

When a Child Doesn't Remember What He Reads!

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One of the most puzzling situations a homeschooling mother finds herself in is when she has a child who can read the words in a book but cannot answer the questions or tell her what has just been read. These moms frequently hear the phrase “I don’t remember” when queried about the reading material.

When working with bright, hardworking fourth- through eighth-graders in my reading class, I often had students who were experiencing this particular reading difficulty. I realized that these students were not proficient at converting the words they were reading into a “movie” in their head, as the rest of us do when we read. They were merely doing “word calling” much of the time. I found that “movie making” was a skill that could be developed in them, using an easy fifteen-minute-a-day exercise. This exercise did

not involve paper or pencil but only the use of the brain.

“Word calling” is a left-brain auditory task, while creating a picture or movie of those words is the responsibility of the right-brain hemisphere. I merely showed them how to create a seamless flow of words to pictures as they were reading. You can do this at home, very easily.

Converting Words to Pictures

When a child or teenager regularly reads a passage well but “can’t remember what is said,” we know that he is using an inefficient strategy for comprehension. He often is trying to remember the exact words he read, rather than converting the words into pictures. Whether he is reading for recreation or information, he must change the words he reads into images in his mind. The more these images involve the senses (sight, sound, smell,

feel), the greater will be the comprehension of the passage.

Daily Training Sessions

The following steps can be used with a student to develop his ability to change the words he hears or reads into pictures for good comprehension. You will be surprised how fast his comprehension skills will improve after just a few weeks of these “training sessions.”

This method works well with one child or a group of children or teenagers.

Step 1: Parent/Teacher Reads a Passage Aloud

Choose material to read to the child that is interesting and very descriptive. Standing in front of him as you read to him, have the child sit upright and keep his eyes upward, creating a “movie” in his mind. You can pretend that you are

looking at the projection screen in a movie theatre to further aid him in his “movie making.” Read a sentence or two aloud. Then ask him a few questions until you are sure he is seeing the pictures of the words you read, in detail.

For example, this is how your training session might look if you are reading aloud a passage about a beaver. Your first sentence you read may be, “The beaver is the largest rodent in North America.” Stop reading, and point to the imaginary screen, and say, “On our screen, let’s draw a quick sketch of North America. Now put the beaver on that map.”

Your next sentence in this passage will read, “An adult beaver weighs from 35–70 pounds.” Stop reading and point up to the imaginary screen and say, “Now, use the ‘zoom lens’ of your brain camera and write ‘35–70’ on the beaver’s coat. Let’s use white paint to do this. Is your paint dripping? Oh well, he’ll wash it off soon.”

The next sentence in the text will be, “Because of its large lungs, a beaver can remain submerged in water for fifteen minutes.” Stop reading and look up at the screen and help the child see this in his head by saying, “Now we need to change our scene. Let’s make a picture of a pond, with beavers around it. Do you see it on your screen? Now have one of the beavers slip into the pond. See him down on the bottom of the pond. Picture a large clock next to him. Have the hands of the clock move from 12:00 to 12:15.”

As you do this training, instruct your child how to “move” his pictures and “freeze” them when he wants to notice something. You both will have great fun with this!

When you get to the end of a passage you’re reading, instruct your child to “rewind” the movie, to answer some questions about the passage. As you ask the questions,

direct his gaze upward as he reviews his “movie” for the answers. This is the exciting part. Your child will be amazed at how easy it is to answer the questions.

Step 2: The Student Reads Aloud to You

After your child has demonstrated proficiency in converting words to pictures as he hears them, he is ready to read the words himself while creating his “movie.” Select a reading passage that is easy for him to read so that he can concentrate on making pictures rather than sounding out new words. Repeat the process you used before, stopping him after he

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has read a sentence or two, to ask him some questions about his “movie.” Direct his gaze upward to see what he just read. Be sure he gives you detailed pictures. As this becomes easier and his recall becomes more accurate, you can increase the number of sentences he reads before you ask questions.

Step 3: The Student Reads Silently

When your child is successfully reading aloud while making good pictures in his mind, you can have him read a passage silently, asking him to stop every few lines or so, and asking him to tell you about the pictures he has made. If the pictures

are detailed and accurate, you can have him read to the end of the passage uninterrupted. At the end of the reading, have him “rewind” his film and tell you all that he has read. You will be surprised at the things he remembers! His “words to pictures” process will soon become automatic. The upward eye movement will soon be unnecessary for the storage and retrieval of reading material.

Remember: No pictures=No answers; Few pictures=Few answers; Great pictures=Great Answers.

This strategy is simple but very effective. Expect to see great changes in the comprehension and retention of reading material in your children. 📖

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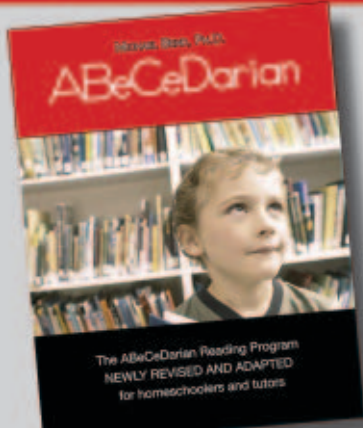
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