

Reading VIPERS Explained

You may have heard your child using the term 'Reading VIPERS' and wondered what snakes have to do with reading! This is a mnemonic we use at school to cover the key comprehension skills that we teach as part of the National Curriculum. The term 'Reading VIPERS' was created by Rob Smith from The Literacy Shed, a website which provides a wide range of interesting and engaging resources for teaching English.

At Uplands, we use the term 'Reading VIPERS' to encourage children to actively think about the comprehension skills they are using when they read. These are:

V - Vocabulary

I - Infer

P - Predict

E - Explain

R - Retrieve

S - Sequence (KS1) or Summarise (KS2)



Throughout our Early Years and Key Stage 1 classes, children will be introduced to these terms gradually, with each explained and contextualised. Once children reach Key Stage 2, they will be exposed to all of these terms regularly throughout their English work and other areas of the curriculum.

Below, we have explained each of the VIPERS skills and given some examples of the kinds of questions you might ask your child to practise these at home. These question types can be applied to all reading materials, but also, pictures, videos and other media. We hope you will find this useful.

We will also be sending home some example 'VIPERS' questions in reading journals to help children and parents with inspiration on conversations to have when reading together. Parents and children are encouraged to make brief notes in the reading journals when convenient, but this should not be at the detriment of having an enjoyable reading experience together.

Vocabulary

Children are taught to draw upon knowledge of word meanings in order to understand the text. This may also include finding and explaining the meaning of words in the context of what they have read. These conversations are a great way to discover which words children know and fill gaps in this knowledge, expanding their own repertoire of vocabulary. For older children, you could show them how to use a dictionary or the internet to find definitions. 'Vocabulary' questions might include finding alternative words or discussing which words are the most effective in an extract.

- What does _____ mean?
- Can you tell me another word that means _____?
- Which word tells you that the character is angry?
- Which word tells us something bad is about to happen?
- Which word in this section do you think is the most effective in building the suspense?

Infer

To infer is to find meaning that is not made explicit in the text. Children will use their understanding of a wide range of prior experiences to make sense of events in what they see and read. As children get more confident, they should start to increasingly back these inferences up with evidence from the text. They may paraphrase or even directly quote to justify what they think.

- Why was the character feeling happy?
- Why did the character run away?
- What kind of person is _____? How does the author show that?
- How can you tell the animal is in pain?
- How can you tell this house has not been looked after?
- How is the character feeling? How do you know that?
- What impression do you get of this setting?

Predict

Children are encouraged to predict what they think might happen based on the events so far and details that are implied in the text. The emphasis here is not to necessarily be right – if all books were predictable, that could become very dull – but to engage with the plot and actively think about where the journey of the story might go.

- Look at the cover. What do you think this book will be about?
- What do you think will happen next? What makes you think this?
- Do you think they will be successful in their quest? Why / why not?
- How do you think the character is going to react? Why do you think that?
- Look at the chapter title. What do you think might happen?

Explain

Children are encouraged to explain their preferences, thoughts and opinions about a text. As they get more confident, children should also be able to explain themes and patterns across a text as well as why authors have made certain choices and the impact of these on the overall effect of the writing.

- Who is your favourite character? Why?
- Would you like to live in this setting? Why / why not?
- Is there anything you would change about this story?
- How does the author build up the tension here?
- Why do you think the author doesn't name the villain yet?
- Why has the text been arranged in this way?

Retrieve

This skill concerns finding and recording information located in the text. It tends to cover some of the more straightforward and closed questions that don't require as much inference (often beginning with who, what, when and where). However, the challenge can lie in children having to skim back over large quantities of text. You can support your child by helping them to narrow down sections to search and scan for key words that will help them look for the information they need.

- In what year did the astronauts land on the moon?
- What did the parents decide to name their baby?
- Who was the first character to climb on the boat?
- Give an example of one of the grandmother's warnings.
- Where did the squirrel hide the food?
- What were the three things Bob was asked to pack?

Sequence / Summarise

Children are taught to recap the events of a narrative and put them in order (sequence) or sum them up (summarise). This can be an effective way to remind children of the story so far in a longer text or to build familiarity with a shorter book or traditional tale. For younger children, the ability to retell a well-known story from their head is an important step in their development and will give them the foundation on which to build their own stories later on.

- How did the story start?
- What happened next?
- Number these events 1 – 5.
- Can you summarise the story so far?
- What happened in the story so far?
- How has the character's life changed throughout this book?

Picture books

Here are some examples of VIPERS questions you can adapt to use with children who read picture books or wordless books.



V – Use some words to describe Kipper's bedroom to me. Can you think of a word to show how Kipper is feeling?

I – How can you tell Kipper is feeling that way from the picture? What time of day do you think it is? What are his brother and sister trying to do? How can you tell?

P – What do you think is going to happen on the next page? How do you think the story will end?

E – Did you like that story? Why / why not? What would you have done if you were Kipper? Which character do you think helped Kipper the most and why? Which of these toys would you like to play with the most and why?

R- Which room are the children in? How many children are in the room? Tell me about some of the toys Kipper has.

S – What was the first thing that happened in the book? What happened next?