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Introduction

The importance of reading for meaning should never be underestimated. Whilst many young children might be able to decode quite complex texts, it is vital that they understand what they read. More importantly, it is fundamental that they enjoy what they are reading.

Over my 15 years of experience, I have used a number of comprehension books as part of my English teaching. Very few of them have engaged the children who are being asked to read and understand them. I decided that if we are asking children to read, understand and answer questions from a passage, that passage should at least engage their attention, and indeed their teacher's attention as well.

The passages in the **Brilliant Activities for Reading Comprehension Series** are designed to give children valuable reading practice through varied, enjoyable texts. The passages begin in the **Year 1** book with simple picture comprehension. They gradually increase in difficulty as you progress through the book, and through the series, encouraging pupils to use a range of strategies for decoding the text and to develop their ability to read for meaning. The passages are entirely fictional and it is hoped that both pupils and teachers will find them humorous.

Teachers should read the texts with the children and discuss them thoroughly before allowing them to proceed to the activities. If you are using the e-book version, you can display the pages on the interactive white board.

In the **Year 4** book there are first a series of Questions that require factual recall. Encourage children to respond in full sentences. The Word work sections will help to develop and stretch their vocabulary. The Extension work sections require more open-ended answers enabling the pupils to provide a more personal response. Children should write the answers in their workbooks or on separate sheets of paper. Answers are provided on pages 113–128. On pages 9–16 there are some suggestions for ways in which the passages can be linked to writing, speaking and other literacy activities, as well as to other areas of the curriculum. These activities are ideal for children who finish their work early.

The **Brilliant Activities for Reading Comprehension Series** provides the teacher with a basis for ensuring progression. The activities give pupils:

- ◆ the ability to select or retrieve information in order to answer the questions successfully using a full sentence
- ◆ the opportunity to deduce, infer or interpret information, events or ideas from the texts
- ◆ the opportunity to identify and comment on the structure and organization of the text and comment on the writer's use of language at word and sentence level
- ◆ the chance to comment on cultural, social or historical traditions and the impact the text may have on the reader.

The **Brilliant Activities for Reading Comprehension Series** provides an invaluable resource for assessing pupil progress in reading. The chart on pages 5–8 shows how the activities link to the relevant Programmes of Study in the National Curriculum for England (September 2014).

Links to the National Curriculum

Pupils should be taught to	
develop positive attitudes to reading and understanding of what they read by:	
listening to and discussing a wide range of fiction, poetry, plays, non-fiction and reference books or textbooks	A wide range of different types of fiction and non-fiction writing are covered in the book: stories, postcards, newspaper articles, announcements, adverts, poetry, letters, recipes, wills, witness statements. The passages have been written to engage pupils' attention and help to promote positive attitudes to reading. Use story CDs and interactive whiteboard stories to watch/listen to different genres.
reading books that are structured in different ways and reading for a range of purposes	Through reading and analysing the passages in this book, pupils will learn that text is structured in different ways, depending on the purpose of the writing. In addition to using the passages in this book, pupils should be given the opportunity to read a wide variety of books of different types.
using dictionaries to check the meaning of words that they have read	Every passage has a 'Word work' activity. Children should be encouraged to use dictionaries to look up the words that they don't know. Dictionary games and puzzles will help them with these skills.
increasing their familiarity with a wide range of books, including fairy stories, myths and legends, and retelling some of these orally	Through reading the passages in this book, pupils will increase their familiarity with a wide range of texts. Pupils should be encouraged to read whole books in these different genres. Using the passages in this book, they will be able to compare and contrast the different genres as well as understand the conventions used in alternative genres. Act out a legend. Pretend to be a storyteller and pass the story round the class. Choose a fairy story to present as a class assembly.
identifying themes and conventions in a wide range of books	Invite the pupils to investigate particular themes arising. Talk about how those themes affect/enhance the writing. Discuss how the themes are presented and what their wide-reaching effect might be. Use highlighters to identify themes in a text.

