SECTION

18

READING

READING COMPREHENSION

INTRODUCTION

In English Studies, opportunities are provided to engage with texts of a wide variety. Such texts can form a support for language learning, but also provide the common ground for discussions, for personal reading, and indeed for a variety of assessment types, particularly the formative. Above all, it is through reading of specified texts that clarity of perception can be brought to the understanding of the strengths, the complexities, and the humanity of another culture.

In one of our earlier lessons, we discussed how to use a variety of text comprehension strategies to analyse fiction and non-fiction texts. We identified some of these strategies/ techniques as skimming, scanning, close-reading, and others. In this Section, we are going further to look at some other comprehension strategies that we can use to analyse a text, whether fiction or non-fiction. These strategies would go a long way to help us predict what is likely to happen, especially, at the end of a text or a narrative. Also, it would help us to know how important it is to us in real life situations.

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- Use a variety of text comprehension strategies to analyse fiction and non-fiction texts.

Key Ideas

- *Comprehension strategies* are plans of actions that are carried out to accomplish or achieve a specific goal or outcome.
- *A fiction* text is a text that is not factual or that arises from the imagination/creativity of the writer.
- *A Non-fiction text*, on the other hand, is one that is produced based on facts.
- *Prediction* is the act of thinking into the future and imagining/clarifying what might happen.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

ACTIVITY 18.1
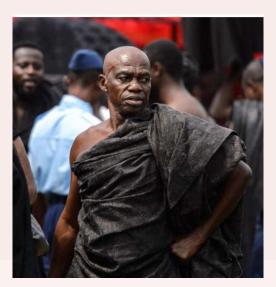
1. Look closely at the following pictures.

Figure 18.1

Figure 18.2

Figure 18.3:

2. Suggest the significance of Figures 18.1, 18.2 and 18.3

3. How do pictures help in understanding a text? Write down at least three points.

4. Compare your answers with your friend's answers for feedback.

Comprehension strategies are techniques or methods that readers use to understand, interpret, and retain information from what they read or hear. These strategies help improve comprehension by actively engaging the reader or listener with the material, making it easier to grasp and remember the content. Some text comprehension strategies include:

1. Previewing: Scanning the text before reading to get an overview of the content, structure, and main ideas.
2. Questioning: Asking questions about the text before, during, and after reading to focus on key points and to fully understand the material.
3. Visualising: Creating mental images or visual representations of the content to better understand and remember the information.
4. Summarising: Condensing the information into a brief summary to capture the main ideas and essential details.
5. Making Connections: Relating the material to personal experiences, to other texts, or to world events genuinely to deepen understanding.
6. Inferencing: Using clues from the text and prior knowledge to make logical guesses about what is not explicitly stated.
7. Monitoring: Keeping track of one's own understanding while reading and recognising when something doesn't make sense, and then taking steps to clarify or reread.
8. Predicting: Anticipating what will happen next in a text, which helps to maintain engagement and enhances comprehension.

Comprehension strategies are summed up as a set method of understanding plans of actions that are carried out to accomplish or to achieve a specific goal or outcome. They serve as processes or procedures that one has to follow in getting something from a text or getting the meaning of a text realised or achieved. Comprehension strategies are mostly applied in works of fiction and sometimes, in non-fiction.

A fictional text as has been stated is a text that is not factual but is based on the imagination/creativity of the writer. This implies that the writer or the narrator had not encountered such a text or story that is being provided for an audience. Thus, the producer of the text or story can essentially visualise what might be happening somewhere and decide to make something out of it for an audience.

A non-fiction text, on the other hand, is one that is produced based on facts. This text or narrative is produced from what actually took place or happened. This is a version of a real-life event.

