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Reading for understanding: The impact of narrative texts in primary education

Leer para comprender: el impacto de los textos narrativos en la educación primaria

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to analyze the impact of narrative texts on reading comprehension in primary school students. The methodology adopted was documentary in nature, where 30 documents related to reading were analyzed. The study explored the connections between pleasurable reading and comprehension, identified both internal and external difficulties affecting reading, and evaluated the benefits of narrative texts. The results highlight the importance of narrative texts in the development of reading comprehension and suggest effective strategies for its improvement. It was concluded that reading comprehension in students is positively influenced by exposure to narrative texts, which foster imagination, enrich vocabulary, promote empathy, and stimulate critical thinking. Additionally, various internal and external difficulties that affect reading comprehension were identified, such as lack of motivation, cognitive difficulties, and a low vocabulary level.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, reading difficulties, primary education, narrative texts.

Resumen

El objetivo del estudio fue analizar el impacto de los textos narrativos en la comprensión lectora en estudiantes de educación primaria. La metodología adoptada fue documental, en la que se analizaron 30 documentos sobre la lectura, se exploraron las conexiones entre la lectura placentera y la comprensión lectora, se identificaron las dificultades internas y externas que afectan la lectura, y se evaluaron los beneficios de los textos narrativos. Los resultados subrayan la importancia de los textos narrativos en el desarrollo de la comprensión lectora y sugieren estrategias efectivas para su mejora. Concluyendo que la comprensión lectora en estudiantes se ve positivamente influenciada por la exposición a textos narrativos, los cuales fomentan la imaginación, enriquecen el vocabulario, promueven la empatía y estimulan el pensamiento crítico. Además, se identificaron diversas dificultades internas y externas que afectan la comprensión lectora, como la falta de motivación, dificultades cognitivas y un bajo nivel de vocabulario.

Palabras clave: comprensión lectora, dificultades lectoras, educación primaria, textos narrativos.

Introduction

In 21st-century educational management, teachers must promote comprehensive reading in primary education through innovative strategies and digital tools, creating a dynamic environment. Comprehensive reading facilitates intellectual and personal development by providing access to information and fostering critical thinking. According to Acosta & Barreto (2023), modern educational management should focus on applying strategies to cultivate a love for reading, leveraging digital technologies that enhance comprehension through interactive and multimedia texts. Additionally, it is necessary to provide teacher training in educational technology. Collaborating with teachers, families, and the community is key to creating an educational environment that promotes comprehensive reading and develops competent and passionate



readers in primary education.

Reading is fundamental for the holistic development of children, providing them with access to knowledge, expanding their vocabulary, fostering their imagination and critical thinking, and promoting their participation in society. In this regard, Rivera *et al.* (2023) state that, in primary education, reading comprehension becomes essential, as children must acquire the ability to read fluently and comprehensively to handle the variety of texts in their academic and personal lives.

According to Palma (2023), narrative texts, such as stories, fables, legends, myths, and novels, play a fundamental role in this process. These texts allow children to develop their imagination by transporting them to fantastical worlds, foster empathy by understanding the emotions and motivations of characters, learn about different cultures and values, enrich their vocabulary, and enhance their critical thinking by reflecting on the actions and values conveyed in the stories.

According to Paredes & Paredes (2023), to promote reading comprehension through narrative texts, various strategies can be employed, such as reading aloud, formulating questions and answers, conducting reading comprehension activities, and encouraging primary students to create their own narrative texts.

These approaches suggest that narrative texts are a powerful tool for developing reading comprehension in primary education. According to Puche & Acosta (2024), it is essential for educators to implement varied strategies to maximize the benefits these texts offer, providing children with the opportunity to enjoy a wide range of stories that enrich their reading experience.

Furthermore, the researchers' experience indicates that among the difficulties observed in primary students with poor reading comprehension are manifested in various ways and can be evidenced through different indicators, one of the most apparent being difficulty understanding the meaning of words and phrases they read, which is reflected in slow and choppy reading. Additionally, these children often struggle to make connections between ideas presented in the text, which prevents them from understanding the plot or the overall message of the story.

