The Himalayan Yak

A yak is a heavy, strong ox. It has long, black, rough hair and humped shoulders. The male yaks are called bulls and the female yaks are called cows.

Yaks live on the high Himalayan Mountains of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. They graze on grass and need a lot of water. So they often eat snow in winter.

Some yaks live far way from people. They live together in herds. But some of them are tamed. They are very useful in the lives of the Himalayan mountain people. These people eat the yak's meat and drink its milk.

Trees don't grow in these higher areas. So the people use yaks' dried dung to make fires to keep warm and for cooking. They use yaks to transport people and to carry heavy loads.

Word meaning:

*humped shoulders*: shoulders which have a bump on them

Question

The yak is used as a means of TRANSPORT because

Options

A. it has humped shoulders.
B. it lives in the Himalayas.
C. it is a strong animal.
D. it is a hairy animal.

1 Why was the question asked?

This question assesses if children are able to make a valid inference by connecting different facts that appear in the text. In this case, the first paragraph clearly states, ‘a yak is a heavy, strong ox’; the last paragraph states that people use yaks ‘to transport people and to carry heavy loads’. Children are expected to infer that it is the strength of the yak that makes it most suitable as a means of transport.
2 What did students answer?

46% of 10,749 children have chosen the correct option C ‘it is a strong animal.’ Option A, ‘it has humped shoulders’ was a common wrong answer chosen by 24% children.

Possible reason for choosing A: Children who chose this option may have returned to the passage to answer this question, but merely to the point where the word ‘transport’ appears. They may not have re-read the entire passage, but just read the material that followed the word ‘transport’ and chosen option A as it appears in the word meanings. Another possibility is that they may be connecting a “hump” to transport, as they may have heard about humped camels being used for transport.

Possible reason for choosing B: Children choosing this option have probably guessed, not understanding the question properly. They may have not referred to the passage fully. The Yak living in the Himalayas might have struck them as an important point in the passage, and influenced them in making this choice.

Possible reason for choosing D: Very few children have chosen this option, and they may have guessed the answer without returning to the passage.

3 Learnings

Almost 55% of children answered incorrectly even though the question requires them to make a fairly simple inference, and only the words from the passage are used in the question. It appears that children do not have the habit of re-reading passages, as a strategy to understand the text, and answer questions. Possibly they are also unduly influenced by stray facts which seem important to them. (e.g. Yak living in the Himalayas, in this case)

4 How do we handle this?

- Use factual passages of approximately 80-120 words based on animals and birds.
- Ask children to read the passage and make a list of all the characteristics of the animal/bird.
- Discuss the list in class and put it up on the board so that children can jot down the points they miss.
- Ask simple questions based on the passage like - e.g. using this passage; ask children “where is the Yak found?” “What are its food habits?” “In what ways do human beings use the yak?”
- Ask children to study the graphic. Now ask them - Why do people use the yak for transport? Why does the yak eat snow sometimes?
- Join the links on the graphic on the board (as shown in the figure). It helps children to see all the facts at once. With practise, they will be able to link facts in the passage independently.

Useful resources:

Website: http://www.rhlschool.com/reading.htm


FIGURE 1

THE HIMALAYAN YAK

What does it look like?
- Heavy and strong
- Long, black hair
- Humped shoulders

Where does it live? What does it eat? What are its living habits?
- Lives in the Himalayan mountains of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan
- Eats grass
- Needs lot of water
- It may sometimes eats snow
- Lives in herds
Why?

How is it useful to people?
- People tame it
- People eat yak meat and drink its milk
- People use its dung to light fire to keep them warm and to cook
- People use it as transport
Why?
The humming bird gets its name from the humming sound made by its fast beating wings. The speed is so great that the tiny bird can move like a helicopter while drinking nectar from a flower. It can fly right, left, up and down, backwards and even upside down.

The humming bird moves its wings about fifty times a second. And the speed of the wings allows it to fly backwards whenever it feels like it.

Most humming birds are bright in colour. They eat every ten minutes. They eat insects. There is a line on the side of the tongue, which helps them to catch insects.

The beak of the humming bird is very long and pointed. It licks about thirteen licks a second, of nectar.

If a humming bird needs to get clean, it uses a shallow pond, or rain or a sprinkler that may be watering flowers. It dips its chin and belly into the shallow pond. If it is raining, it gets soaked and gets clean everywhere easily.

**Question**

The humming bird is named so because of its

**Options**

- A. sweet voice.
- B. divided tongue.
- C. wing movement. **(Correct)**
- D. style of eating.

**Why was the question asked?**

Students in Class 3 read a variety of non-fiction in Science, Social Studies, Maths (word problems), and Poetry. They are expected not only to understand the literal meaning of these texts, but also to interpret meaning through complex processes of analysis, inference, and generalization. To comprehend these non-fictional texts, students must first demonstrate the ability to understand stated information while determining the meaning of new words from their context. Similarly reading and understanding factual information about animals and birds, which are not a part of the text books, is equally important.
2  What did students answer?

44% of 6579 children chose the correct option C, “wing movement”. 34% of the children chose option A, “sweet voice” which was the common wrong answer.

Possible reason for choosing A:  The children could have selected “sweet voice”, because of their prior knowledge of the word ‘hum’ as a soft sweet sound made while producing a tune with the lips closed. This could have led them to confidently choose Option A and prevented them from reading the passage again and finding that the word ‘hum’ is actually connected with the sound made by the fast movement of the bird’s wings. Option A was used as a distracter to check how many children would select ‘humming’ based on its usual association with ‘sweet voice’.

Possible reasons for choosing B and D: Only a few children chose these options (7% each), probably indicating that they have simply selected any option as the answer.

3  Learnings

Children have not detected the fact that is clearly stated in the line ‘The humming bird gets its name from the humming sound made by its fast beating wings.’. They have not realised that the name of the bird is linked with the sound of the hum produced by the wing movement. They could also have thought that birds are usually associated with singing and talking and so ‘humming’ should necessarily be connected to the ‘voice’. We understand from this that children are either not used to re-reading a passage to answer a question or are unfamiliar with non-fictional texts. It is clear that those who read with the purpose of understanding, choose to re-read the passage and are able to quickly find the words/lines referred to in the question.

4  How do we handle this?

- Use the same passage in class. Ask children to read it carefully.
- Ask simple questions like: What is this passage about? What are the special features of the bird? How does it move? What is special about the bird? How does it get its name? etc.
- Ask the children to identify the words and lines mentioning what is special about the bird’s movements and put down the points, one by one in a table like the one below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is special about the Humming Bird’s Movements?</th>
<th>What is special about the Humming Bird’s Movements?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It moves its wings fifty times a second.</td>
<td>The speed of the movement is very very fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It beats its wings at a very great speed.</td>
<td>The wing movement is so fast that it makes a sound which is like a hum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tiny bird moves like a helicopter while drinking nectar from a flower.</td>
<td>It can move to the right, left, forwards, backwards and up or down, while in the air.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Follow this up with comprehension exercises on short passages of 75-100 words about rare birds or animals, like the: ‘lori’, panda, canary etc. and ask them questions for every line of the passage.
- Another idea is to ask children to keep in mind the following when describing a living creature: What is this creature? Where does it live? How does it look? What does it eat? How does it live and protect itself?
- Continue this with more specific questions like: What does the diet of the animal tell you about it? Why does it sleep in the day? etc. Such an exercise would also help the children to compose short paragraphs on ‘animals’ and ‘birds’

Useful resources:

The African Fish Eagle looks out for fish as it hunts over lakes and rivers. At the first sign of a ripple in the water, it climbs into the sky and then *swoops* down.

