

# The missing link in reading comprehension

The bridge between decoding text and understanding it.

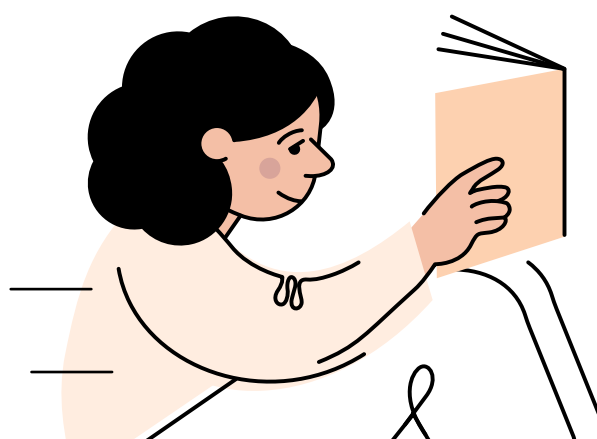
## Reading is a complex, multi-faceted process.

Have you ever heard a student read something beautifully, then realized that same student has no understanding of what they've just read? Have you ever asked a student what they're picturing in their head as they read something and they say "nothing"? Research has uncovered some key insights to help explain this behavior.

## Why might your student be struggling?

Young readers have to decode the words on the page—but to read fluently, they must also learn how to comprehend those words.

Many students who excel at decoding words struggle with language comprehension due to something called **mental modeling**, a key component of the language comprehension process.



## Understanding mental models

Researchers use the term "**mental model**" to describe the structure you create in your memory while reading a passage. We can think of a mental model as a network of idea units.

In order to illustrate the importance of a solid mental model of a text, consider the bolded sentence in the following paragraph:

**Carla forgot her umbrella, so she got very wet on the walk to school.** Olivia gave her one to borrow for her walk home. After she got there, she was very dry, and very grateful.

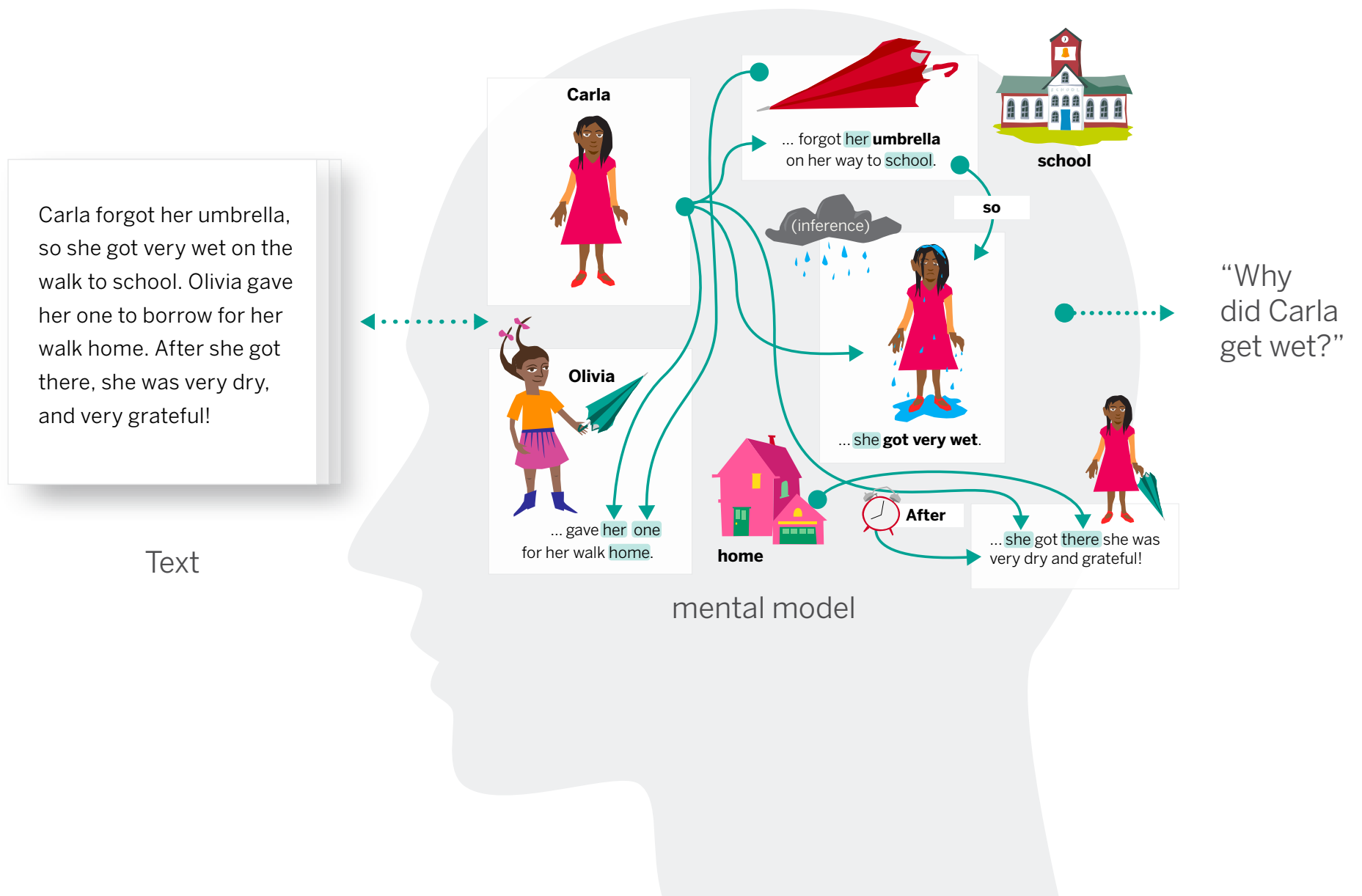
Ask yourself, "**Why did Carla get wet on the way to school?**"