In this sense, Leal (2023) states that among the difficulties caused by poor reading comprehension is the inability to extract relevant information from texts. Students may have problems identifying main ideas, important details, or cause-and-effect relationships within the narrative. According to Blanco & Acosta (2023), this translates into a lack of deep understanding of what they are reading and an inability to apply the acquired knowledge to other situations.

Additionally, Maina & Papalini (2023) argue that the lack of reading comprehension in primary school children may be related to difficulties in language development, deficits in cognitive skills such as memory or attention, or even environmental factors like the lack of support at home or in school. It is important to address these difficulties comprehensively by providing persona-



lized interventions that help children develop the necessary skills to understand and enjoy reading. Finally, the study focused on analyzing the classical theories proposed about reading, establishing the connections between pleasurable reading (narratives) and reading comprehension in primary students, uncovering the difficulties that students face while reading, categorized as internal and external, and determining the benefits of narrative texts for improving reading skills.

Methodology

The study was of a documentary type, which, according to Díaz (2011), is defined as a process of collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing information from written and audiovisual sources. A total of 30 documents were reviewed, including scientific articles, books, and postgraduate and doctoral theses. The currency of the documents was not considered, as the scope of the review extended from classical theoretical propositions to the most recent research.

Techniques such as bibliographic review and content analysis were used to investigate how narrative texts improve reading comprehension in primary students. These techniques allowed for the identification of key patterns in the literature, revealing that narrative texts enrich vocabulary, stimulate critical thinking, and foster empathy.

Instruments such as bibliographic cards and summary cards facilitated the organization and synthesis of information, ensuring a solid foundation for analysis and conclusions. The study concluded that exposure to narrative texts is essential for improving reading comprehension in students, providing an effective framework for developing cognitive and emotional skills in primary education.

Results

The findings from the documentary review provide a detailed and structured view of the different dimensions and relevant aspects of the study topic. These categories are the result of a thorough analysis of existing literature, allowing for the identification and classification of the main elements influencing the studied phenomenon. Through this process, a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the factors, concepts, and relationships involved in reading comprehension and the use of narrative texts in primary education is achievedle.

Table 1
Classics of theoretical propositions on reading



Autho	r Year	Postulates	Analysis
Emilia Ferreir	2016	Reading and writing are constructive processes that children engage in based on their prior knowledge and interaction with their environment.	Ferreiro highlights the role of constructivist principles in literacy development, stressing how prior knowledge and social experiences shape children's reading and writing skills. His approach has significantly influenced literacy teaching practices in primary education.

Frank Smith	1990	Reading is a process of prediction and verification. Readers use their prior knowledge to predict what they are going to read and then check their predictions as they progress through the text.	Smith emphasizes the active role of the reader in the reading process. His theory has contributed to the understanding of how readers construct the meaning of the text.
Isabel Solé	1992	Reading comprehension is a complex process that involves the interaction of three levels: the text, the reader, and the context.	Solé proposes a model of reading comprehension that takes into account the characteristics of the text, the reader's skills, and the context in which reading occurs. His model has been useful for understanding the factors that influence reading comprehension
Michel Certeaul	2008	Reading is a creative activity in which the reader constructs their own meaning from the text.	De Certeau conceives of reading as a process of meaning-making. His approach has contributed to the understanding of reading as a critical and creative activity.
Jerome Bruner	2003	Reading is a form of discovery- based learning. Readers learn by in- teracting with the text and constructing their own understan- ding of it.	Bruner emphasizes the importance of the reader's participation in the learning process. His theory has contributed to the development of teaching strategies that promote reading comprehension.

Note: Own elaboration (2024)..

The consulted authors agree that reading is a complex process involving the interaction of various factors. However, each author offers a different perspective on the reading process. Ferreiro and Smith focus on the role of the reader in constructing the meaning of the text. Solé proposes a model that considers the characteristics of the text, the reader's skills, and the context.

De Certeau views reading as a creative activity. Meanwhile, Bruner emphasizes the importance of the reader's engagement in the learning process. In summary, the ideas of these authors provide a comprehensive view of the reading process and offer a solid foundation for teaching reading in primary education.

Table 2Links between pleasurable reading (narratives) and reading comprehension in primary school students.