Text Analysis and Predictions

One of the text comprehension strategies that we will focus on in this lesson is prediction. Prediction is a comprehension strategy where readers use clues from the text, along with their prior knowledge, to anticipate what will happen next or what the text will be about. Prediction, again, is the act of thinking into the future and imagining/proclaiming what might well happen. It is possible for one to do prediction based on the kind of data or

statistics available to the person. It simply means foreseeing the future. Prediction is an essential ingredient in our life as it helps us to plan and to make projections into the future, so we are not taken by surprise by circumstances. This strategy in reading a written work keeps readers engaged and helps them actively interact with the text, which in turn enhances understanding.

How Prediction Works

Before Reading:

- Title and Cover: Look at the title, cover, and any illustrations, blurbs or summaries. Based on these, predict what the text might be about.
- Prior Knowledge: Think about what you already know about the topic, genre, or author, and use that information to make predictions.

During Reading:

- Context Clues: Pay attention to the plot, characters, setting, and details as you read. Use these clues to anticipate what might happen next in the story or what a section of the text might explain.
- Adjusting Predictions: As you get more information, compare it to your initial predictions. Adjust your predictions based on new evidence.

After Reading:

- Reflection: After finishing the text, think about whether your predictions were accurate. Reflecting on your predictions can help deepen your understanding of the text. Some brief jottings of your predictions on the way through will assist in shaping your memory and judgement.

Apart from applying reading techniques such as skimming, scanning, close-reading and others to analyse and also to predict a text, there are some other strategies that can be employed in analysing texts. These are called text features. Text features are elements found within written texts that help the reader understand and navigate the content.

Some text features that can also help us analyse texts and make predictions include but are not limited to *titles*, *headings*, *sub-headings, illustrations*, *bold print*, *italics*. These features are not to be taken lightly when we come across them in our reading as they may be communicating important aspects to us. Paying serious attention to them would help us in our analysis and prediction of a given text. Taking a title like *Ananse in the Land of Idiots* for instance, one could immediately suspect how idiotic the people of the land might be. Based on this, the person can easily predict doom for the people of the land.

Aside from the text features pointed out above, images or pictures we see in texts or videos are also very important because they can help us to analyse and predict texts. In a text, we may see images or pictures of people dressed in all-black, all-white, all-smock, and others. It may mean that the one dressed in black is in a sad/mourning mood; all-white could be suggesting that the person is in a joyful or happy mood; one in smock could be communicating to us the traditional or cultural background of the person.

It is very rare to see women having their hair entirely shaved. But within some ethnic groups, especially in northern Ghana, women would shave their hair entirely when they lose their loved ones like husbands (to observe widowhood). Other relatives can also do the same to show that they are mourning or grieving over the death of the loved one. So, if such is observed in a text or video, those who are familiar with such custom would be able to analyse the text or video effectively.

These and other strategies would go a long way to help us in text comprehension, in analysis, and in prediction as a whole. Learners are therefore urged to be mindful of those text features identified, and others to equip themselves well in their attempt to understand, analyse, and predict what happens in the texts. All these would enhance our reading comprehension and text analysis.

ACTIVITY 18.2

1. Take a critical look at the title of the story below. With a friend, analyse and predict what is likely to be the end of the story.

    WISDOM IS NOT DEPOSITED IN ONLY ONE PERSON'S HEAD

    Once upon a time. There was a great famine in the animal kingdom. This was due to a long drought that had hit the kingdom.

    It was so very severe that all their foodstuffs were finished, and the edible plants in the forest also dried up. The kingdom was left with nothing to feed on.

    Sensing that he and his family were going to die in no time, a rabbit came up with a plan that he thought could help them survive the famine. The plan was that he should go to tell the king that anybody who backbites or speaks ill about another person should be killed, and the corpse would then be given to the one that is talked about to use as food to feed the family. So, he went and discussed it with the king whom he asked to make a decree.

    The next day, the king summoned his elders to the palace and laid the idea before them. After a thorough deliberation on it they came to agreement that it was a laudable idea. They even argued that it was going to prevent people from saying evil or bad things about others. So, the king made it a decree and it was announced to everybody.

