Sam Finds a Worm

Sam digs in the garden.
He looks for a worm.
Sam says, “Here is a worm.
It is red and it wiggles.
I will show it to my big sister!
Then I will put it back
into the garden.”
Background Information

Readers use a variety of strategies and cues when reading. Cues are various sources of information that readers rely on to read and make sense of text. Early readers rely heavily on picture cues to make sense of what they are reading. Eventually, they will begin to use syntactic cues, semantic cues, graphophonic or visual cues, and other helpful reading strategies.

*Syntactic cues* are cues provided by the structure of a language. For example, when interpreting the sentence *They _____ across the street*, readers use their knowledge of the structure of the English language to identify that a verb would be the only appropriate word to use to fill in the blank. Any other part of speech, such as a noun, would not “sound right.”

*Semantic cues* are cues that are provided by the context of the text as well as by the reader’s prior knowledge of a topic. For example, in the text *Jane dropped the soccer balls. They _____ across the street*, readers use the context of the sentences and their knowledge of soccer balls to identify that only certain verbs, such as rolled or bounced, would make sense in these sentences. The verb would have to not only sound right (in terms of syntax), but it would also have to make sense (in terms of semantics).

*Graphophonic or visual cues* are cues provided by the way a word looks or is spelled. For example, in the sentence *The soccer balls r______ across the street*, the reader would use the visual cue provided by the letter “r” to figure out that the verb must begin with the letter “r.” Reasonable possibilities could be rolled or ricocheted.

Lastly, young readers learn to recognize high-frequency words on sight (e.g., am, here, can, when, who) when reading. High-frequency words are another example of visual cues that can aid reading comprehension.

Purpose

In this activity, children will view the photo above and read the accompanying text titled “Sam Finds a Worm.” They will be prompted to use cues from various sources of information to decode and make sense of the text. This activity will also include other reading strategies, such as recognition of high-frequency words, one-to-one correspondence between spoken words and written words, punctuation, and a return sweep of the eyes to move from one line of text to the next line. Children will also identify quotation marks and exclamation marks.

Get Ready to Read

1. Have children view the photo of the child holding the worm. Tell children that the boy in the story is named Sam. Ask, *What do you see in this photo?* Encourage children to make inferences. Ask, *Where do you think Sam found the worm?* (in the dirt) *How do you know?* (His hands are dirty.) Ask children to make predictions, e.g., *What do you think Sam will do with the worm?* (go fishing, put it in a wormery, show it to a friend) Say, *Let’s read and find out.*

2. Ask children to read the story out loud. If the story is too challenging, you may choose a simpler piece of text. However, the same prompts and questions will still apply when reading simpler and shorter pieces of text.
Prompt Children to Use Cues When Reading

Note: This section will provide examples of how to prompt children to use multiple cues or sources of information to decode and make sense of a piece of text.

1. Have children read the first sentence. If they read Sam “bigs” in the garden, say, **You said Sam “bigs” in the garden. Does that sound right?** (No.) **What word could you use here instead that would sound right and make sense?** (digs)

2. If children read the first sentence and say, “Sam digs in the dirt,” respond by saying, **You said, “Sam digs in the dirt.”** The word “dirt” makes sense here. But if the word said “dirt,” what letter would you expect to see at the beginning of this word? (d) **What letter do you see at the beginning of the word?** (g) **What word could you use here that would make sense and that starts with the same sound as the letter “g”?** (garden)

3. When children read the fourth sentence, they may get stuck on the word “wiggles.” Say, **Look at the word. Do you see something in the word that might help you to read it?** (Yes, I see the word “wig.”) **Now start with what you know and read through the word to the end. Look at and think about the sounds and then say them out loud.** (wig-l-s) **Now put the sounds all together.** (wiggles) **Does the word “wiggles” make sense here?** (Yes, it does.)

4. When children read the fifth sentence, they might overlook reading the word “big.” Say, **Read the sentence with your fingers. Point to each word as you say it. Did you say enough words? Did you say too many words?** Point to the punctuation at the end of this sentence and ask, **How does this sentence end?** (with an exclamation mark) **Ask, What does this exclamation mark tell you about how Sam is feeling?** (He is excited to show his big sister the worm he found.)

5. The last sentence continues over two lines. If children stop at the end of the first line of the final sentence, ask, **Is there a period here that tells us that we are at the end of the sentence?** (No.) **Point out that they need to keep reading and let their eyes return to the next line in order to finish reading the sentence.**

6. You may also wish to point out the use of quotation marks in the text and ask, **What do these marks tell us?** (that Sam is saying something; that someone is speaking) **Do you know what these marks are called?** (Yes, they are called quotation marks.)

7. If children struggle with high-frequency words (e.g., look, he, in, my, here, the, said), engage in activities to help them recognize these words on sight. To give children additional support, you may wish to use the Grade 1 activities titled “High-Frequency Words” provided on this website.

8. After reading the story about Sam finding the worm, ask children to compare their predictions with what happened in the story. Ask them to make inferences, e.g., **What do you think will happen when Sam shows the worm to his big sister? What do you think the worm will do when Sam returns it gently to the garden?**
Prompts and Questions to Support Readers

1. You said ___________. Does that make sense?

2. Does __________ sound right?

3. What could you try that sounds right and makes sense?

4. Look at the picture. What do you see that could help you?

5. Do you see something you know in the word that can help you?

6. You said ___________. What letter would you see at the beginning of the word if it said ____________?

7. Use your finger to point to each word as you read. Did you say enough words? Did you say too many words?