Author	Year	Postulates	Analysis
Jeanne Chall	1983	Pleasurable reading is an important factor in the development of reading proficiency. Children who read for pleasure are more likely to develop stronger reading comprehension skills.	Chall was one of the first researchers to highlight the importance of pleasurable reading for reading comprehension. Her research has demonstrated that children who read for pleasure have larger vocabularies, better decoding skills, and a deeper understanding of the text.



Stephen Krashen	2013	Free reading is essential for language acquisition and the development of reading proficiency. Children who read for pleasure are more likely to develop greater fluency and deeper reading comprehension.	Krashen is a proponent of free reading and argues that children learn to read better when they engage with material that interests and motivates them. His theory has contributed to the development of reading programs that promote pleasure reading in schools.
Isabel Solé	1992	Pleasure reading is a powerful tool for promoting reading and improving reading comprehension. Children who read for pleasure are more likely to develop a positive attitude towards reading and become independent readers.	Solé has developed a reading comprehension model that includes motivation as an important factor. His model has contributed to understanding how pleasure reading can enhance reading comprehension.
Richard Allington	2006	Pleasure reading is a key factor for academic success. Children who read for enjoyment are more likely to achieve better results on academic performance tests.	Allington has conducted research demonstrating that pleasure reading is linked to better academic performance across various subjects. His research has contributed to the promotion of pleasure reading as a tool for enhancing learning in schools.

Note: Own elaboration (2024).

The consulted authors converge on the idea that pleasurable reading has a significant influence on the development of reading proficiency in primary education students. This practice not only involves an act of enjoyment but also carries a range of tangible benefits for the holistic development of the individual in the reading domain. As children immerse themselves in pleasure reading, they have the opportunity to naturally expand their vocabulary by encountering new words in meaningful and engaging contexts.

Additionally, this experience helps improve their decoding skills by exposing them to a variety of texts and literary styles, which strengthens their overall comprehension of the text and their ability to extract meaning from what they read. This approach also promotes smoother reading fluency and a more agile reading pace, as children are more engaged and motivated when they enjoy what they are reading.



Furthermore, fostering a positive attitude towards reading from an early age can have a significant impact on long-term academic performance. Students who enjoy reading tend to dedicate more time and effort to this activity, which, in turn, reinforces and consolidates their reading skills. In short, pleasurable reading is not only a recreational activity but also a powerful tool for the growth and holistic development of students in the realm of reading proficiency.

Table 3
Benefits of narrative texts

Benefits	Relevant theory	Analysis
Development of story comprehen- sion	According to information processing theory, narrative texts provide a clear structure that helps students organize and retain information, facilitating their understanding of the story.	Narrative texts allow students to practice identifying narrative structure, predicting events, and understanding cause-and-effect relationships, which enhances their ability to comprehend and retain information.
Empathy and understanding of characters	From a socio-emotional development perspective, exposure to complex characters in narrative texts allows students to practice empathy and understand the emotions and motivations of others.	By understanding the experiences and perspectives of characters in narrative texts, students develop skills to infer mental states and better comprehend the complexities of human relationships, which fosters empathy and emotional awareness.
Vocabulary enrichment	Language processing theory suggests that exposure to a wide variety of words in meaningful contexts facilitates the learning and retention of new words, which enriches students' vocabulary.	Narrative texts provide a wealth of vocabulary that challenges students to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from context, thereby expanding their lexical repertoire and improving their overall comprehension of the texts.
Promotion of critical thinking	According to cognitive development theory, narrative texts stimulate critical thinking by encouraging students to reflect on the characters' decisions, moral dilemmas, and the underlying themes of the story.	By analyzing key elements of narrative texts, such as conflicts, characters, and themes, students develop skills to evaluate information, make connections between ideas, and form their own opinions, which strengthens their critical thinking and analytical abilities.
Stimulation of ima- gination	From the perspective of cognitive development theory, narrative texts foster imagination and creativity by offering fictional worlds and vivid characters that spark students' curiosity and interest.	As they immerse themselves in the stories and characters of narrative texts, students develop skills to visualize scenarios, anticipate events, and create connections between fiction and their own experiences, which stimulates their imagination and creativity.

Note: Own elaboration (2024).

Table 3 presented offers a holistic and detailed understanding of how narrative texts positively impact reading comprehension in primary school students. By supporting each benefit with relevant theories from the educational and psychological fields, it provides a solid foundation for understanding the underlying mechanisms behind these advantages.