identifying themes and conventions in a wide range of books (cont)	Look at and examine the writing conventions used to write a particular passage: play, recipe, statement, etc. Pupils should understand that specific genres are written in a particular manner.
preparing poems and play scripts to read aloud and to perform, showing understanding through intonation, tone, volume and action	The following poems and plays can be read or performed aloud: <i>Maisy who Squeezed Herself into Tight Spaces</i> (page 20); <i>Lions in the Garden</i> (page 29); <i>Earth, Sea and Sky</i> (page 50); <i>I Had a Dream</i> (page 56); <i>Chicken</i> (a play) (page 47); <i>The Fosters</i> (a radio serial) (page 89). Groups could take on a poem or script and rehearse, ready to perform.
discussing words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination	Pick out phrases and words and make a mind map on big paper. Many of the 'Extension work' (EW) activities encourage pupils to look at specific phrases. Some examples are: <i>Sharon Smayle's Report</i> (page 23) – EW3; <i>I Had a Dream</i> (page 56) – EW2; <i>Everest – to the Top</i> (part 1) (page 62) – EW3; <i>Everest – to the Top</i> (part 2) (page 86) – Q6.
recognising some different forms of poetry	There are four poems in this collection: 'Extension work activities encourage pupils to look at the form of poetry: <i>Maisy, who Squeezed Herself into Tight Spaces</i> (page 20); <i>Lions in the Garden</i> (page 29); <i>Earth, Sea and Sky</i> (page 50); <i>I Had a Dream</i> (page 56). Give pupils a variety of poems and ask them to sort them under the correct headings and say why.
understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by:	
checking that the text makes sense to them, discussing their understanding and explaining the meaning of words in context	Teachers should read the texts with pupils and discuss them thoroughly before allowing them to proceed to the activities. Ask pupils to recap the story and discuss the events so far. Ask questions to check children's understanding and explain any words that are unclear. The 'Word work' activities encourage children to think about the meaning of words and to look at how they are used in context.
asking questions to improve their understanding of a text	The 'Questions' activities require factual recall and will check pupils' understanding. Specific activities requiring children to ask questions include: <i>Monkey trouble</i> (page 59) – EW10; <i>Speech to the Board of Directors</i> (page 80) – EW6. Ask children to look at a passage of text and then write down some questions they would ask about it.

<p>drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying inferences with evidence</p>	<p>Many of the 'Extension work' (EW) activities provide opportunities for drawing inferences from the text. Special examples are: Capture of the White Stallion (page 26) – EW2 & 3; Space Station Astra (page 32) – EW1; The Afternoon Train to Sunbeam Creek (page 41) – EW1; No Gold at Mouse Creek (page 44) – EW1; Shock for Shoppers (page 53) – EW2; Everest – to the Top (part 1) (page 62) EW4; Haunted Villages in Snodshire (page 65) – EW1; Mystery at the House of Shells (page 95) – EW5; The Last Settlement ... (page 101) – EW2 & 3; Superheroes (page 104) – EW1.</p> <p>In every passage there is the opportunity for role-play and hot-seating. Children can do this in pairs or groups. Drama lessons can explore thoughts and motives of a character. Children can pretend to be detectives and find evidence for inferential questions from the passage.</p>
<p>predicting what might happen from details stated and implied</p>	<p>Many of the 'Extension work' (EW) activities provide opportunities for predicting what might happen. Specific examples are: Some Peculiar Inventions (page 35) – EW5; The Afternoon Train to Sunbeam Creek (page 41) – EW7; Everest – to the Top (part 1) (page 62) – EW5; Haunted Villages in Snodshire (page 65) – EW2; The Oasis at Wadi Loofah (page 83) – EW1; The Fosters (a radio serial) (page 89) – EW5; Mystery at the House of Shells (page 95) – EW8; The Haunted House (page 110) – EW6.</p> <p>In groups, pupils could act out what they think comes next in the story.</p>
<p>identifying main ideas drawn from more than one paragraph and summarising these</p>	<p>Passages which particularly lend themselves to be summarised include: Maisy, Who Squeezed Herself into Tight Places (page 20); Sharon Smayle's Report (page 23); Lions in the Garden (page 29); Earth, Sea and Sky (page 50); Shock for Shoppers (page 53); I Had a Dream (page 56); Monkey Trouble (page 59); Tragedy at Danger Zone (page 74); The Fosters (a radio serial) (page 89); The Red Stone (page 92); the Lost City of Chipputut (page 98); The Last Settlement ... (page 101).</p> <p>Ask pupils to discuss text in groups and present findings to others. Children can make their own Powerpoint to show their understanding.</p>