As a fluent reader, you know it was due to rain, but this sentence **doesn't explicitly say that.**

So how do you know? And **how do you help your students make that inference?**

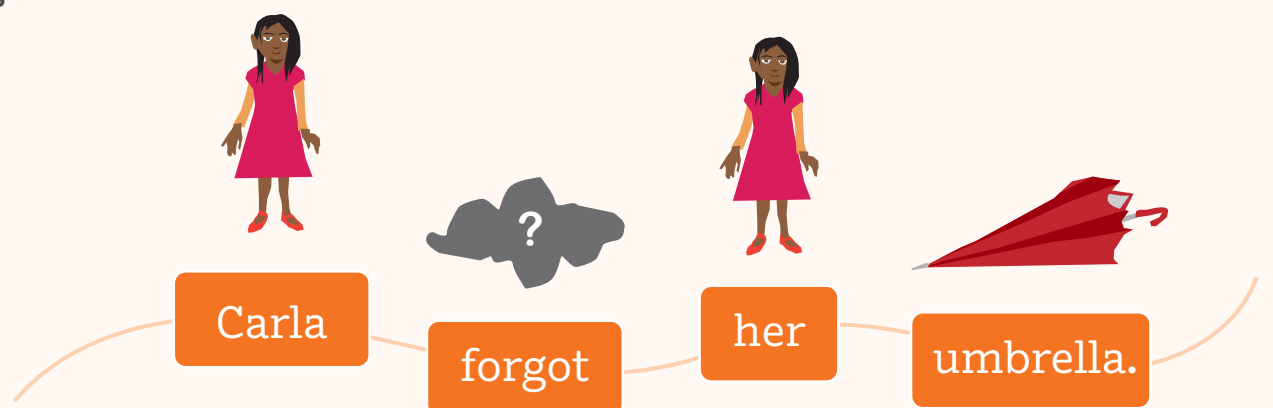
## Building a mental model

For your student to understand that Carla got wet because it was raining, they must build a correct mental model. Here is what that might look like inside their head:



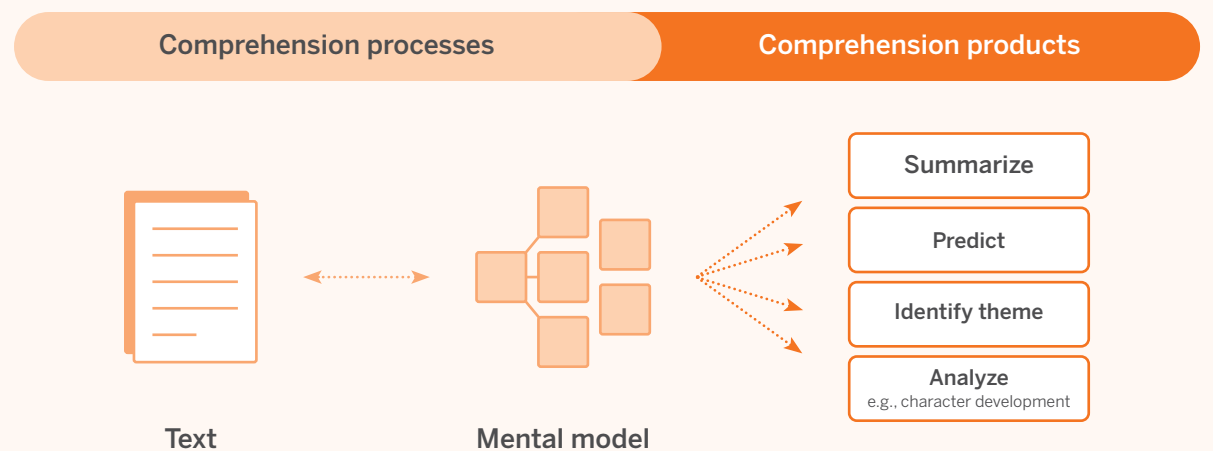
## Introducing comprehension processes

To build accurate mental models, students need practice with **comprehension processes**—mental processes that allow us to make automatic inferences from text without the need for explicit clues.



## The missing link

Comprehension processes allow the student to construct a mental model of a text during reading, and then to use this model to correctly answer questions about the text. The work the student is able to do with their mental model after reading can be referred to as **comprehension products**, such as identifying the theme, summarizing the main idea, and predicting what may happen next.

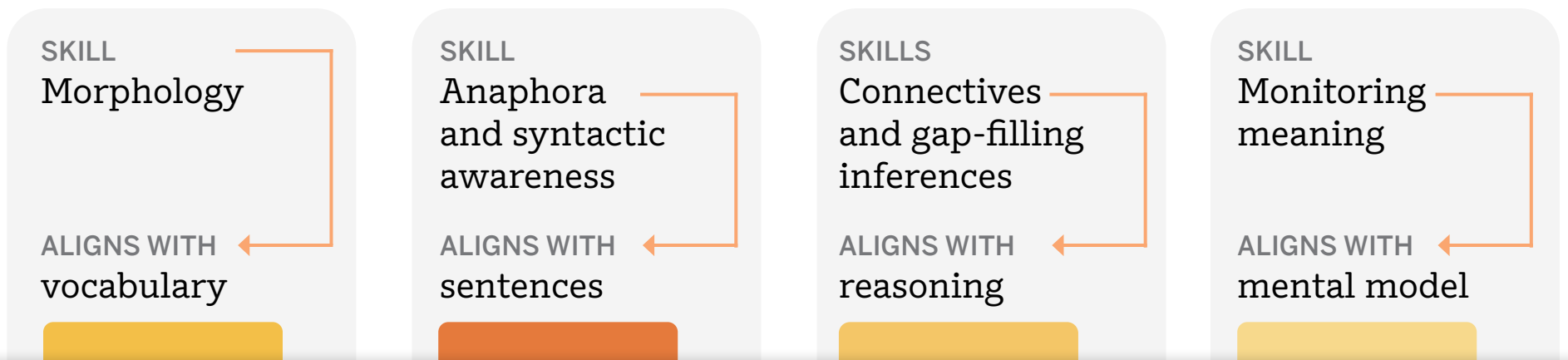


If your student has built a mental model from a text, but executed it poorly, their answers to questions about the text will also be poor. What they need to build better mental models are better comprehension processes—the **missing link in true reading comprehension**.