From information processing theory to a focus on socio-emotional and cognitive development, it explores how exposure to narrative texts facilitates the mental organization of information, promotes empathy, enriches vocabulary, stimulates critical thinking, and fosters creativity. Moreover, the detailed analysis highlights how these benefits translate into educational practice,



showing how students develop reading comprehension skills as they engage with narrative texts in the classroom, which in turn influences their academic performance and appreciation for reading.

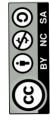
Table 4
Difficulties in schoolchildren's reading, classified as internal and external

Type of difficulty	Description	
Internal		
Lack of motivation	Lack of interest in reading, lack of emotional connection with the content, perception of reading as a boring or irrelevant task.	
Cognitive difficulties	Attention, memory, linguistic processing, or decoding skill problems that hinder text comprehension.	
Low vocabulary level	Limitations in knowledge and understanding of words, which hinder overall comprehension of the text and the inference of meanings.	
Emotional difficulties	Stress, anxiety, or insecurity that can affect concentration and comprehension during reading.	
	External	
School environment	Lack of access to appropriate reading materials, an unstimulating learning environment, or lack of support and motivation from teachers.	
Pedagogical strategies	Inadequate teaching approaches, lack of diversification in teaching methods, absence of activities that promote reading comprehension.	
Type of reading	Inappropriate texts for students' reading competence level, lack of variety in genres and topics, excessive reading material.	

Note: Own elaboration (2024).

Table 4 provides an overview of the possible difficulties that students may face in their reading process, addressing both internal challenges and those arising from the school environment and pedagogical strategies used. When considering internal difficulties, obstacles that students themselves may experience are examined, such as difficulties in word decoding, lack of reading fluency, comprehension problems, as well as limitations in vocabulary and prior knowledge. These internal difficulties can be influenced by individual factors, such as cognitive ability, prior learning experiences, and the emotional development of students.

On the other hand, when exploring external difficulties, challenges arising from the school environment and pedagogical strategies employed are analyzed, such as the lack of adequate educational resources, the quality of the curriculum and instruction, as well as the lack of support and motivation from educators. These external difficulties can have a significant impact on the reading learning process, influencing students' motivation, engagement, and academic performance. Together, this comprehensive analysis provides a deep understanding of the various factors that can affect students' reading abilities and highlights the importance of addressing both internal and external aspects to promote effective reading development.



Discussion

When reviewing the theories that frame the object of study and the elements connected to it, an initial explanation is provided on how the classical theories on reading contribute to establishing appropriate strategies using narrative texts to improve reading comprehension. In this regard, Ferreiro (2016), known for her research on literacy processes and the acquisition of written language in children, presents her ideas on the construction of knowledge and reading comprehension as an active and constructive process. These ideas inform strategies that encourage student participation in meaning-making from narrative texts.

Meanwhile, Smith (1990), recognized for his theory on the natural learning process of reading, highlights the importance of immersion in meaningful texts and learning through understanding, rather than memorization or decoding. He proposes strategies focused on exposing students to a wide variety of significant narrative texts and developing deep comprehension skills.

Similarly, Solé (1992), who has extensively researched teaching reading comprehension and constructing meaning from texts, suggests that her ideas on teaching through metacognitive strategies, such as self-regulation and monitoring, can be useful in designing activities that help students reflect on their comprehension and employ effective strategies while reading narrative texts.

For his part, de Certeau (2008), focusing on cultural theory and everyday practice, offers ideas on interpretation and appropriation of texts, which can be relevant to reading comprehension. His concepts of reading as a creative activity and the reader's reinterpretation of texts can inspire teaching approaches that promote active interpretation and personal connection with narrative texts.

Bruner's (2003) analysis has significantly contributed to the field of cognitive psychology and education, emphasizing the importance of narrative in learning and understanding. His theories on narrative structure and the role of narrative in meaning-making can inform strategies that utilize narrative texts to facilitate comprehension, such as modeling narrative structure and analyzing key elements of a story.

When addressing the links between pleasurable reading (narratives) and reading comprehension in primary school students, Chall (1983) emphasized the importance of intrinsic motivation in reading and how the enjoyment of reading can drive readers' engagement and interest. Thus, pleasurable reading fosters a conducive environment for practice and exposure to a variety of texts, which contributes to improved reading comprehension through increased fluency and familiarity with different writing styles and genres.