**Swooping down**
As the eagle approaches near, it *swings* its feet forwards, ready to make a catch. It uses its tail like a boat’s rudder to stay exactly on course.

**Ready to attack**
The eagle is close to the water. Its wings, which can measure almost 2 m across, work like brakes, helping to slow it down as it approaches its prey.

**In for the kill**
When the eagle is within inches of the water’s surface, it *snatches* its prey, often using just one of its feet to hold the catch. Rough scales on the soles of the feet help the bird to *grip* the slippery fish. It then flies off to its perch to finish its meal.

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**Question**
In the passage, the word ‘perch’ could mean which of the following?

**Options**

A. a fresh water fish  
B. a measure of length  
C. to sit on something  
D. a bird’s resting place

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**Why was the question asked?**

Students may not understand all the words in a given text. However, they should be able to figure out the meanings of these words by paying attention to the surrounding language. Events in the passage, related words, phrases and sentences provide some of the required context clues. In this question, though students are not expected to know the meaning of “perch”, they should be able to arrive at it.
What did students answer?

Only 28% of the 3603 students have chosen the correct option D, “a bird’s resting place”, while 28% of the students have chosen Option A, “a fresh water fish”, the common wrong answer.

Possible reason for choosing A: Students might have felt that “a perch” is “a fresh water fish” because of the words, “its meal” in the sentence, “It then flies off to its perch to finish its meal.” They might have assumed that the words ‘finish its meal’ refers to “eat its fish”. If they had connected the two sentences- “Rough scales…slippery fish” and “It then flies off... its meal.”, they would have realized that ‘perch’ cannot be the same as ‘fish’.

Possible reason for choosing B: A few students chose option B, “a measure of length”, probably because of the words, “within inches of the water’s surface” and “Its wings can measure almost 2m across’. This shows that students probably do not know the word and are therefore guessing its meaning.

Possible reason for choosing C: It is possible that students choosing this option may have already known the meaning of “perch” as a verb but may not have noticed that it is used as a noun in the passage.

Learnings

- Students who have answered this correctly have been able to infer that “a perch” is “a bird’s resting place” because they have clearly followed the description of the eagle’s hunting habits. They seem to have understood that the paragraph titled “In for the Kill” describes the way the eagle hunts and flies off to a comfortable resting place, to eat the fish it has caught.
- Students may have used context clues like: “hunting, ripple in the water, fish, meal, resting place and the part of speech in the sentence (a noun)” to arrive at the meaning of the unfamiliar word, “perch”.
- Context clues are usually of four common types within a passage. They are in the form of: examples, synonyms, antonyms and a general meaning of the situation in the sentence or passage.
- By deducing word meanings based on these context clues, readers would save time as they do not have to keep referring to the dictionary and would anyway get a good sense of how a word is actually used.

How do we handle this?

- Select short passages of rare animals or birds.
- Ask students to underline the words they know as well as don’t know.
- Ask them to guess the meaning of these words based on context clues.
- Given alongside is an example to understand how context clues help in deducing word meanings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example sentence: The snake slithered through the grass. He was hunting. We must figure out what slithered means by using logic. Here are the choices, and the analysis:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) stopped moving INCORRECT: the sentence above says THROUGH the grass. ‘Through’ means there is some movement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) slept in the grass INCORRECT: the sentence above says he is hunting. Snakes don’t sleep when they hunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) ate something INCORRECT: the sentence above says he is hunting. Snakes don’t eat when they are hunting; They eat AFTER they hunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) moved or travelled CORRECT ANSWER: the sentence above says THROUGH the grass. ‘Through’ means that there is movement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Useful resources:

1 Why was the question asked?
Students often need to refer to dictionaries, encyclopedias, time-tables, registers, catalogues etc. to find the exact information needed to complete a task. For example, to find out information on “earthquakes” in an encyclopedia, one would need to look for the volume with topics beginning with “E”. To select a particular name in an attendance register, it would be easy to find it from the entries made alphabetically. Similarly, to find out the meaning of a word, like, ‘pity’ in a dictionary, one could directly turn to the pages with words beginning with ‘p’ and then look for the page with the heading ‘pitch – place’ to read the meaning of the word ‘pity’.

2 What did students answer?
30% of 3298 students have answered this correctly by choosing Option A, ‘spick’ to ‘spin’, while the common wrong answer was Option C, ‘spin’ to ‘spiral’, answered by 31% of the students.

Possible reason for choosing Option B:
Students choosing this option, ‘spend’ to ‘spice’, have probably not understood the question. They may have just picked on the option which has a word with an ‘e’ and ‘i’ as the third letter, assuming that all words with ‘spi..’ can be found on the dictionary page with that heading.

Possible reason for choosing Option C:
Students choosing the option, ‘spin’ to ‘spiral’, perhaps feel that if the last word, “spiral” has an ‘i’ and ‘l’ in it, ‘spill’ can be found on that page. But they do not seem to have recalled that ‘l’ comes before ‘n’ and hence ‘spill’ cannot be found on a page with words from ‘spin’ to ‘spiral’.

Possible reason for choosing Option D:
Students choosing Option D, ‘split’ to ‘sponge’, have probably done so because they mixed up the order of the letters ‘li’ and ‘il’ after ‘sp’ in the words, when looking at ‘split’ in the option.

3 Learnings
Just knowing the correct alphabetical order alone is not sufficient. It is equally important to remember that if the first letter or the first and second letters in words are common, like in: ‘coat, cell, chop’ and ‘clot, clip, cluck’, the alphabetical order from the second/ third letters respectively, need to be considered. Our experience indicates that students seem to manage alphabetical order till the second and third letters but tend to struggle from the fourth letter onwards.

4 How do we handle this?
Give different exercises on identifying the alphabetical order of words used in real life situations, but with a certain sequence. Proceed from simple four/ five - letter words to eight letter words.

- Arrange the words, ‘centre, sense, nest, giant, jigsaw, mango’ in alphabetical order.
- After that, arrange these words, ‘blue, black, beat, blind, blow’ in alphabetical order, and make a sentence with the word which comes third in the list.
- Ask the children to take out their textbooks (Science, English, Social Studies, Hindi, (‘Kannada, Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu’ as the case may be) and arrange them in alphabetical order, from top to bottom. Then ask questions like: Which textbook can we place third in alphabetical order? Which textbook can we place fifth in alphabetical order? etc.
- Divide the children into groups of 6 and then ask them to use their names to stand in alphabetical order from first to last. Then mix up the groups, divide them again into groups of 10 and ask them to do the same exercise. If time permits, do this with half the class and then with the whole class.
- Ask them to pick up any one textbook, look at the content’s page and write down the topics in alphabetical order, imagining that they are looking for more information on these topics in the encyclopedia.
- Ask them to find out from the dictionary, the headings of pages, containing the words:
  1. fresh
  2. stretch
  3. germ
  4. margin
  5. jingle
- Then ask them to make sentences with the meanings of any two of these words.