## Bringing the research into your instruction

Historically, comprehension instruction has focused on the products of comprehension, rather than on the process. Using the latest Science of Reading research, we can better understand how children build mental models to fluently read and comprehend text.

Comprehension process instruction and practice aligns to the Reading Rope, aligning with the language comprehension strands and focusing on skills like anaphora and syntactic awareness.



## *language comprehension*

knowledge

vocabulary

sentences

reasoning

mental model

## *word recognition*

sounds

letters

words

*increasingly strategic →*

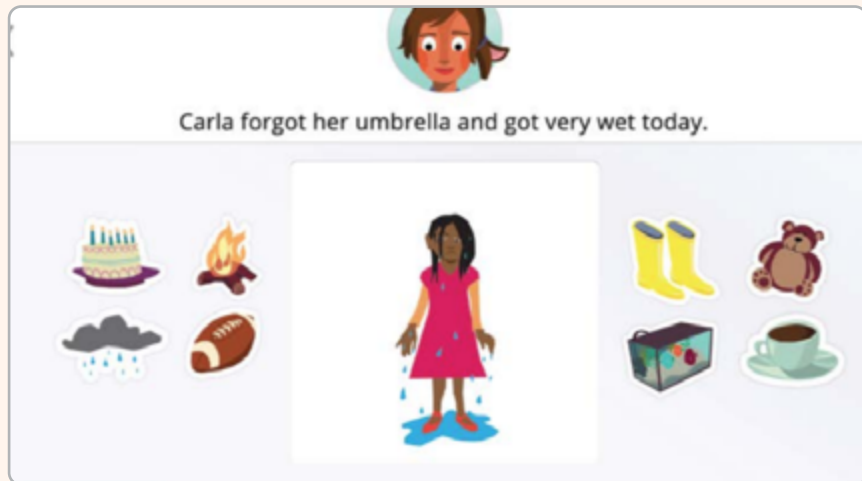
*increasingly automatic →*

*skilled reading*

## How to practice comprehension processes to enhance understanding

There may be as many as 17 comprehension processes that impact students' ability to build and use their mental models, but here are just a few to practice with your students:

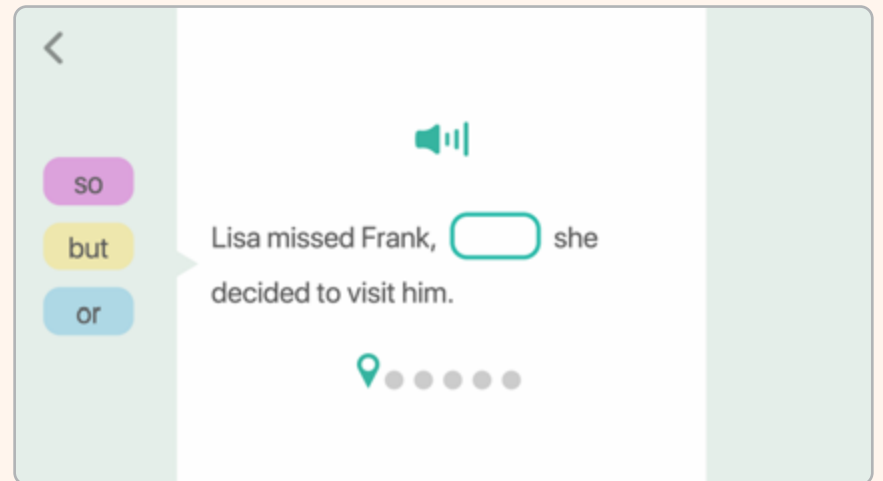
### Gap-filling inference



Gap-filling inference practice in the Amplify Reading skill game "Storyboard"

Writers make assumptions about what can be left unstated. For instance, when reading the sentence "Carla forgot her umbrella and got very wet today," good readers will use their prior knowledge to conclude that it rained.