Likewise, Krashen (2013) proposed his theory of comprehensible input, which holds that readers improve their comprehension and acquisition of language skills when they engage with texts that are both interesting and understandable to them. In this way, pleasurable reading provides



a meaningful and relevant reading experience for readers, enhancing their motivation and facilitating comprehension while expanding their vocabulary and language knowledge.

For Solé (1992), it is important to create a pleasant and motivating reading environment in the classroom to promote reading comprehension. Pleasurable reading is based on personal choice of texts and the freedom to explore different topics and genres, which can boost readers' self-esteem and willingness to engage with reading, ultimately improving their comprehension.

Allington (2006), on the other hand, highlighted the relationship between the amount of reading and reading comprehension, arguing that students who read more tend to better understand what they read. Therefore, pleasurable reading promotes a positive attitude toward reading and the willingness to read regularly outside school hours, increasing exposure to different types of texts and strengthening comprehension skills over time.

Referring to the benefits of narrative texts in fostering reading comprehension, Ccoa (2023) states that the development of story comprehension is fundamental for reading comprehension, as it involves the ability to understand the sequence of events, identify characters, understand their motivations, and anticipate outcomes. Ascencio, Gonzales, Ibañez & Ascencio (2023) argue that by being exposed to narrative texts, students practice identifying narrative structure, improving their ability to organize and retain information. Furthermore, familiarity with different types of plots and narrative structures helps them anticipate events and understand cause-effect relationships, contributing to a deeper understanding of the story as a whole.

Regarding empathy and understanding of characters, Acosta (2024) points out that it is important for teachers to foster empathy in students, as these are fundamental aspects of reading comprehension, allowing students to emotionally connect with the story and understand the motivations and emotions of the characters. In this regard, Bort & Gil (2023) suggest that when exposed to complex characters in narrative texts, students practice empathy by putting themselves in the characters' shoes and understanding their experiences and viewpoints. This skill not only improves comprehension of the story but also fosters emotional awareness and strengthens social and relational skills.

Additionally, when analyzing vocabulary enrichment, Rivera et al. (2023) consider this element decisive for reading comprehension, as a wide range of words facilitates understanding of complex texts and recognition of implicit meanings. Therefore, Ccoyo & Turpo (2023) emphasize that by exposing students to a variety of words in meaningful contexts through narrative texts, they improve their vocabulary by deducing the meaning of unknown words from the context. This, according to Cieza (2023), strengthens their ability to understand and retain information, as well as express themselves more precisely and effectively, both orally and in writing.



Regarding the promotion of critical thinking, Leal (2023) states that it is important for reading comprehension as it involves the ability to analyze, evaluate, and question the information presented in the text. Hence, according to Chacaguasa & Larreal (2023), by interacting with the

fundamental elements of narrative texts, such as conflicts, characters, and themes, students develop skills to evaluate information, make connections between ideas, and form their own opinions. This strengthens their ability to think critically and analytically, which improves their understanding of complex texts and their capacity to apply critical thinking in other areas of life

As for the benefits of narrative texts for improving students' reading comprehension, Quezada, Aravena, Maldonado & Coloma (2023) consider that stimulating the imagination is fundamental for reading comprehension, as it involves the ability to visualize scenarios, anticipate events, and create connections between fiction and reality. In this regard, Ccoyo & Turpo (2023) explain that by immersing themselves in the stories and characters of narrative texts, students develop the ability to imagine situations and events, which helps them comprehend and remember the information presented in the text. This not only enhances reading comprehension but also stimulates creativity and abstract thinking.

Similarly, when addressing the reading difficulties faced by students, classified as internal and external, starting with those related to students (internal), Herrera & Villafuerte (2023) point out that these are connected to a lack of motivation, which can inhibit the student's interest and engagement with reading, hindering the development of comprehension skills. Therefore, recognizing this difficulty allows for the implementation of strategies using interesting and relevant narrative texts to increase the student's intrinsic motivation and foster a pleasant learning environment.

According to Acosta (2023), cognitive difficulties, such as problems with attention or memory, can affect a student's ability to process and comprehend the information they read. In this regard, Juana & Mateo (2023) argue that by acknowledging these difficulties, narrative texts with clear and coherent structures can be employed to facilitate comprehension and reduce the cognitive load on the student.