Useful resources:

Websites:

For any clarifications on this teacher sheet, or to share your feedback, write to us at ts@ei-india.com, using the feedback format provided to your school.
A huge crocodile once came to our tank during the monsoon. I did not want it to eat our fish. I threw a brick at it but it slipped into the water and disappeared before the brick could hit it.

In the nights, the crocodile moved from tank to tank. I found the tracks it made and saw a hole in one of the hedges enclosing the tanks. I took a strong rope from the cowshed. I made a noose at one end of the rope, fixed it in the opening of the hedge and tied the other end to a big tree.

The next morning I saw the crocodile with the noose tight around its neck. The ground around the tree was churned up by his struggle. I went home and woke up Uncle and told him of my big catch. Uncle brought another rope, made a noose at one end, and, using a pole, tied the second rope around the body of the crocodile. Then we dragged the huge creature along and tied it securely to two trees near the house.

I became a hero. My friends and teacher came to see the tied-up crocodile and the teacher told us more about it than we knew.

Question
Which word has the same meaning as ‘firmly and strongly’?

Options
A. hardly
B. quickly
C. securely
D. jointly

Why was the question asked?
Vocabulary is an integral part of language and good vocabulary aids in comprehension. The two aspects of vocabulary include knowing the word itself, and gauging its meaning from the context in which it appears. Reading the text carefully is a pre-requisite for gauging the meaning of the word in context.
2 What did students answer?

Only 37% of 3605 children have chosen the correct option C, “securely”. 47% children have chosen option A, “hardly” which is also the most common wrong answer.

Possible reason for choosing A: Children may be under the impression that all the additions of ‘ly’ to all adjectives make them adverbs. It is also possible that they have been influenced by the wrong usage of the word “hardly”. Children have often been heard to say sentences with ‘hardly’ used like in the example here: “I pressed the lever hardly”. Such usage, if uncorrected, may become an integral part of children’s language making them interpret information incorrectly.

Possible reason for choosing B: Very few children have chosen this option and it is possible that they may have guessed the answer.

Possible reason for choosing D: Since few children chose this option, this indicates guessing. Students may have understood from the question and the passage that the words refer to things that are tied together and hence they have chosen the word “jointly” possibly interpreting it as “joined together”.

3 Learnings

- Children who have answered correctly may have known the meaning of the word “securely” from the word ‘security’ which they hear often in the context of ‘protection’ and ‘safety’.

- The passage states that the crocodile was dragged and then “tied securely to two trees”. Children who may have read the passage carefully may have understood that the crocodile was “firmly and strongly” tied to the tree to prevent it from escaping.

4 How do we handle this?

- Ask children to make a list of all the words they know which end in “ly”.
- Make them underline words like “hardly”, “lately”, “jointly”, “deadly”.
- Tell them to make two sentences with each of these words.
- Discuss these sentences in class and put up the common ones on the board.
- Break the class into smaller groups and ask them to find meanings of these words using a dictionary.
- Discuss if the meaning of the words from the dictionary match the sentences they have made.
- Ask them to make sentences again based on the explanation in the dictionary.
- Repeat this exercise with different types of words every few weeks in class.

Useful resources:

Websites: http://www.rhschool.com/reading.htm
www.edhelper.com
The word cent comes from a Latin word that means "one hundred", so you might think that the many-legged creature called the centipede has hundred legs. But it's only a rare centipede that has exactly hundred legs. All centipedes have one pair of legs for each body segment; so if a centipede has twenty body segments, it will have forty legs. Most centipedes have either thirty or forty two legs, but a few also have more than a hundred and sixty.

The word millipede would mean "a thousand legs". But like its cousin, the centipede, the millipede doesn't have the number of legs that its name would suggest. All millipedes have two pairs of legs for each body segment, and most millipedes have less than hundred segments. In fact, the millipede with the most legs has 355 pairs, or only 710 legs.

Question

A difference between centipedes and millipedes mentioned in the passage is:

Options

A. Centipedes have exactly 100 legs, millipedes exactly 1000.
B. Unlike centipedes, millipedes have the number of legs suggested by their name.
C. Centipedes have 2 legs for every body segment, while millipedes have 4.
D. Centipedes have shorter legs than millipedes.

1 Why was the question asked?

This question assesses if children are able to look for relevant information and state it accurately. Finding similarities and differences among the objects and organisms described in the text are crucial to understanding the central idea of the content presented. Often the information required is not stated directly in the text and children have to read the passage carefully to find the answer, as in this case.
2 What did students answer?

Only 30% of 1229 children chose the correct option C, “Centipedes have 2 legs for every body segment, while millipedes have 4.” Almost 37% children chose the most common wrong answer, option A, “Centipedes have exactly 100 legs, millipedes exactly 1000.”

**Most possible reason for choosing A:** The passage states that the word “centipede” literally means “a hundred legs” and “millipede” literally means “a thousand legs”. Children may have merely skimmed through the passage, come across this information but not read on in detail, thereby choosing this option. These children may also not have verified their answers with the text.

**Most possible reason for choosing B:** A significant percentage of children have chosen this option. The passage states “But like its cousin, the millipede doesn’t have the number of legs that its name would suggest.” Children may have misread or misinterpreted this statement, thereby choosing this option.

**Most possible reason for choosing D:** Very few children have chosen this option. It is possible that they may have just guessed blindly.

3 Learnings

Children may be accustomed to looking for only directly stated information. In this case, children are asked to compare the two organisms described. It appears from the data that children look for ‘catch words’ like ‘centipede’, ‘millipede’ ‘legs’ etc. and skip the rest of the information. They read the information incompletely and form an opinion based on this. They also do not verify their answers against the information in the text. It is also possible that some vocabulary like ‘rare’ and ‘segment’ may be unfamiliar to them and hence they could not figure out the correct answer.