    On the next day, the rabbit quickly mobilised his family members and they went to make a farm on a rocky land along the road that links the community to the market. Whenever they saw any animal approaching on the way to the market they would bend down pretending to be farming. So, when the animal reaches them (rabbit and his family), the animal will automatically announce, 'I can't believe what I am seeing: how can you farm on this rocky land?'. Whenever the rabbit hears this, he would immediately rush and tell the king about it and that animal would be killed for him and his family for food. This continued until all the other animals became worried.

One day a guinea fowl decided that she was going to end the suffering of the animals at the hands of the rabbit and his family. We all know that a guinea fowl has no hair. She decided that she was going to tie up her hair in the market, knowing very well that when she got to the rabbit, he would say something. She dressed up and set off for the market. When she reached the rabbit's farm, as usual, the rabbit started using his hoe against the rocks so that noise was produced to attract the attention of the guineafowl. Seeing no sign of getting the guineafowl attracted, the rabbit jumped up, greeted the guineafowl and asked, 'My dear friend, where are you heading to'? The guinea fowl answered, 'I am going to tie up my hair in the market'. Hearing this, the rabbit decided to say something but was very well aware that if he were to say anything against the guinea fowl, he would become food for the guinea fowl. He then decided to dig a hole and speak into it so that the guinea fowl would probably not hear. He dug the hole and said, "If I am not to speak the truth, where are the hairs that you are going to tie"?

Immediately the guinea fowl heard this, she returned and went and reported the rabbit to the king. So, the rabbit was killed for the guinea fowl for food. This confirms that wisdom is not in the head of only one person.

2. If you were the king and his council of elders of this kingdom, would you have decreed this idea provided by the rabbit? Discuss this in groups and share the outcome of the discussion with the entire class.

Activity 18.3

Identify and discuss with two of your colleagues, the main idea of the story below.

There once was a boy who grew bored while watching over the village sheep. He wanted to make things more exciting. So, he cried out that he saw a lion chasing the sheep. All the villagers came running to drive the lion away. However, they saw no lion. The boy was amused, but the villagers were not. They told him not to do it again. Shortly after, he repeated this cry. The villagers came running again, only to find that he was lying. Later that day, the boy really sees a lion walking amongst the flock. He jumped up and called out for help. But no one came this time because they thought he was still joking around……

Glossary

Analyse	To examine something by breaking it into its smaller components.
Comprehension	Understanding
Strategy	A plan that is put in place for one to follow to accomplish/ achieve a goal.

Review Questions

1. From the text above, identify the main idea behind the boy's cry?

2. If the story had continued, predict what you think would have been the end result.

3. Analyse and interpret to colleagues, the main idea in the text.

Answers to Review Questions

1. The boy wanted to create some fun.
2. The boy will really cry for help and no villager would come to offer to help.
3. To be done by the learner.

Extended Reading

1. Dadzie, A.B.K and Grant, N. (2008). New Gateway English for Senior High School Book 1 (2nd ed.). Longman Publications
2. Sandy, A.J. (2020) English for Senior Secondary Schools Book 1(volume 1). Independently Published
3. Victor, Y. *et al*; Leonard, A. (2008). Black Star Series Book 1 (volume 1). Cambridge University Press
4. Old newspapers
5. Any English Language Textbooks approved by NaCCA
6. Sample texts and pictures from social media

References

- Carter, R., et al; McCarthy, M. (2020). Cambridge Grammar of English: A Comprehensive Guide (2nd ed.) Cambridge University Press.

- Azar, B. S., et al; Hagen, S. A. (2021). Understanding and Using English Grammar (5th ed.). Pearson Education.

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- Wiredu. F. J, (1992). Organised English Structure, with A Self-Study and Practice Book for students of Training colleges, the Polytechnics and the Universities: Academic Publications Accra.

Acknowledgements