

Concept Imagery For Meaning

# 8 TIPS

to Enhance  
Comprehension  
Strategies



LINDAMOOD-BELL  
LEARNING PROCESSES





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## to Enhance Comprehension Strategies

Have you helped students improve their phonemic awareness, phonics, and word recognition, only to see them struggle with reading comprehension? Many students have a separate comprehension weakness, even with adequate decoding and receptive vocabulary skills.

Our **sensory-cognitive approach** to language and literacy skills focuses on concept imagery as a base for reading and language comprehension. Concept imagery is the sensory-cognitive process for creating mental representations for the whole – an imaged gestalt.

The National Reading Panel Report (2000) cites imagery as a research-based comprehension strategy. Application of concept imagery to underlying comprehension skills is necessary for building a mental model for understanding the higher-order thinking skills of main idea, inference, conclusion, prediction, and evaluation. Strategies that aid in building a mental model include using marker words, teaching pronoun relationships, gap-filling inferences, and comprehension monitoring, among others. Underlying these instructional strategies is one's ability to create mental imagery for language.



## Here are eight tips for applying concept imagery to enhance comprehension strategies:

### TIP #1:

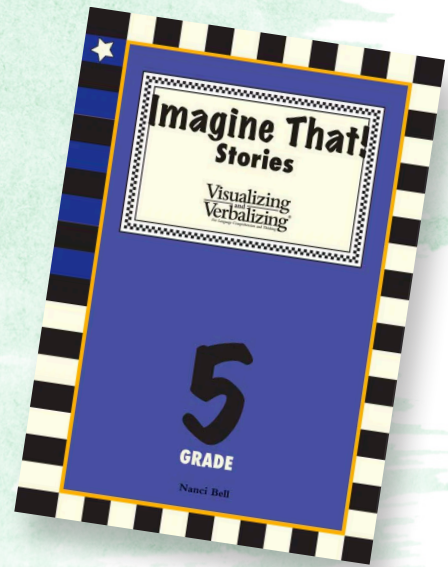
#### Set the Climate with explicit instruction

Introduce the idea of imagery or visualization with a student-friendly term like “picture.” Use a whiteboard or blank paper to draw a person’s head with a thought bubble of a simple picture (such as a cat). Describe how words on the page turn into pictures in their mind, which then turn into words. This will help them remember and understand what they read.

#### ***For Tips 2 - 8, refer to the following passage:***

“The huge saguaro cactus thrives in the Arizona desert by storing its own water. Plants in this dry land might only get a few rainstorms each year. So the saguaro soaks up to a ton of water into its rigid trunk, which swells and widens as it fills. The cactus’s thick, waxy skin keeps the water sealed inside. This cactus uses up water very slowly. The trunk grows for at least fifty years before sprouting an arm-like shoot. Other desert plants grow and die quickly, but the saguaro can live hundreds of years and tower sixty feet high.”

*From Imagine That! Stories Grade 5, A Visualizing and Verbalizing resource, a Nanci Bell Book*



## TIP #2:

### Pre-check unknown vocabulary

Scan the text and identify key terms that may be challenging or unknown, such as *thrives*, *rigid*, and *sprouting*. Ask your student if they have a picture for those words and use an age-appropriate dictionary to teach them the meanings. Help students develop a specific, concrete mental image for each word. If necessary, show a picture/video of the word(s) to reinforce meaning and store it in memory.

## TIP #3:

### Activate background knowledge

Check for imagery and understanding of background knowledge. For example:

*“What characteristics do you picture for a desert? Think about how plants and trees get water. What do you picture for that?”*

## TIP #4:

### Monitor for Comprehension

Have students read text aloud, so you can also monitor for decoding accuracy and fluency. Prompt students to actively check they are visualizing the text as they read. If they miscall a word that affects the meaning, your first question should be, *“What does that make you picture? Does that make sense?”*



## **TIP #5:**

### **Ask students for a word summary**

After reading the text, ask the student to give a verbal word summary in their own words. This will be your first assessment if they recalled the relevant details and sequence and understood the passage. Students may initially struggle with accurate word summaries but will improve with practice and more attention to their imagery. As they become more skilled with verbal word summaries, extend the lesson to written word summaries.

## **TIP #6:**

### **Check for imagery and understanding**

To develop and reinforce comprehension further, question for key imagery from the text. For example:

*“How did you picture the saguaro soaking up water? How far up its trunk do you picture the water going? Half-way, three-quarters up?”*

Teach students to actively check their imagery and question them for important details to make their image concrete, such as size, shape, color, movement, and background. Prompt them to reread a sentence if they cannot create an accurate mental picture.

## **TIP #7:**

### **Use imagery for higher-order thinking (HOT) questions.**

HOT questions require a more complex understanding of the text beyond basic facts and details. These include Main Idea, Inference, Conclusion, and Prediction. Prompt students to use their imagery as a foundation for higher-order thinking. For example, *“Based on how you pictured the saguaro storing and using its water, why do you think other desert plants die so quickly?”*



## TIP #8:

### Model the thinking process

Provide examples from your imagery, especially for more complex and abstract text. When possible, use new vocabulary to increase your students' word knowledge. For example:

*"I pictured the trunk of the saguaro starting out as skinny, and as water started filling it, the trunk started stretching out and getting wider (gesturing here) so it could hold more water. With more water, the cactus can grow much bigger, thrive, and live a long time."*

Students with poor concept imagery skills and struggle with comprehension strategies will benefit from the **Visualizing and Verbalizing for Language Comprehension and Thinking**. The program provides explicit and systematic instruction for developing concept imagery and has been shown to improve reading and listening comprehension significantly.

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**for more information on getting instruction at a learning center**  
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