How to be a Reading Detective

By Cheryl Feucht, Reading Interventionist, grades 3-5

When you are reading there are many clues along the way, here is what you need to look for!

Main idea and details: The main idea tells what a paragraph is mostly about. Facts and details explain the main idea. Look for sentences that tell who, what, when, where, why and how.

Sequence: Sequence tells the order in which things happen. Look at the beginning, middle and end of a story to help you understand the sequence. Look for: clue words such as *first, next, then, last, finally, before, after*; clues about time of day, days of the week, months, seasons and years.

Comparing and contrasting: Comparing is finding how things are alike. Contrasting is finding how things are different. Look for: clue words such as *both, same, like, alike, similar* tell about a likeness or comparison; clue words such as *but, unlike, different* tell about a difference or contrast.

Prediction: Making a prediction is a way of using clues in a reading passage, as well as things you already know, to make a good guess about what might happen next. Look for: clues in the passage that help you make a good guess about what might happen next; clues are often in the title, facts and details as well as in the pictures; combine what you know with clues you find in the passage.

Context clues: Words and phrases around an unknown word often give clues to that words meaning. Look for clues: in words before and after the unknown word; by thinking about the way the unknown word is used in the sentence; think about the meaning of the unknown word by thinking about the facts and details in the paragraph where the new word appears; a synonym (similar meaning) near the word; an antonym (opposite meaning) near the word; if you think you know the meaning of the word, read the sentence and replace the word with the new meaning, does it make sense?

Facts and opinions: Facts can be proved, but opinions cannot be proved! Look for: Facts that can be proved, observed, checked or tested. Opinions tell how someone thinks or feels. Clue words that signal an opinion would include *think, feel, believe, seems, always, never, all, none, most, least, greatest, best, worst.*

Cause and effect: A cause is the reason something happens. An effect is the result, or what happens. To find the cause, look for a reason that something happened. To find the effect, look for a result, or something that happened. Words that can signal cause and effect would include *so, so that, since, because, if, reason, as a result*.

Drawing conclusions or making inferences: This is a way of figuring out information that the writer does not state in the reading passage. Think about the details stated, use these details to figure out information that is not explained. Use the details and what you know from your own life to draw a conclusion or make an inference. Look for details that tell how a person or character looks, acts, thinks, feels, and speaks. Look for details that suggest where or when something happens.

Author's purpose: Authors write to describe, entertain, explain or persuade. To figure out the authors' purpose, ask yourself: Does the author provide lots of details that help me picture a person, place or thing? Articles are written to describe. Does the author tell a personal story that is enjoyable to read? Does the author try to make me laugh or try to teach a lesson? Is this a poem or fable? Personal stories, folktales, poems, and other stories are written to entertain. Does the author give facts about something? Does the author tell me how to do or make something? Are directions given? Articles and directions are written to explain. Does the author try to get me to do something, buy something, or believe something? Ads, articles and letters in which an opinion is stated are written to persuade.

Similes, metaphors, and idioms: Similes, metaphors, and idioms are types of figurative language. Authors use figurative language to help readers create pictures in their minds. A simile uses the words *like* or *as* to compare two things. A metaphor compares two things but does not use like or as. A metaphor says that one thing is another. An idiom is a phrase in which words have a meaning different from their usual meaning.

Summary: A summary is a short statement that tells the main points or most important ideas of a reading passage. A good summary of a fiction story tells about the main character's problem and how the main character solves the problem and often states the meaning or theme of the story. A good summary of a nonfiction story tells about the main idea or the article and the important ideas that help explain the main idea. It often answers who, what, when, where, why, and how questions.