4 How do we handle this?

- Use the same passage in class. Ask children to read it carefully. Ask them to make two columns – “Centipede” and “Millipede” and write down their respective characteristics under these headings.
- Discuss the characteristics of each in class and put them up on the blackboard so that children can write down the points that they may have missed.
- Repeat this exercise with lessons from the textbook where two or more people, characters, things or situations are described and repeat this activity every few weeks till you are sure that the students are able to compare and contrast and draw conclusions based on their observations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENTIPEDE</th>
<th>MILLIPEDE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The word “centi” means “100”. But very few centipedes have exactly 100 legs.</td>
<td>• The word “milli” means a million, but millipedes do not have a million legs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Centipedes have one pair of legs (2 legs) for each body segment</td>
<td>• Millipedes have two pairs (4 legs) of legs for each body segment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Most centipedes have either thirty or forty two legs, though sometimes they have more than a hundred and sixty.</td>
<td>• The millipede with the most legs has 355 pairs, or only 710 legs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Useful resources:**

Books: “Once a Week Comprehension” published by the Oxford University Press
In South Africa, a railwayman named Wylde lost both his legs in a train accident in 1877. He was given a signalman’s job. He constructed a trolley to move from his wooden shack to the signal box, 135 m away. One day he bought a baboon for a pet and soon trained him to fetch water, sweep the shack and even to hand over a special key to passing engine drivers who used it to adjust points further up the line.

Jack, the baboon would also push Wylde on his trolley to the signal-box where he would sit and watch with great interest while his master pulled the levers.

Very soon, Jack learned to operate the signals for two of the routes himself! Wylde would sit in the trolley ready to take over if the baboon made a mistake. Eventually, Jack became so adept at the job, that he carried out the entire operation himself while his master remained in the shack. Till he died of tuberculosis in 1890, the baboon was not known to have made a single mistake while operating the signals, over a period of nine years.

In 1972, another baboon was reportedly operating the signals near Pretoria, again in South Africa. But unlike Jack, he was paid one and a half shillings a day and a bottle of beer every Saturday night! Some baboons have also been trained successfully to herd sheep. Studies have shown that the baboon is the most intelligent among the various species of monkeys.

**Question**

In what way did the baboon near Pretoria differ from Jack?

**Options**

- A. It was taught to herd sheep.
- B. It operated signals in South Africa.
- C. It was paid for its services.
- D. It did not report to anyone.

Only 38.1% answered correctly.
2 What did students answer?

38% of 7452 students chose the correct answer C 'It was paid for its services'. The common wrong answer was Option B 'It operated signals in South Africa.'

Possible reason for option A: Students may have been misled by this sentence in the last paragraph of the passage 'Some baboons have also been trained successfully to herd sheep.' They were not able to note the difference between a general point made about some baboons that herded sheep with a specific point about the other baboon near Pretoria.

Possible reason for option B: Students have noticed that the passage mentions that both baboons operated railway signals, which is the main similarity but have failed to register that the question asks for the difference and not the similarity.

Possible reason for option D: Students have not understood the passage completely and have simply chosen this option as the word 'reports' occurs here and a similar word occurs, in the line. "In 1972, another baboon was reportedly operating the signals near Pretoria, again in South Africa."

3 Learnings

- A good reader would normally read a passage carefully and go through some steps before arriving at the answer. She would deduce the meanings of different words in the context of the situation and thus arrive at the significance of the sentence because of these words. All this helps the student to read, understand, compare and contrast the different facts presented in the passage.
- In this passage, the good readers have been able select the correct answer (It was paid for its services.) by taking a hint from the sentence "But unlike Jack, he was paid one and a half shillings a day and a bottle of beer every Saturday night!", specifically the word 'unlike'.
- A student, who is just familiar with or has superficial knowledge of common words and does not read the text carefully, would not be able to link one idea to another.

4 How do we handle this?

- Bring to the classroom short passages of about 250 words; they can be taken from the magazine sections of newspapers or children's magazines.
- Demonstrate using one passage, maybe with the passage in this worksheet. Get the students to underline words that are unfamiliar to them. Ask them to guess the meaning of these words, by studying the context.
- After that, ask the students to imagine the scene occurring in front of them. Ask them simple questions to test the sequence of the facts in the passage, such as: What is this passage about? Who are the characters in this passage? How many baboons are there in the story? What happens to Jack? What happens next? Which event is important to the story?
- Encourage students to form such questions for other passages, focusing on questions that would lead to the gist of the passage.
- Put down the common points between Jack and the baboon in Pretoria and then the points relevant to the baboons in the form of a diagram presented here. Do this on the board. Use flow charts or any other diagram to represent the facts in the passages.
- In this way, use comprehension strategies like: visualizing, sequencing, making connections, predicting and summarizing while handling any passage in the class.
- Do this with one more passage and then follow up with one fictional or non-fictional passage once a week or fortnight.
- To include students of all ability levels, demonstrate some of these techniques and then reinforce using Class lessons.

Useful resources:

Books: Mosaic of Thought, Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction, by Ellin Oliver Keane and Susan Zimmermann, Heinemann 2007

Websites: www.readinglady.com
**Grandfather’s experience on his trip from Dehra to Saharanpur**

*Toto is a monkey who causes destruction in the house. So Grandfather is forced to take Toto along with him to neighbouring Saharanpur where he had to go to collect his railway pension. Now read on to see how the trip went.*

A black kit-bag was provided for Toto. When the strings of the bag were tied, there was no means of escape from within, and the canvas was too strong for Toto to bite his way through. His initial efforts to get out only had the effect of making the bag roll about on the floor, or occasionally jump in the air – an exhibition that attracted a curious crowd of onlookers on the Dehra railway platform.

Toto remained in the bag as far as Saharanpur, but while Grandfather was producing his ticket at the railway gate, Toto managed to get his hands through the aperture where the bag was tied, loosened the strings, and suddenly thrust his head through the opening.

The poor ticket-collector was *visibly alarmed*; but with great presence of mind, and much to the annoyance of Grandfather, he said, ‘Sir, you have a dog with you. You’ll have to pay for it accordingly.’

In vain did Grandfather take Toto out of the bag to prove that a monkey was not a dog or even a quadruped. The ticket-collector, now thoroughly annoyed, insisted on classing Toto as a dog; and Rs.3.50 had to be handed over as his fare. Then Grandfather, out of sheer spite, took out from his pocket a live tortoise that he happened to have with him and said, ‘What must I pay for this then, since you charge for all animals?’

The ticket-collector retreated a pace or two; then advancing again with caution, he subjected the tortoise to a grave and knowledgeable stare.

‘No ticket is necessary, sir,’ he finally declared. ‘There is no charge for insects.’

---

**Question**

What could be the possible reason why Grandfather pulled out a tortoise from his pocket and asked what the charges for that would be?

**Options**

- **A** He did not like the ticket collector and wanted to show him how a tortoise looked.
- **B** He could not believe how the strict ticket collector could be so uncaring.
- **C** He was extremely angry with the ticket collector and wanted to be nasty to him.
- **D** He was desperate and did not know how else to convince the ticket collector.

---

**1. Why was the question asked?**

Understanding mood and tone of passages is critical for understanding characters, situations and turn of events in any given text. It may require a series of mental activities like: following the sequence of events, identifying related word clues and interpreting what is symbolized through these. For a good reader, this process becomes almost automatic, whereas a less able reader may find it difficult to do so. This question requires students to gauge the tone of the anecdote and draw an inference about Grandfather’s mood.
2 What did students answer?

Only 21% of the 5214 students chose the correct option C ‘He was extremely angry with the ticket collector and wanted to be nasty to him.’ 47% students chose the most common wrong answer D ‘He was desperate and did not know how else to convince the ticket collector.’

