice.

Vygotsky's work (1978) suggests that learning occurs from engaging in collaborative activities with a more capable person. The more capable person, often the teacher, understands what the novice learner knows and helps guide the novice to a higher level of understanding. Pearson and Gallagher (1983) apply this principle in the following gradual release of responsibility model:

1. Teacher modeling and explanation of a strategy
2. Guided practice, where teachers gradually give students more responsibility for task completion
3. Independent practice accompanied by feedback
4. Application of the strategy in real reading situations

Besides employing the above mentioned collaboration and gradual release supports, a teacher's choice of approaches, curricula, or materials all work toward lifting learning, especially when materials and resources are used to support new understanding (Rogers & Rogers, 2004). The research from Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) states that graphic organizers serve to combine the linguistic mode of words and phrases with the nonlinguistic mode of symbols to represent relationships and as such are powerful tools for enhancing student achievement (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollack, 2001).

In *Thinking Pads: Supporting Comprehension in the Primary Grades*, the collaboration and gradual release of responsibility supports are incorporated in the lessons to enhance

students' comprehension. In the Comprehension Strategy section of the manual, teachers are given routines for supporting the introductory, guided practice, and independent practice stages. *Teacher Modeling Cards* are included to assist teachers with the think-aloud demonstration during read-aloud. These cards also help students apply the strategy during guided practice. A graphic organizer *Thinking Pad* for each comprehension process enhances small-group and independent practice. Reproducible sheets to insert into the *Thinking Pads* are included for student responses. Rubrics for each *Thinking Pad* are provided in order to assess student independent practice.

All eight *Thinking Pads* offer simple illustrations to prompt student thinking as well as aid in organizing their responses to text. The sentence stems employed are open-ended and can apply to any book or text. Open-ended responses help students remember their thinking as they read, heighten awareness of the strategy being taught, and let students (and the teacher) know how well they are able to apply the strategy independently (Miller, 2002). As children experience and understand the purpose for each of the comprehension strategies, the task becomes easier for them to apply these strategies to their own independent reading.

Each *Thinking Pad* comes with five copies of a comprehension process graphic organizer to enhance comprehension instruction during small groups. Small-group instruction allows the teacher to focus on specific strategies and skills based on students' needs. The teacher can easily and informally assess students' progress and respond to their competencies. Students benefit from the multiple opportunities to participate and actively demonstrate their understanding while learning from their peers.

Mastering a skill or understanding a comprehension strategy requires practice. While practicing, students should adapt and shape what they have learned. It is during this shaping phase that learners attend to their conceptual understanding of a skill (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Unlike worksheets that may be linked to a particular text, *Thinking Pads* are visual organizers to be used over and over again on more than one text so that the strategic thinking process becomes automatic.

In order to help ensure consistency and fairness in evaluation of reading comprehension strategies, *Thinking Pads: Supporting Comprehension in the Primary Grades* includes rubrics for assessment purposes. The forms can be adapted by varying the scoring scale at the bottom of each form to correspond to the grading scale used in any school or district. One example is provided below:

- Developed            90–100
- Satisfactory        80–89
- Beginning            70–79
- Unsatisfactory      below 70

Rubrics are authentic assessment tools used for effective classroom instruction. When a rubric is discussed with students before its use, it becomes a working guide for both the teacher and the students. A rubric can offer useful feedback to the teacher regarding the effectiveness of the instruction as well as provide a more self-directed learning opportunity for the students. The teacher can copy the student *Thinking Pad* sheet and its corresponding rubric back-to-back for assessment after students have had ample practice time and have demonstrated understanding of the *Thinking Pad* task.

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*“If teachers can slow down their thinking and notice what they do as expert readers of their content, they will know how to design effective reading strategy instruction. They can show students through modeling their own reading process how proficient readers attack different kinds of texts.”*

*~Cris Tovani~*

# Comprehension Strategies

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## Analyzing Characters

An author reveals a character's traits through the character's thoughts words and actions. Readers use their own background knowledge, as well as clues from the text, to infer character traits based on the author's text. When readers pinpoint a character's traits, they understand how the character is feeling and the motivation behind his or her actions.

### Preparation

1. Select at least three texts with strong character development. Use one for Teacher Modeling/ Thinking Aloud, one for Guided Practice 1, and one for each small-group Guided Practice 2. Record on My Text Selections for Analyzing Characters.
2. Locate the *Teacher Modeling Card*, *My Character*. Copy *Thinking Pad* sheets and rubrics as needed.