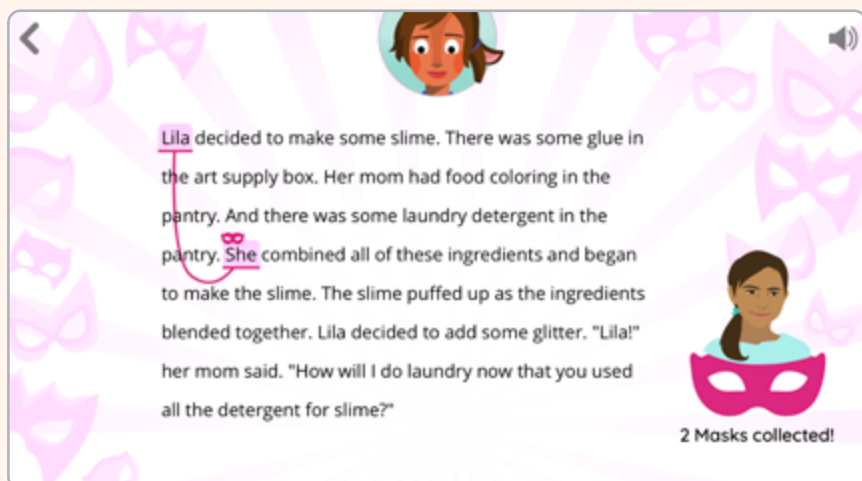
### Connectives



Connectives practice in the Amplify Reading skill game "Connect It!"

These are special words that tie clauses, sentences, and ideas together. They signal that two ideas are related and give insight into exactly how. They should be taught to students in context through varied examples.

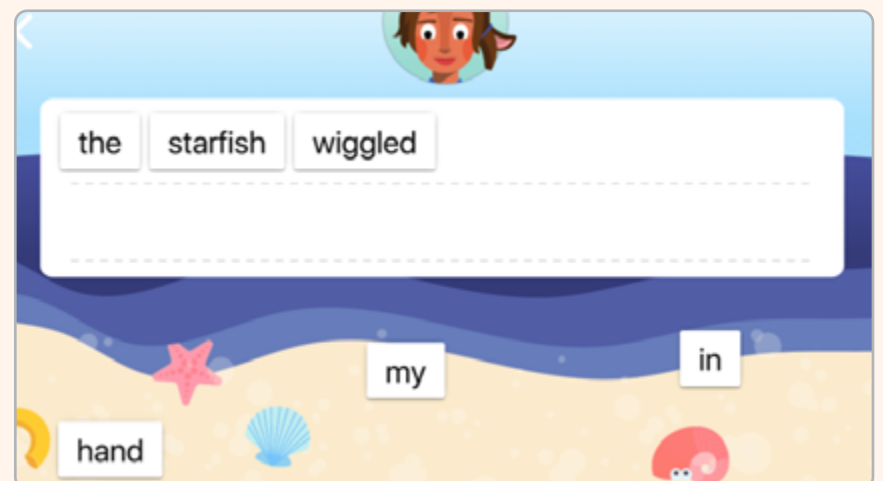
### Anaphora



Anaphora practice in the Amplify Reading skill game "Unmask That"

Writers avoid repeating things like characters' names, assuming readers can figure out who they are referring to when they use pronouns. Practicing anaphora allows readers to see how sentences are tied together and make a coherent whole.

### Syntactic awareness



Syntactic awareness practice in the Amplify Reading skill game "Message in a Bottle"

Students with poor syntactic awareness have trouble breaking up and analyzing sentences at the right parts. Practicing unscrambling sentences can help students improve their syntactic awareness.



Boost Reading is the only personalized learning program that provides students with explicit instruction in comprehension processes alongside other key foundational skills. To learn more about how Boost Reading empowers K-5 students to master reading, visit us at [readingsuccess.amplify.com](https://readingsuccess.amplify.com).