For Chacaguasa & Larreal (2023), a low level of vocabulary can limit the understanding of complex texts. Therefore, using narrative texts rich in vocabulary and providing activities that foster the expansion of the student's lexicon help overcome this difficulty while also strengthening reading comprehension.

Additionally, according to Acosta & Blanco (2022), emotional difficulties, such as stress or anxiety, can interfere with a student's ability to concentrate and understand what they read. Incorporating narrative texts that address relevant emotional topics and providing a supportive emotional environment can help students feel more comfortable and engaged with reading.

Regarding external difficulties, Juana & Mateo (2023) indicate that the school environment can influence reading comprehension through factors such as the availability of resources, the support from teaching staff, and the reading culture in the classroom. This suggests that recognizing the importance of the school environment allows for measures to be implemented that create



a conducive atmosphere for reading comprehension, including the use of narrative texts that reflect the diversity and interests of students.

Additionally, pedagogical strategies used by teachers present challenges, as they can significantly affect students' reading comprehension. Incorporating narrative texts into the curriculum and using pedagogical approaches that encourage participation, reflection, and discussion about the texts can improve both comprehension and enjoyment of reading. Ascencio *et al.* (2023) argue that the type of reading selected can influence students' comprehension and interest. Meanwhile, Paredes & Paredes (2023) suggest that by choosing narrative texts appropriate for the student's skill level and interests, comprehension difficulties can be overcome, promoting a rich and meaningful reading experience.

In this regard, Bruner (2018) asserts that narrative texts play a fundamental role in enhancing reading comprehension in primary school students by offering a rich and immersive reading experience. These texts present stories that capture readers' imaginations, transporting them to fictional worlds where they can explore diverse situations, characters, and settings.

Moreover, Bruner (2015) believes that by immersing themselves in these narratives, students not only improve their ability to comprehend the literal meaning of what they read, but also develop more advanced comprehension skills, such as inference, prediction, and interpretation. The structure of narrative texts, which often includes an introduction, a development, and a conclusion, provides students with a clear framework for following the sequence of events and understanding their relationships.

Finally, narrative texts provide primary school students with an effective platform to enhance their reading comprehension by offering an engaging and meaningful reading experience that fosters the development of key cognitive and emotional skills.

Conclusions

Analyzing the classic theories proposed on reading reveals that the classic theories suggested by prominent researchers such as Emilia Ferreiro, Frank Smith, Isabel Solé, Michel de Certeau, and Jerome Bruner provide a deep understanding of the theoretical foundations underpinning the reading process. These authors offer a variety of perspectives addressing important aspects of reading development, such as language acquisition, text comprehension, and meaning formation. Their theoretical contributions are fundamental to understanding how students construct meaning from the texts they read and how educators can design effective strategies to promote reading comprehension in the classroom.



Regarding the links between pleasurable reading and reading comprehension in primary students, the results show a direct connection between pleasurable reading, especially through narrative texts, and the improvement of reading comprehension in primary students. In this sense, authors such as Jeanne Chall, Stephen Krashen, Isabel Solé, and Richard Allington have

highlighted how reading for pleasure not only increases motivation and interest in reading but also strengthens comprehension skills, vocabulary, and reading fluency. These findings underscore the importance of promoting positive and engaging reading experiences in the school environment to cultivate competent and passionate readers.

Regarding the identification and understanding of students' reading difficulties, both internal and external, the results indicate that they are significant for designing effective interventions to address these barriers. Factors such as lack of motivation, cognitive difficulties, low vocabulary levels, emotional challenges, the school environment, and inadequate pedagogical strategies can negatively affect reading comprehension. By recognizing these difficulties and their underlying causes, educators can implement differentiated and personalized approaches to help students overcome these obstacles and improve their reading competence.

Finally, the research highlights a wide range of benefits associated with the use of narrative texts in primary education. These benefits include the development of story comprehension, empathy and understanding of characters, vocabulary enrichment, the promotion of critical thinking, and the stimulation of imagination. By exposing students to a variety of narrative texts, educators can provide meaningful learning experiences that not only enhance reading comprehension but also promote students' overall development in multiple cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions.

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