

**Background Knowledge**-This refers to the knowledge your child already has about the information being read or that can be applied to the information being read.

A few ideas to work with your child on this are included below.

- **Begin by teaching words in categories.** For example, you can try something as simple as this: “I’m going to say the following words: *strawberries, bananas, papayas, pineapples*. They all are a type of... (fruit).” Categories of objects begin to develop concepts, and the use of generic nouns (*fruit*) has been shown to be highly related to language and vocabulary development.
- **Use contrasts and comparisons.** For example, you can give children puzzlers like, “Is an artichoke a type of fruit? Why is it or is it not a kind of fruit?” Puzzlers help children think outside the immediate context and consider the reasoning behind these contrasts and comparisons, which can further their understanding of categories and concepts.
- **Use analogies.** An analogy is another type of comparison, but this time the comparison is made between two things that are usually thought to be different from each other. Analogies help children build knowledge because they compare something new to something we already know. For example, try something like, “bird is to feather as dog is to... (fur).” Children can use similes (comparisons using the words *like* or *as*) or metaphors (comparisons without using *like* or *as*) to build new knowledge.
- **Encourage topic-focused wide reading.** Reading builds knowledge, but wide reading has typically been interpreted as reading about a lot of different topics, demonstrating breadth rather than depth in reading. Try this variation: Encourage children to identify an interest and read as many books as they can on one topic. What you find is that children will develop a deeper knowledge and expertise on a topic. These interests will drive children to read more.
- **Embrace multimedia.** We often think that direct experiences are the most compelling ways to build knowledge. As many teachers can attest, there is nothing more thrilling than watching children engage in learning through direct experiences or seeing their delight and excitement on field trips and other activities. Although it is certainly not a replacement for real-life experiences, multimedia can often provide a wealth of information that we could only wish to experience firsthand. Further, it can introduce children to important words and concepts in a highly motivating way and build a shared knowledge base among all students.