Possible reason for option A: Very few chose this option. Students choosing this option possibly did not read the option fully. Students may have inferred that Grandfather did not like the ticket collector which is implied in the first half of the sentence in this option. They seem to have ignored the 2nd part of the sentence “wanted to show him what a tortoise looked like.”

Possible reason for option B: The question is very specific, and asks why Grandfather performed the specific act of pulling out the tortoise from his pocket and asked what the charges for that could be. Students choosing this option are ignoring the fact that this does not answer the specific question. It is possible that Grandfather may have felt this way at some point during the encounter, but this is irrelevant as the option does not address the reason for the specific act.

Possible reason for option D: Students may have not moved past the words “in vain did Grandfather take Toto out of the bag…” and inferred that Grandfather was desperately trying to convince the ticket-collector. Another possible reason is that students have not understood the shift in mood. They may have read on, but failed to register the anger in Grandfather’s action.

3 Learnings

One way of understanding emotion is by focusing on action and trying to guess the reason for that action. In this passage, it would mean focusing on why Grandfather took out Toto from the bag first and later, why he took the tortoise out of his pocket.

Students who have answered correctly may have followed Grandfather’s actions, the ticket collector’s response and the subsequent reaction given by Grandfather. They could also have picked up important clues from word phrases like “in vain”, “in spite” to come to the correct answer.

4 How do we handle this?

Use a short story (250-500 words) that has various emotions, from the English Textbook.

Ask the students to imagine the scene occurring in front of them. Ask them simple questions to test the sequence of the facts in the passage: What is this passage about? What does Grandfather do to convince the ticket collector? What does the ticket collector say? How do you think Grandfather feels when the Ticket collector makes him pay for Toto’s fare?

Help students to sequence the chain of action/situation-emotion-reaction to understand the happenings of the passage entirely. (see fig. 1)

Get the students to underline words and phrases that are unfamiliar to them. Ask them to read the sentence and guess the meaning in the context of the sentence. Encourage students to use a dictionary to find meanings.

Do this with one more passage and then follow up with one fictional or non-fictional passage once a week or fortnight.

To include students of all ability levels, demonstrate some of these techniques and then reinforce using class lessons.

Useful resources:

Websites: http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/500000737.shtml
http://wilearns.state.wi.us/apps/default.asp?cid=24

---

Figure 1

TT: “Sir you have a dog with you, you have to pay accordingly.”
Gf: (desperately) Pulls out Toto from the bag to prove he is not a dog.
TT: (annoyed) insists Toto is a dog and a ticket of Rs. 3.50 be bought.
Gf: (angry) Takes out a tortoise from his pocket and asks, “What must I pay for this then, since you charge for all animals?”
A vision of a life uninterrupted by cable operators demanding a subscription fee for poor transmission is sheer bliss. Direct telecast of 28 state assemblies, movies on demand, a cricket match at the touch of a remote… made possible by a tiny dish and a receiver is what Direct to Home (DTH) is all about. It is the latest technology that will give not only a picture perfect image to the viewer but also make real choices available if broadcasters choose to provide good content.

What does the consumer have to invest in if he opts for DTH?

Of course all this will come for a price, much higher than an ordinary cable. A consumer will be expected to spend roughly Rs. 6000 for a dish and will have to keep aside anything between Rs. 400 and Rs. 600 per month to watch channels of his choice. The items made available by the broadcaster will be a small pizza sized dish and a small set-top box to decode the signals. The installation charges would be separate. If that sounds expensive, then the consumer will have to learn to live with cable operators.

Question

Which of the following, according to the passage, is an ADVANTAGE of DTH?

Options

A. It relieves the public of dependency on the cable operators.
B. It provides a much larger choice of high-quality, free channels.
C. The cost is much lower than that of the cable operator.
D. There will be no influence of foreign channels on Indian children.

1 Why was the question asked?

We often come across material that gives us details about a specific concept or idea. As readers we almost automatically pick up points that highlight different points of view about the concept presented. We then categorise them based on prior knowledge or direct information provided within the write-up. Here, the material gives comparative information on different products. This question helps us to see whether students are able to pinpoint key characteristics and categorise them.
2 What did students answer?

Only 35% of 6878 children who answered this question chose the correct option A 'It relieves the public of dependency on the cable operators'. 38% chose the most common wrong answer B, 'It provides a much larger choice of high-quality, free channels.'

Possible reason for choosing B: Children seem to have latched on to the fact that DTH offers better picture quality (from the word “high-quality”), but seem to have missed out the fact that the channels are not free. DTH is a costly affair.

Possible reason for choosing C: It is evident from paragraph 2 that DTH is expensive ("much higher than ordinary cable…"). “If that sounds too expensive”). Possibly children choosing this option have not registered this fact, and do not seem to have verified this statement by referring to the passage.

Possible reason for choosing D: Very few children have chosen this option, and many may just have guessed. There is no mention of foreign channels at all in the passage. Children have probably not used the passage to answer, and may have relied on some fuzzy "knowledge" of foreign channels not being good for children.

3 Learnings

It appears that the following may be hampering many children from answering this “direct fact” question-

- Children may not be reading the entire passage, and therefore they do not get the gist - they have missed out the key fact that DTH is of better quality BUT has a higher price.
- Children may not be reading the options fully. E.g. Option B says “free channels”, children may not have gone back to the passage to verify facts if they did not remember clearly.
- Children may be having difficulty in understanding the words in the options- it would be interesting to investigate whether children understand what is implied by option A.

4 How do we handle this?

- Present children with passages which have technical information. This could include new automated toys, the internet (things like blogs), wifi technology etc.
- Ask children to list all the possible features of that technology in class.
- Have a discussion, and list the points on the board. This helps children to understand what they have missed in their list.
- Ask children relevant questions about the technology discussed: What is the use of this technology? What is the biggest advantage? What is the most likely drawback? (In this case: DTH gives better picture quality, every home can have a dish and set-top box that help to transmit the channels directly, but DTH is more expensive than cable connections)
- Children can be made to draw a diagram that lists all the features of the technology, its advantages and its limitations.

**FIGURE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DTH</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Better picture quality than cable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More number of channels, more choice for customers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Direct transmission of channels through a dish and set top box</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No need to pay cable operators and for poor transmission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cost of DTH higher than that of cable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Useful resources:

Website: http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/500000737.shtml
TRAPPED

PROF. PURENOTHIN, THE RENOWNED INDOLOGIST, IS TRAPPED INSIDE THE MOUND OF MURUKKI. YOU JOIN DETECTIVE MANDOO TO SEARCH FOR THE PROFESSOR AND SAVE HIM. THE ONLY WAY TO THE MOUND OF MURUKKI IS REVEALED TO YOU. ONLY WHEN YOU CAN GET HOLD OF FOUR KEYS HIDDEN ALONG YOUR ROUTE, AND YOU HAVE TO SEARCH FOR THEM THROUGH A DOZEN DIFFERENT GAMES AND ACTIVITIES. GO FOR CLUES AND KEYS!

