Starting Comprehension
STORIES TO ADVANCE READING & THINKING

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Starting Comprehension is a series of twelve workbooks which develop essential reading comprehension skills at the earliest reading level—from preprimer to second grade. Because research indicates that students learn to read in different ways, **Starting Comprehension** has been written in two different strands of six books each, with the texts designed to accommodate the reading styles.

•The **Phonetic-Analytic** strand is designed for the student who is good at phonics but learns nonphonetic, or sight, words less easily.

•The **Visual-Gestalt** strand is written for the student who has a strong visual sense and learns whole words easily, especially graphically unusual words with concrete meanings (such as *pizza*). This student has trouble learning phonics.

The series is suitable for all kinds of students— readers for whom any type of material is appropriate, as well as reading-disabled children with marked reading styles.

The books develop comprehension of words, sentences, and short passages through four different types of exercises:

1. **Vocabulary** exercises introduce, in context, most of the words used in the workbooks. Students can refer to these pages if they are unsure of a word in a passage.

2. **Literal Comprehension** exercises ask questions about factual details. On the most elementary level, this involves answering yes/no questions or using internal logic. At a more sophisticated level, the student answers "who," "what," "where," and "when" questions about a longer passage.

3. **Inferential Comprehension** exercises ask students to identify the correct summary or recognize the main idea of a selection.

4. **Organizational Comprehension** exercises require the student to relate, or organize, the information in a passage in two ways:

• in sequence—what happened first, next, and so on, or
• by category—which items belong in the category.

In the later books in both strands, the student must relate the details of a passage to the main idea.

Most pages in both series contain writing activities which can be used at the discretion of the teacher, depending on students' individual differences.

Starting Comprehension proceeds at a relatively slow pace. It is suitable for use in regular kindergarten, first-, or second-grade classrooms, as well as with older students. The series offers a great deal of structure and reinforcement, with a review section every twelve pages. In the lower-level books in each strand, the vocabulary, syntax, and format have been chosen carefully according to what the student will be able to handle most easily—in other
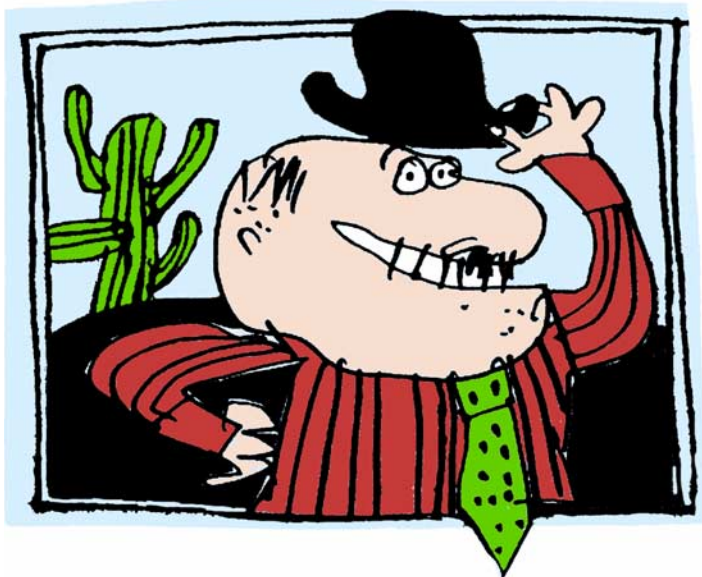
words, to accommodate the child's learning style. But in the later books, elements which are more difficult for the reader are gradually introduced, so that the writing style of the upper-level texts is more fluent and natural. Thus, while Book 1 in the Phonetic-Analytic series and Book 1 in the Visual-Gestalt series are quite different, the two forms of Book 6 are considerably more similar.

Organization of the Phonetic-Analytic Strand

The **Phonetic-Analytic** books are organized according to phonetic elements. Nonphonetic words are incorporated slowly, and selected on the basis of frequency of use, visual simplicity, and visual dissimilarity to the other words.

Both phonetic and nonphonetic words are repeated frequently, especially after they have first been added, to help students add the words to their sight vocabularies, and thus read more smoothly and gain more comprehension. Once a phonetic element has been presented in a book or section of a book, that element is then available for use in all subsequent books or sections.

Syntax develops gradually from book to book, but it is assumed that students who learn to read phonetically are capable of understanding lengthy or complicated sentence structure. The format of the books is intentionally uncluttered, though, to minimize visual distraction. Illustrations are kept at a minimum in this strand, since they are likely to be distracting, too.

Organization of the Visual-Gestalt Strand

The Visual-Gestalt books usually introduce imageable content words first and more abstract words later. Imageable content words include concrete nouns (*cat, egg*), active verbs (*run, jump*), and tangible, colorful, or emotional adjectives (*fuzzy, red, mad*). The more abstract words include function words (*than, if*), pronouns, and auxiliary verbs. Proper nouns are kept to a minimum, and most of the people's names used are also names of concrete objects or active verbs (*Pat, Bill*) or derivations of them (*Sandy, Dolly*).

This strand also contains words with unusual visual configurations, because a student who learns visually usually learns words as wholes. The length of the words is phonetically regular, since the student generally tends not to use phonetic analysis. Words that both look and sound similar (*mad* and *mud*) are not presented at the same time, since they are easily confused.

Most of the words used in the books are illustrated on the Vocabulary pages and on the inside back cover, as it is assumed that the Visual-Gestalt reader will not be skilled at using phonetic clues to determine words. Illustrations are used freely throughout the strand because this student gains meaning from pictures and benefits from associating words with them.

The syntax in these books is simple and direct. Writing activities are optional. Teachers may decide whether or not to use them, depending on how strong the student's writing skills are.

Useful in a variety of settings, from individual to large-group, **Starting Comprehension** requires little or no attention from the teacher. The exercises on the first four pages in each workbook have been completed in order to provide a model which shows the student how to proceed. Thus, students understand quickly how to work in the books, and can easily work on their own.

The detailed **Teacher's Guide** accompanying the series provides the teacher with valuable additional information:

How to determine which strand to use
• Checklists of reading-style characteristics
• Test patterns for different types of readers

Using the series
• How to integrate the series into the classroom
• Suggestions for teaching the comprehension activities
• Enrichment activities
• Lists of phonetic/grammatic elements in the books

Bibliography
•Supporting research and articles
•Diagnostic tests available

Starting Comprehension makes early reading rewarding instead of frustrating. It builds confidence by allowing students to "get their feet wet" in reading as soon as possible. The reading passages present a minimum of distractions since the content and format of the material are adapted to the reading strengths of the child. The basic assumption of the series is that the best way for children to learn to read is by reading.