

Comprehension Skills

There are three main types of questions used in comprehensions. By knowing their types it can be easier to answer the questions with sufficient meaning.

→ on the surface

who ... what ... where ... when ... did ...

These questions ask about facts and information that are contained in the story. It also involves word meanings, recognition of the main idea and detail and order of events.

→ under the surface

why ... how ... should ... would ... could ... what if ...

These questions ask about information which may need to be figured out or understood from evidence in the story. This requires the skill of inference. See lower down for an explanation of what inference is.

→ opinion based

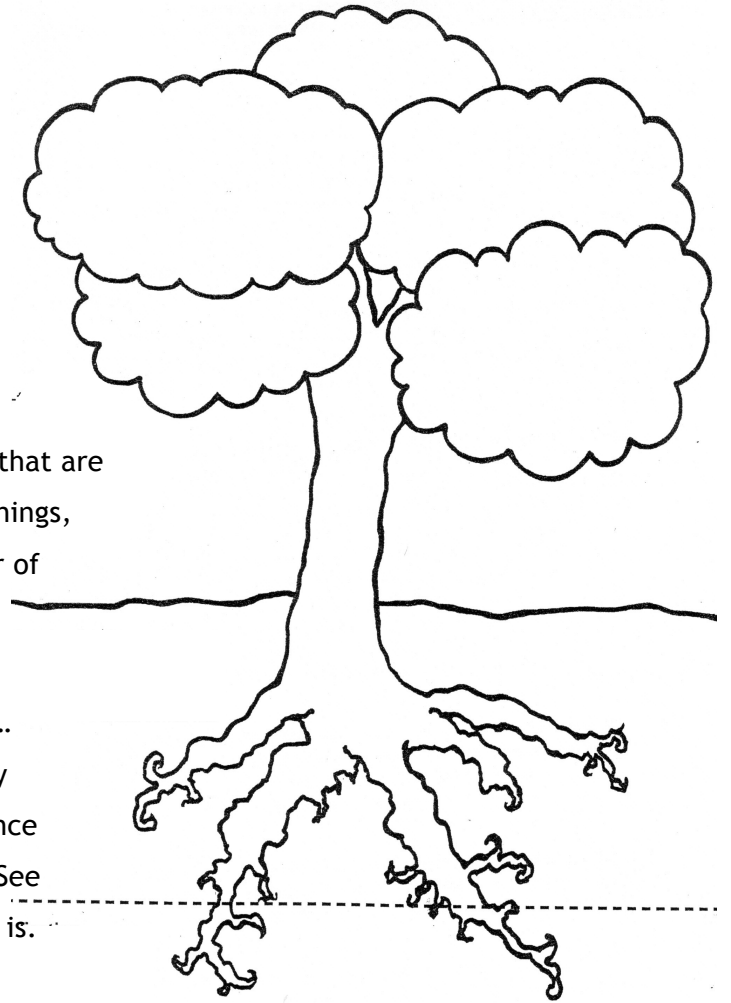
If I were ... How is ... How does this relate to ...

What would I do ... What do you think ... How would you ... What makes you think ...

These questions often ask for a judgement or an opinion based on the knowledge gained from the story. It is important when answering these questions to give enough reasoning for judgement or opinion and that your answer is connected to the story.

(inference = reading between the lines, drawing conclusions or understandings from the story, anticipating outcomes, making generalisations, etc.)

The answers you give in comprehensions should communicate your understanding of the question that was asked. Your understanding should be communicated in a meaningful way that shows your insight.



Read the following extract and in pairs formulate the following:

- 3 on the surface questions
- 3 under the surface questions
- 2 opinion based questions

Then swap questions with another pair and try to answer their questions.

The 1820 Settlers

In the early months of 1820, twenty-one ships set sail from British ports bound for the Eastern Cape of South Africa. On board were nearly 4 000 people - men, women and children - setting out to make a new life in a hostile part of the world that was very different from the country they were leaving behind. They became known as the 1820 Settlers. They came from many walks of life - some were soldiers, tailors and furniture makers, while others were black-smiths, clerks and merchants - but few had any real knowledge of farming.

They were leaving Britain for many different reasons. For instance the long wars against the French empire of Napoleon had just ended and about 300 000 British soldiers and sailors were seeking work. Unemployment was made worse by the fact that the factories all over Britain were doing badly and could offer little encouragement to those looking for jobs. In those days children were employed to work in factories and down mines because they were cheaper to hire and this meant that there were fewer jobs for adults. It was only in 1819 that it was forbidden to employ children under the age of nine.

Conditions in the country were not much better. During the 18th century, country life in Great Britain had changed a great deal. Before 1709 village people had the use of commonland for their crops and animals. Between 1709 and 1801, however, 3 000 Acts of Parliament were made which gave wealthy landowners the right to fence off their land and to charge the people who needed to use it. Villagers now had to pay rent to the landowners or work for them.

Little wonder then that when, on 12 July 1819, the British parliament decided to set aside £50 000 to help people emigrate, it caused quite a stir, especially as the attraction was the government's promise of land ownership in South Africa to all those selected to go. Some 90 000 people made enquiries, but the government could not cope with so many and eventually only about 4 000 were to leave Britain for the distant wild lands of southern Africa.

Marian Robertson: Living with the 1820 Settlers