MIND YOU, YOU HAVE ONLY 60 MINUTES TO REACH THE PROFESSOR! GET THERE FAST, BUT BEWARE OF YOURSELF BEING TRAPPED.

Hey, but this one is a whole lot of fun! you have a different set of games and activities, every time you begin your search.

Question

According to the advertisement, where is the product readily available for immediate purchase?

Options

A at www.chandamama.org
B at all prominent outlets.
C in the Defence Colony.
D in Chennai only.

A quality product from Chandamama
For more details, please contact Chandamama India Limited, 82, Defence Officers’ Colony, Ekkatuthangal, Chennai - 600 097, www.chandamama.org

1 Why was the question asked?

This question assesses if children are able to reproduce key points of the content provided. To understand any material fully, key information/facts need to be known. The use of ‘authentic’ material (something that children encounter in daily life) helps in knowing if children are actually able to pick up the key aspects. In this question, the ad has actually helped in pointing out that children maybe missing even obvious information because they do not read unfamiliar material, in this case a blurb, at the top left side of the ad.

For any clarifications on this teacher sheet, or to share your feedback, write to us at ts@ei-india.com, using the feedback format provided to your school.
2 What did students answer?

Only 32% of 4861 children chose the correct option B ‘at all prominent outlets.’ 44% chose the most common wrong answer A, ‘at www.chandamama.org’.

Possible reason for choosing A: Children may have missed out the blurb in the ad completely, or they may have connected a CD Rom with a computer and felt that it may be available on a website. They may also have heard of online shopping, and having missed out the blurb, decided that a website would have this.

Possible reason for choosing C: Chandamama’s office address is stated to be in Defence colony, so children may have thought it would be available here. The ad also says, ‘for further details contact’ leading children to choose this option.

Possible reason for choosing D: The few children who chose this option may have been guessing. The ad says that the Chandamama office is Chennai, so they may have selected D.

3 Learnings

- Children tend to skim through material and tend to miss even the most obvious things. The blurb, as in this ad, is at the top left corner. Children, who may have skimmed, missed it completely thereby choosing the wrong options.

- Children have possibly not read the question fully. The words “immediate purchase” should have told the children that the product has to be procured instantly and therefore, a website cannot be the correct choice.

- Children tend to get used to a particular form of material, e.g. stories, anecdotes. Sometimes when they are presented with unfamiliar content, no matter how simple, they may miss key points.

4 How do we handle this?

- Bring to class the notices that are put up on the school notice board. Ask questions like: Whom is this notice intended for? What is this notice about? Where is this event going to take place? What time will the event begin? Which teachers need to be contacted for help? Who can be part of this event?

- Bring to the class ads from magazines, newspapers etc. These ads can be related to admission notices, new products, and exhibition-sales. You can also bring actual wrappers/cartons of biscuits, games, etc. if possible.

- Ask them questions related to the information in the ad: What is the product that this being advertised? Who are the manufacturers? Where is the product available? Who can you contact if you want to know about the various other products by the same manufacturer? What is the price of the product?

Useful resources:

Websites: http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000737.shtml
Reading for Understanding - Literal Comprehension

English: Class 8

Question
The first and the last sentence of the passage below are numbered (1) and (6) respectively. The rest of the passage is split into four parts named P, Q, R and S. These four parts are not in the proper order. Find the correct combination among the given alternatives that sets the SEQUENCE CORRECTLY.

1. Factories and power stations release harmful chemicals into the atmosphere.

P. The moisture in the atmosphere dissolves the rest of the chemicals.
Q. When it rains, these chemicals come down too, as acid rain.
R. Some, such as sulphur, fall to the ground as tiny particles.
S. It damages trees and other plants, and poisons the soil.

6. Eventually acid rain drains into rivers and lakes, where it kills many fish.

Options
A. PQRS
B. QPRS
C. RPQS
D. SRPQ

Only 32.7% answered correctly

1 Why was the question asked?
This question addresses a key skill in language comprehension, which is literal understanding of the information given in a paragraph or text. A good reader should be able to answer the question ‘what comes next?’ This is called sequencing. This helps in two ways: to visualize the gist of the passage and also to understand the interrelationships between different bits of information in the text. Sequencing involves looking for those key words that connect one sentence to another, which a good reader is able to do automatically. Another important skill is to understand sentence structure and identify the subject of each sentence.
2  **What did students answer?**

Only 32.6% out of 6900 students answered C, which is the correct answer.

**Possible reason for option A:** Students may have noticed the word ‘chemicals’ occurring in two of the sentences and concluded that they come one after the other. Some children may have just chosen the answer with the familiar alphabetic sequence.

**Possible reason for option B:** Students have misinterpreted cause and effect. They may have thought of moisture as a result of rain, rather than the cause. Equally importantly, they appear to have missed the point that sulphur cannot come down in particles if it has already dissolved.

**Possible reason for option D:** Students have not realized that ‘it’ cannot refer to nouns: - ‘Factories and power stations’, because they are plural and ‘it’ is singular.

---

3  **Learnings**

To answer this question correctly, a good reader would use prior knowledge of sentence structure and identify words that connect one sentence to another. A good reader would also use prior knowledge to eliminate unworkable connections and confirm workable connections. Many students have attempted to solve this sequence but have missed out on one or two key points. They are not able to identify the connecting words correctly, and do not confirm workable connections. The key words themselves are not difficult. Therefore, this skill can be easily mastered with practice.

The correct sequence connects each sentence as shown in the diagram. We see that a good understanding of sentence structure helps us make the connections correctly, using key words such as ‘some’, ‘it’ and ‘these’.

---

4  **How do we handle this**

Play games such as ‘strip story’.

- Start with short passages, stories or news items, which have a clear time line.
- Cut them into strips containing one sentence each.
- Jumble them up and give it to the students, in groups.
- Ask the students to come up with the complete story as they see it.
- One key rule is that they must be able to give reasons for their sequence.
- Later introduce stories or news items that do not have a clear time line but have points that are connected in other ways. Repeat this with items from textbooks of other subjects.

While working on reading exercises in class, pause and ask students to predict what would happen next and ask them to give reasons for their answer. This encourages students to actively engage with the material that is being read.

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**Useful resources:**

Books:  **Friday Afternoon Comprehension** by Kunjappa Radha, OUP.

Websites: www.readwritethink.org
Mathia Bags Accolades

The conservative film enthusiasts of the cultural capital of India, Kolkata, were exposed to a rare delight from the interior villages of strife-torn Tripura when Mathia, the Kokborok feature film, was premiered there last month. A website called it “one of the rare gems to emerge from Indian regional cinema today.”

C.M. Paul, President of SIGNIS (India), an international media group, says Mathia gives one a glimpse of the “dignity and silent strength that women are capable of.”

The film is a strong indictment of the practice of witch-hunt that has, in Tripura, reportedly claimed 36 innocent women since the turn of the millennium alone.

