

## Comprehension Instruction Should Begin Early



This Text Talk lesson with kindergartners, "If You Could Go to Antarctica," exemplifies explicit instruction to build vocabulary, background knowledge, and comprehension.

### Understanding Expository Text

Expository text (*ex = out; pos = put*) is informational text that presents ideas. Reading informational texts serves several important functions for young readers, including building content knowledge and vocabulary, capitalizing on students' interests, presenting opportunities for students to develop areas of expertise, and preparing students for the types of text that they will read most frequently as adults (Duke, 2006). These are among the reasons that the Common Core State Standards include key shifts in English Language Arts to feature more complex and informational texts and those that build background knowledge.

According to Natalie Wexler, "... the idea that kids don't need to acquire knowledge until after they've learned to read ignores the fact that gaining knowledge is *part* of learning to read—or learning to understand what you read." "Because expository texts are the primary means for acquiring academic and school knowledge, students' failure to understand and learn from expository texts can create a cumulative knowledge deficit as children progress through schools."\*

Therefore, the important work of developing informational text comprehension needs to begin at an early age, as shown in the video above. "To help children gain success with reading, it is necessary to focus on comprehension early in their experiences. Much of this interaction can and should be done orally; it can't wait for children's word skills to catch up with their conceptual skills" (Beck & McKeown, 2002).

### Read More

\*C. Collins Block, L.B. Gambrell & M. Pressley, Eds. (2002). *Improving Comprehension Instruction: Rethinking Research, Theory, and Classroom Practice*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.

Willingham, D. (March 2016). Knowledge and practice: The real keys to critical thinking in Knowledge matters. Restoring wonder and excitement to the classroom. Issue Brief 1. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/2WqJdLE>.



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