



## Background Knowledge: The Underappreciated Powerhouse to Reading Comprehension

World or background knowledge is key to reading comprehension and development. Background knowledge is the vocabulary and language gained through experience either hands on or through shared reading and receiving language input directly and incidentally. Children need to begin to develop their knowledge from the world as babies and continue to build that knowledge through adulthood.

Often when people think about reading, thoughts center around phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, and vocabulary. While these factors are important parts of learning to read, there is supportive evidence linking strong world/background knowledge to reading comprehension.

### IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT OF BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE:

- Read to children/students regardless of their age.
- Connect with experts on the book topic (virtually or in person).
- Take field trips (virtually and physically).
- Provide frequent sensory experiences (e.g., eat, smell, feel peaches when reading *James and the Giant Peach*).
- Relate book choices to content area, such as social studies.
- Parents of young children can devise activities to teach world knowledge such as nature walks or cooking together.
- Utilize the additional information in the book (author's notes, maps, recipes, activities, timelines).
- Incorporate knowledge-boosting stopping points (don't front-load all new knowledge).
- Have students learn through mentoring younger children.
- Discuss feelings in the books; expose students to other cultures.
- Have the students teach each other.
- Use wordless books sometimes at all age levels.

**Check out these links for additional information:**

[Iowa Reading Research Center](#)  
[Reading Rockets: Building Background Knowledge](#)