Over 60,000 people mostly in the interior villages of Tripura, have seen the film, whose popularity, according to publicity in-charge, AK Debbarma, “has greatly exceeded our expectations”.

Sampari Pictures, the production group, has decided that Mathia be shown only free of cost, as they believe it has “a message that must reach the rich and the poor alike”.

Mathia is only the third full-length feature film made in Tripura. It also has the distinction of being one of the first digital feature films produced in the country. Moreover, it is the first-ever feature film in the country to be directed by a priest, Joseph Pulinthanath, SDB.

At the Agartala premiere in May this year, Jitendra Chaudhury, a cabinet minister of the ruling Marxist Government called the film “a crusade against the age-old superstitious beliefs of our people”.

Sampari Pictures are exploring the possibilities of dubbing the film into other Indian languages.

Question

According to the passage, praise for Mathia has come from

Options

A. a website.
B. C. M. Paul.
C. a minister.
D. all the above.

1 Why was the question asked?

While reading, noting important stated facts is an important stepping stone to comprehension. In most reading material, facts are rarely presented in a straightforward way. Here, the facts are very clearly stated, but are spread out across the passage. A good reader would recognize the common thread or theme and would easily be able to identify the related facts. A poor reader on the other hand, would probably not register all the facts, or would not see the common theme, which in this context is praise. Here the, title of the passage ‘Mathia Bags Accolades’ would give the good reader a clue to the key facts in the passage.
2 What did students answer?

33% of 6903 students chose the right answer D, 'all of the above.' The common wrong answer was B, 'C.M. Paul'.

Possible reason for choosing option A: This is the first quotation of praise we encounter in the passage. The language used is simple and straightforward. Students who have chosen this option have either not noted the other two or have not categorised them as praise.

Possible reason for choosing option B: Students have chosen the option probably because he is the only one named among the options. It is likely that they have missed the praise from the website while reading through this passage and have focused on C.M. Paul, as this more easily identified because of the capital letters used.

Possible reason for choosing option C: It is possible that the students choosing this option have not read the passage fully and have probably guessed that the person praising could very well be an authority figure such as a minister.

3 Learnings

To answer this question, it is necessary that the reader stays engaged with the text, until the reading is complete. We see that the students do not seem to have registered what the title of this passage is saying. With the title in mind, a student with good reading skills would automatically note that the film Mathia was praised by more than one person and on seeing this question would confirm the validity of each option and arrive at the correct answer D, by re-reading the passage.

Students who do not read the complete text and perhaps choose to skim, would not be able to get the right answer. They also would not be able to check the validity of the options presented, which would be another way of answering this question.

4 How do we handle this?

- Select passages from the standard textbook and ask students to identify the important facts.
- Use this passage as an example for this exercise. Ask students to read the above passage carefully and identify the important facts. (Do not give the students the answer to the question in this teacher sheet.)
- Ask them to assign scores out of 10 for each of these facts, depending on how important each of these facts is.
- Discuss the reasons why these marks were assigned to these facts.
- Next, ask students to see whether they can categorise these facts under a common theme word.
- Ask students to pick the category with the highest scores for that theme word.
- Ask them to give a title to this category with reference to the passage and put them under Set 1. (See table below). Do the same with the next common theme word and put them under Set 2. Now total the scores separately for the items in column 2 and column 3. The one with the highest scores can be taken as the overall theme of the passage. Put that overall theme which the students have arrived at as a group, in the 4th column. Then draw the attention of the students to this action in the passage and select the answer to the question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All important facts with scores</th>
<th>Set 1 - Firsts</th>
<th>Set 2 - Praises</th>
<th>Overall Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Film - 10</td>
<td>First by priest - 8</td>
<td>Website praises-6</td>
<td>Praises/Accolades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kokborok - 1</td>
<td>First Digital - 8</td>
<td>Minister praises - 8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally produced - 2</td>
<td>Total - 16</td>
<td>International praises-8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First by priest - 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total - 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First digital - 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free shows - 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website praises - 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister praises - 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International praises - 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Useful resources:

http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Reading/Reading%20Strategies/checking%20out%20the%20framework.htm
http://www.greece.k12.ny.us/instruction/ela/6-12/Reading/Reading%20Strategies/interactivenotebook.htm
http://www.textmapping.org/whMappingExerciseMagazineArticle001.html
Wednesday, November 10, 1999. The Mars Climate Orbiter was launched last December 11 and it spent nine months coasting toward Mars.

Art Stephenson, director of the Marshall Space Flight Centre and head of a NASA investigation team, said, “The spacecraft was not symmetrical and pressure from the sun caused it to slowly twist or roll as it sped along. On board gyroscopes partially controlled the motion but eventually rocket-firings were needed to stabilize the craft.” This happened 12-14 times a week over the nine-month voyage.

Engineers on the ground calculated the size of the rocket firing using feet-per-second of thrust, a value based on the English measure of feet and inches. But, the spacecraft computer interpreted the instructions in Newtons-per-second, a metric measure of thrust. The difference is 1.3 metres a second.

“Each time there was a burn (rocket-firing) the error built up. As the spacecraft approached its rendezvous with Mars and the engineers prepared for a final rocket firing, there were indications of something seriously wrong with the navigation but no corrective action was taken,” Stephenson said.

When the Mars Climate Orbiter did fire its rockets, the craft went too low into the planet’s atmosphere, instead of into a safe orbit. Communication signals stopped when the craft passed behind Mars and have not been heard of since. It was a small mathematical mismatch that was not caught until after the $125-million spacecraft, a key part of NASA’s Mars exploration programme, was sent crashing into the Martian atmosphere.

Stephenson said, “The problem was not with the spacecraft but with the engineers and the systems used to direct it. The spacecraft did everything we asked of it. The mathematical mismatch was “a little thing” that could have been easily fixed if detected. Sometimes the little things can come back and really make a difference.”

Following recommendations from Stephenson’s investigation board, the team directing the Mars Polar Lander has been reorganized and strengthened. Senior engineers have been added to the group and a new system of review and evaluation has been installed. Navigation of the Mars craft now would be checked by two independent means to make sure it is on target for the landing. The loss of the Mars Climate Orbiter is a serious blow to NASA’s exploration program.

Glossary:

**gyroscope:** a heavy wheel which spins inside a frame, used for keeping ships and aircraft steady.

---

**Question**

Which is the best summary of the passage?

**Options**

- A. NASA’s analysis, explanation and recommendations based on the disastrous end of Mars Climate Orbiter may lead to necessary precautions for future missions.
- B. The mechanical operations inside the spacecraft, Mars Climate Orbiter are examined in detail to understand the causes of the failure of the mission to Mars.
- C. Stephenson, the director of the Marshall Space Flight Centre criticizes the engineers for their ignorance in leading the spacecraft, Mars Climate Orbiter to disaster.
- D. The Mars Climate Orbiter’s technical deficiencies and mishandling of operations by the ground engineers have made all future space explorations very difficult.

---

Only 43.7% answered correctly
What did students answer?