<p>identifying how language, structure, and presentation contribute to meaning</p>	<p>Many of the 'Extension Work' (EW) activities provide opportunities for looking at how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning. Most of the passages have a question about the language of the passage. Specific examples are: Lions in the Garden (page 29) – EW4; Space Station Astra (page 32) – EW6; The Afternoon Train to Sunbeam Creek (page 41) – EW8; No Gold at Mouse Creek (page 44) – EW7; The Lost City of Chipputut (page 98) – EW7. Specific examples of how the structure contributes to the meaning include: Chicken (a play) (page 47); Monkey Trouble (page 59); Wizard's Speech (page 68); The Fosters (a radio serial) (page 89) – EW1.</p>
<p>retrieve and record information from non-fiction</p>	<p>Pupils will need to look at non-fiction books to learn how to use contents pages and indexes to locate information. The non-fiction passages in this book provide pupils with opportunities to record information retrieved from non-fiction sources.</p>
<p>participate in discussion about both books that are read to them and those they can read for themselves, taking turns and listening to what others say.</p>	

Lions in the Garden

We had lions in our garden last night.
We watched them pad through the open gates
And lap the water from the pool.
Amber bodies covered the grass,
Some at rest, some at play.
Billy and I watched awestruck
As the might of the African plain
Graced our backyard.



The park rangers kept watch all night.
We could not sleep.
We could not move.
Only thin glass and brick walls protected us
From giant paws and savage jaws,
Fierce in hunt, gentle in play.

The big male roars.
The pride rise.
Something crashes past in the undergrowth.
A lioness pads forwards. Her sisters follow.
Bodies tense, ears alert. Then suddenly,
The darkness explodes with a golden flood.
Paws flash past, gravel flies
And, like the wind they are gone.

The pool is still, the garden bare.
But there are paw prints beside my garden chair.
We had lions in our garden last night.

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Questions

Answer the following questions with a full sentence:

1. How did the lions enter the garden?
2. What was the first thing the lions did when they arrived? Why do you suppose they did that?
3. What protected the watchers from the lions?
4. Which line do you think best describes the strength of the lions?
5. In verse three, why do you think the pride rose up?
6. What evidence remains to show that lions have been in the garden?
7. In your own words, comment on the language of the poem. Which words or phrases make it evocative?
8. The final lines may be considered 'dreamlike'. Why do you think this might be?

Word work

1. Give the meaning of the following words:

pride (of lions)

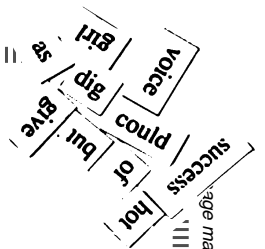
awestruck

amber

savage

2. 'The darkness explodes with a golden flood.'

Explain what this means in your own words.



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Extension work

1. The mention of 'park rangers' tells us that the story is set in a national park, where animals roam free. What job do you suppose the park rangers do?
2. Which part of the poem appeals to you the most and why?
3. The poem is set in Africa. But suppose this event took place in Britain, in an ordinary garden. How might a child feel if they looked out of the window and saw they had lions in their garden?
4. List all the verbs in the poem. Substitute other verbs. What difference do they make to the poem?
5. List all the adjectives. Substitute other adjectives. What difference do they make to the poem?
6. Invent a conversation between the watchers, Billy and the poem's author. How old do you think they are? What do you think they might say to one another?