### Instruction

#### Teacher Modeling/Thinking Aloud

1. Direct students to listen as you share thoughts about a character during the story you are going to read.
2. Describe how thinking aloud permits them to hear your thoughts.
3. Read aloud. Stop often to talk about the character's feelings, behaviors, or personality.
4. Show the front of the My Character Card as you share.
5. Cite the text to support your inferences about the character.
6. Use the sentence stems on the back of the My Character Card as a think-aloud guide.
7. Explain how thinking about the characters as you read helps you to enjoy and understand the text better.

#### Guided Practice 1

1. Inform students that now they will be the ones to share thoughts.
2. Read aloud. Stop often to allow students to describe their thoughts about the characters.
3. Display the front of the My Character Card as students share.
4. Direct students to give evidence from the text to support their answers.
5. Provide the sentence stems on the back of the My Character Card to guide the responses as necessary.
6. Prompt for character traits (feelings, behaviors, personality).

#### Guided Practice 2

1. Follow the procedures in Guided Practice 1 during small-group work.
2. Support students in using the My Character *Thinking Pads* to record their thoughts and text evidence. For more support, scribe students' ideas as a group on one My Character *Thinking Pad*.

#### Application in Real Reading Situations

1. Students self-select reading and use the My Character *Thinking Pad* independently.
2. Teachers assess with the rubric after students demonstrate sufficient understanding.

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>My Character</b>	

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<b>My Character Rubric</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What is the character like?</b>	No descriptions tell what the character is like.	One description is a good match for the character. One description is not a good match.	All descriptions are a good match for the character.
<b>How do you know?</b>	No evidence is given for the description.	Only one text evidence supports the character description.	All text evidence support the character descriptions.

Scaled score: 6 points = Developed  
 4–5 points = Satisfactory  
 3 points = Beginning  
 2 or below = Unsatisfactory

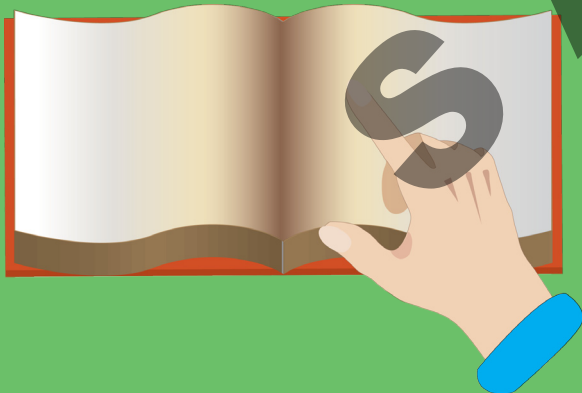
# My Character



Who is the character?



What is the character like?



How do you know?

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# Teacher Modeling/Thinking Aloud

**As you share your thinking, point to the illustrations and questions on the front of the card.**

“The Gingerbread Man is an important character in the story, *The Gingerbread Man*. From the clues in the story, I can tell that he is fast. I know he ran away from the little old man and the little old woman and all of the animals, too. I also think the Gingerbread Man is someone who likes to brag because on every page he says, “ ‘Run, run, as fast as you can! You can’t catch me. I’m the Gingerbread Man!’ ”

“I can think about important characters in other stories, too. Doing this helps me enjoy the story more because I put myself in the character’s shoes. I can understand why the character acts the way he or she does.”

## Who is the character?

- “ \_\_\_ is a main character in this story.”
- “This story is mostly about \_\_\_.”
- “ \_\_\_ is an important character in this story.”

## What is the character like? How do you know?

- “In this story, \_\_\_ is feeling \_\_\_ because \_\_\_.”
- “ \_\_\_ seems to be \_\_\_ because on page \_\_\_.”
- “I think \_\_\_ is \_\_\_ because the author says \_\_\_.”
- “I think \_\_\_ is acting \_\_\_ because \_\_\_.”

# My Character

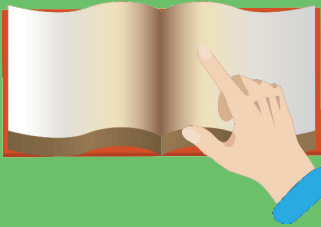
Who is the character?



What is the character like?



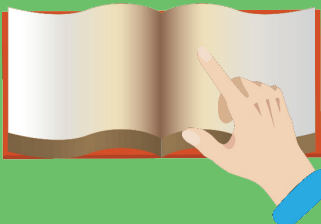
How do you know?



What is the character like?



How do you know?



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Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My Character	

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