44% of 1507 students have answered option A, which is the correct answer. They have clearly understood the main message of the passage and have been able to categorize the given information in the order of importance. The common wrong answer is option C, which summarizes just one paragraph of the passage, which is NOT the conclusive paragraph.

Possible reason for choosing option B: Students have probably not read through the complete passage. They seem to have focused on the details of the mechanical systems, which have been discussed in the passage. However, the main cause of failure has been identified in the text as human error, and possible remedies have been suggested in the last two paragraphs.

Possible reason for choosing option C: Students have probably focused on the words of an authority figure, rather than on the whole passage. They seem to have felt that an authority’s words of criticism on the disastrous venture signified the most important conclusion to the passage. It is also possible that some students may have confused summary with reported speech.

Possible reason for choosing option D: Students may have focused on the last paragraph, and reached a conclusion that future space operations would be “very difficult” because of the checks and balances added after the failure of this mission. Students have not understood the main message of the passage in its entirety, perhaps because they have not been able to keep up with its flow.

Learnings

There are many stages of reading that a student has to go through to get the gist or summary of the passage. The passage must be read completely first. The key facts and their interrelationships must be identified and the flow of the passage absorbed. Here, different possible summaries are given and the student has to only identify the most appropriate one. However, we find that many students are not able to do so.

It is likely that they
- do not read the passage completely.
- find it difficult to make the necessary connections, appreciate the full context, and arrive at the “main message” of the passage. (Such students may have found it difficult to decide between the different options.)
- have not understood what a summary means.
- are not able to separate the description of events from the message.
- find it difficult to comprehend passages based on technology.

How do we handle this?

- Using passages from different subjects, ask students to mark out the vital points with explanations and reasoning. Students should note these points separately and organize them in order of importance. They should focus on - who, what, when, where and how.
- This could culminate in identifying the most important points from these or writing out a summary of 5-6 lines. They can then keep trying to reduce the summary to 2 lines in such a way that it brings out the most important points of the passage.
- Have students bring in interesting articles from newspapers and magazines. Groups can exchange these with the headlines cut off. Competing groups should come up with suitable headlines for these articles and justify their titles.
- Another exercise would be for students to write a complete story or newspaper report from a summary and compare their work to the original. Students should identify which points helped them the most in completing the story.

Useful resources:

Websites:
- [http://meade.k12.sd.us/PASS/Pass%20Adobe%20Files/March%202007/SummarizingStrategies.pdf](http://meade.k12.sd.us/PASS/Pass%20Adobe%20Files/March%202007/SummarizingStrategies.pdf)
- [http://kidtrib.com/learningtips/lt33.htm](http://kidtrib.com/learningtips/lt33.htm)
“THEREAFTER I enjoyed every moment of my walk through a dozen or so villages as the dogs barked at the smell from the basket and students and teachers of a couple of primary schools surrounded us with the request to take the lid off the basket for a moment as the news of the trophy we carried had somehow spread ahead of us...”

Then, a few short paragraphs later, a boy’s proud status is shattered, and a Dusserah holiday worth cherishing turns sour as reality hits hard after tragedy strikes.

"Look here, my boy," said somebody wanting to console me, "it would have grown up day by day like the waxing moon and think of a day when we would have been obliged to live with a fully grown tiger. The government would have compelled you to deport it to the forest anyway!"

"And I would have gone to the forest with it. Do you understand, Uncle?" I shouted.

Thus ends the moving tale of an orphaned tiger cub, adopted and then found dead near a snake hole in the short story "Befriending the Dangerous" (p.98), noteworthy among the 28 pieces in author Manoj Das' collection of memoirs.

Called Chasing the Rainbow: Growing Up in an Indian Village, Das' 160-page compilation is a rendering of his many childhood experiences, set in his village Sankhari, in Orissa; an account between his fourth and fourteenth years, except on occasion when he has related the tales to an event or observation of a later period. In fact, the title of each episode is a pointer to the passage of these "growing up" years.

Though an exercise in nostalgia, recreating many lost moments, situations and characters (this includes the famine of the 1940s), it is not, as the author admits, a sociological account.

Worth noting too is Das' preface in which he touches upon the identity of village India - which though peaceful, was by no means passive - before focussing on the state of his own village. Here, he says, the system of untouchability was unknown, and "the only 'drunken' man I had seen in the village was in a drama".

Question
Which of these is the correct meaning of 'memoirs'?

Options
A. a short story usually involving animals or nature
B. an account of the personal experiences of an author
C. the mental faculty of recalling past experiences
D. a short note written as a reminder in an office

Only 44.7% answered correctly

1 Why was the question asked?

An important skill in comprehending unseen passages is being able to arrive at the closest possible meaning of an unknown word, using clues from the context. Good readers, with some prior knowledge, would be able to eliminate those that surely do not fit, and then arrive at the right answer. For this process to be successful, the reader must be able to form some idea of the subject matter addressed in the passage.
2 What did students answer?

45% of 2956 students answered B correctly; ‘an account of the personal experiences of an author’. The common wrong answer was C, chosen by 32% of the students, ‘the mental faculty of recalling past experiences’.

Possible reason for option A: Students have mistaken the form of presentation with the content of the story. A memoir can be presented as a short story or a complete novel.

Possible reason for option C: Students have perhaps noticed the ‘past experience’ part in the option but have not noted that the option relates to ‘mental faculties’. It is likely that some students have confused the word ‘memory’, which they know and with the word ‘memoirs’.

Possible reason for option D: It appears that students have simply guessed this as the answer, without applying any prior knowledge or understanding of the context of the passage. Some of them could have also mistaken this for the word ‘memo’ given as a reminder in an office.

3 Learnings

There are two ways of arriving at the correct meaning; one is to have prior knowledge of the word, which may not apply here as the word ‘memoir’ is on the higher side for this class level. Another equally effective way is to look for clues like ‘personal experience’ and ‘recollection’ from the passage and relate these clues to the options given.

When reading this passage, a good reader would automatically register that it is about a book review, and then look for clues to what kind of book it is. Then, he/she would not miss the words describing the book.

Students are probably not able to identify the descriptive words in the passage.

Phrases such as ‘a rendering of his many childhood experiences’ occurring in the passage are direct clues to the nature of the story.

It is also possible that some students are handicapped by a limited vocabulary and may not have understood key words in the passage to clearly say what kind of book is being reviewed.

4 How do we handle this?

- Using standard textbook passages, ask the students to first identify unfamiliar words.
- Then ask them to look for clue words or phrases which could help understanding the possible meaning of the concerned word, and give the reasoning for their answer.
- Give them passages with known words blanked out. Ask them to fill in the blanks from a list and explain how each word fits.
- Students should start maintaining a word diary, where they record the new words that they encounter in any subject. Periodically, this list can be reviewed in class, where the students are called and given a few of these words to make into sentences. Alternatively, the class may be split into groups and a quick quiz can be conducted where the most original responses win points.

In general, encourage students to get interested in words and word origins. Introduce the culture of paying attention to words in the class, not just as a part of the dictionary, but as part of a living, breathing means of communication.

Useful resources: