

THE EFFECTS OF STORY PREVIEWS
ON THE READING COMPREHENSION
OF NINTH GRADE STUDENTS

THESIS

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Kate Klehn

State University of New York
College at Brockport
Brockport, New York

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SUBMITTED BY:

Kathleen A. Klehn

APPROVED BY:

Gerald L. Begy 4/14/88
Project/Thesis Advisor Date

Arthur E. Smith 4/14/88
Second Faculty Reader Date

Mauro J. Beers 4/22/88
Chairman, Graduate Policies Committee Date

Abstract

This study examined the effects of story previews on fifty ninth grade students from a public high school in Western New York. The students were divided into two groups: Group A and Group B. In Phase I of the study, students in Group A received the preview treatment, while students in Group B received the treatment without the preview. In Phase II of the study, students in Group B received the treatment with the preview, and students in Group A received the treatment without the preview. Materials included two potentially difficult short stories, two teacher-made previews, and two teacher-made multiple choice posttests. In both phases of the study, a t test of independent means at the .05 level of significance was used to determine the effects of the previews. The results revealed that the story previews significantly increased students' comprehension. These findings, consistent with previous research, support the claim that previews facilitate comprehension of text by activating or building background knowledge/schemata.

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to further investigate the effects of story previews on the reading comprehension of ninth grade students with varying levels of ability.

Need for the Study

Reading teachers and content teachers across the country are concerned about their students' reading comprehension. They want to know what they can do in the classroom to improve students' comprehension. Cooper (1986) claims that, "They want to know what new ideas have been discovered in the teaching of comprehension--and how they can incorporate them with the things that they are already doing well" (p. IX). In addition, it is important to classroom teachers to know that research, as well as theory and common sense, supports these new ideas.

Fortunately, many effective strategies have been developed through the years to help students better understand selections in their basal readers and assignments in content area textbooks. These

strategies can be grouped under three traditional headings: prereading activities, that can activate students' prior background knowledge; during-reading activities, that can guide reader-text interactions; and postreading activities, that can help students remember new ideas and information. Many of these techniques for aiding students in understanding narration, as well as exposition, have been validated to some extent by research findings; many others, not yet thoroughly researched, have worked for teachers in countless classrooms. The research reported here, on the use of story previews, was conducted to further investigate the effectiveness of this prereading strategy.

The story preview, advocated by theorists and practitioners as a method of strengthening reading comprehension, consists of introductory material presented to students before they read a specific selection. "A preview attempts to build background information pertaining to a selection and to provide specific information about the contents of the reading material itself" (Graves & Cooke, 1980, p. 38).

Usually, a preview begins with several questions, designed to catch a reader's interest and provide a

link between a familiar topic and the topic of the story (Graves, Prenn, & Cooke, 1985). Following these questions is a discussion question, designed to generate student involvement in a brief exchange related to the story's theme or main idea. Next, the characters, the setting, and the point of view are described, followed by a summary of the plot up to the point of the climax. It might also include definitions of difficult vocabulary, translations of foreign phrases, or a brief introduction of a difficult concept. Finally, the students are given a question to answer or specific directions to set a purpose for reading.

Graves, Palmer, and Furniss (1976) previously recommended that teachers use previews with their students, before their effects were empirically validated. Since then, Graves, along with a research group at the University of Minnesota, has conducted a series of classroom experiments, attempting to validate this teaching procedure. Most of their research has demonstrated the efficacy of story previews.

Graves (1979) has stressed the importance of replication. "Previous research, theory, authority,

and common sense all say this procedure ought to work. Yet, teaching procedures which research, theory, authority, and common sense strongly suggest will work, don't always work" (Graves, 1979, p. 4). Furthermore, he adds:

Our work has revealed several instances in which the treatments were ineffective. Even low risk research, research of techniques which are generally agreed upon as valuable and are widely used, fail to produce consistent results. Investigation of the validity of these sorts of activities seems a more immediate concern than investigation of those that seem to be less powerful and are less widely used (Graves, 1979, p. 5).

With this in mind, the present research was undertaken to further investigate the effects of story previews on reading comprehension.

Question

The present study was designed to answer the following question:

Do story previews significantly affect the reading comprehension of ninth grade students of varying levels of ability?

Definition of Terms

Story Preview An overview of a story, which attempts to either build background knowledge or activate existing schema; and which attempts to provide students with specific information about plot, characters, setting, point of view, and theme.

Reading Comprehension The ability to understand, recall, and paraphrase what has been read. Literal comprehension is the ability to gain specific meaning of any written material, regardless of the interpretation of the whole. Inferential comprehension is the ability of the reader to derive meaning that is not specifically stated in the reading--to understand what is only implied.

Schemata Structures or categories of knowledge (concepts, information, ideas) that are formed and stored in the reader's mind through experiences.

Varying Levels of Ability Low, average, and high ability levels, as measured by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests: Second Edition.

(Prior) Background Knowledge "The sum total of a person's previous learning and development; experiences which precede a learning situation, story, etc." (Harris & Hodges, 1981, p. 29).

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited in their application based upon the following conditions:

1. The findings of this study are applicable only to ninth grade students from a similar school environment and exposed to the same conditions as those of the study.
2. The study covered only a two-week teaching period.
3. Only one teacher took part in this study.
4. Only two stories were used in the study.
5. The same dependent measures (teacher-constructed multiple-choice tests) were used in both phases of the study.

Summary

The present study was designed to further investigate the effects of story previews on the reading comprehension of ninth grade students. Although theory, as well as some research, supports the use of previews to improve reading comprehension by building background knowledge and/or activating existing schemata, more research is needed to empirically validate this prereading strategy.

The findings of this research should be considered in light of several limitations. First, these findings are applicable to ninth grade students from a similar school, exposed to the same conditions as those of the study. Second, this study covered only a two-week teaching period, and only one teacher participated. Furthermore, only two short stories were used, and the same dependent measures (teacher-made multiple-choice tests) were used in both phases of the study.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Purpose

The primary purpose of this study was to further investigate the effects of story previews on the reading comprehension of ninth grade students with varying levels of ability. The research related to this study included the effects of background knowledge and schemata on reading comprehension, classroom observations, other strategies designed to improve comprehension, and the use of the story preview.

Background Knowledge

Several theories seem to support the use of story previews to strengthen reading comprehension. First is the theory that the background of the reader is closely related to his or her ability to comprehend text (Adams & Bruce, 1980).

Background, as it relates to reading comprehension, has been defined as "the sum of a person's previous learning and development; experience; . . . experiences which precede a learning situation, story, etc." (Harris & Hodges, 1981, p. 29).

Some theorists prefer other synonymous terms, such as world knowledge, prior knowledge, pre-reading knowledge, life memory storage, non-visual information, or experiential background. According to DeVine (1986):

It is all the information and ideas, all the perceptions and concepts, the images and ideational propositions, as well as the intellectual residues of emotional experiences, held in long-term memory by readers. It is, in short, everything held in memory (p. 25).

The importance of background knowledge is dependent upon a clear understanding of the process of comprehension. In the past, a number of reading specialists believed that "reading comprehension was an end product of decoding; if students could name the words, comprehension would occur automatically" (Cooper, 1986, p. 3). But teachers soon discovered that as they placed greater emphasis on decoding, their students still were not able to understand; and comprehension was not taking place automatically, as they had assumed it would.

But interest in reading comprehension continued to gain the attention of educators and researchers, and a better understanding of comprehension has

resulted. Currently, comprehension is viewed as a process by which the reader constructs meaning by interacting with the text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). It is "building bridges between the new and the known" (Pearson & Johnson, 1978, p. 24). It is "relating new information to what is already known" (Smith, 1978, p. 240). Most agree that the understanding that the reader achieves during reading comes from the accumulated experiences of the reader, experiences that are triggered as the reader decodes. Though the reader must have some ability to decode in order to comprehend, this does not mean that the reader must be able to orally decode every word on the page. It is the interaction between the reader and the text that is the foundation of comprehension. In the process of comprehension, the reader relates the information presented by the author to information stored in his or her mind. The process of relating new information (the text) to old information (the reader's background knowledge) is the process of reading comprehension.

Smith (1965) maintained that learning is enhanced if the learner has background related to the topic under study. Adams and Bruce (1980) have suggested:

Reading comprehension involves the construction of ideas out of pre-existing concepts. A more correct statement of the role of background knowledge would be that comprehension is the use of prior knowledge to create new knowledge. Without prior knowledge, a complex object, such as a text, is not just difficult to interpret; strictly speaking, it is meaningless (p. 37).

The specific background knowledge that a reader needs to comprehend a selection varies from selection to selection. Each reader will either have the background, have part of the background, or have none of the background needed for the selection. Therefore, reading authorities have recommended that teachers make provisions to ensure that the reader has the necessary background needed to comprehend the selection to be read. Durkin (1981b) urged classroom teachers "to provide children with varied experiences as a way of building up understandings, concepts, and vocabulary; and to review whatever experiences and concepts are relevant before children read a selection" (p. 24).

Schema Theory

The importance of background development has been given even greater emphasis with the recent increase in theory development and research on schema, which also suggests that possessing prior knowledge and using appropriate schemata are absolutely critical in reading comprehension (Adams & Bruce, 1980; Anderson, Spiro, & Montague, 1977; Cooper, 1986; Pearson & Spiro, 1982; Rumelhart, 1980; Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977; Smith, 1978; and Spiro, 1980).

The study of schemata has been sporadic. It has occupied the attention of scholars from several fields for many years. Sir Frederic Bartlett (1932, as cited by Anderson & Pearson, 1984 and Whaley, 1984) is usually acknowledged as the first psychologist to use the term schema, in the sense that it is used today. Others would say that historical precedence must be given to the Gestalt psychologists, whose earlier studies were of mental organization. But it was Bartlett who proposed that people employ schemata to aid understanding and recall of stories. Bartlett believed that memory is "reconstructive" rather than simply "recapitalative", and that the concept of schemata provided an explanation for this phenomenon.

Whaley (1984) also reported research on the concept of schema in developmental child psychology by Piaget (1970, 1971) and others. Piaget studied the role of schemata in intelligence and perception.

Whaley noted research by a handful of anthropologists (Propp, 1928; Leach, 1970; Levi-Strauss, 1955, 1967; and others) who were interested in the study of schemata and text organization. They analyzed stories, folktales, and myths in order to investigate the cultural, social, and moral codes of the times. Then they made inferences about the culture of the bearers of the literature.

But the full development of schema theory did not emerge until the late 1970's, when schema-theoretic notions became the force behind research in the reading process. At that time, Rumelhart and Ortony (1977) employed the term schemata, which they defined as "data structures for representing the generic concepts stored in memory" (p. 101). Rumelhart (1980) defined schemata as structures or categories of knowledge (concepts, information, ideas) that are formed and stored in the reader's mind through experiences. Pearson and Spiro (1982) defined schema as "the little pictures or associations you conjure up

in your head when you hear or read a word or sentence. You have a schema for an object, an abstract idea or feeling, an action, or an event" (p. 46). Anderson and Pearson (1984) defined schema as "an abstract knowledge structure, abstract in the sense that it summarizes what is known about a variety of cases that differ in many particulars" (p. 259).

Schema theory explains how these structures are formed and related to one another as an individual develops knowledge. Cooper (1986) suggested that:

The reader develops schemata through experiences. These form the basis for his or her background on a particular topic. The reader stores these concepts, ideas, and relationships in memory and uses them when they are needed (p. 80).

During the process of reading then, the reader takes the information from the text and relates it to his or her acquired knowledge--schemata. The existing schema expands, or a new schema is formed. This process occurs continuously, as the reader interacts with the text. As more information is gained, other schemata are activated, new ideas are formed, more information is gained, and so on. In other words, "a schema is an abstraction of experience that you are constantly fine-tuning and restructuring according to

new information you receive" (Pearson & Spiro, 1982, p. 47).

Rumelhart (1980) attempted to explain, by example, how schemata are supposed to work. Included in his discussion of the complicated processing system of schemata activation is the following fragment:

Business had been snow since the oil crises. Nobody seemed to want anything really elegant anymore. Suddenly the door opened and a well-dressed man entered the showroom floor. John put on his friendliest and most sincere expression and walked toward the man (p. 43).

The interpretation is quite clear. Obviously, John is a car salesman, who has experienced a slump in sales, presumably as a result of the oil crises. It can be assumed that he sells expensive cars, maybe Cadillacs, even. Apparently, a prospective buyer has come into the showroom, and John makes his way over to him, eager to make a sale. Predictably, John may have sold a car if the story had continued.

The process of activating, evaluating, and refining or discarding schemata in the comprehension of this simple and direct story is quite elaborate. A theory (which is schema) is constructed and tested against the available data (the text). As more data

becomes available, the theory is further specified and refined or discarded, and a new theory is constructed.

The theories come to the reader from experience. In reference to the "oil crises" story, Rumelhart (1980) pointed out that most readers have accumulated schemata for salesmen, their motives and techniques; for automobiles, how and where they are sold; for the "oil crises", its effects on business and the economy; and for consumers, their motives and responses. "The knowledge embedded in these schemata form the framework for our theories. It is some configuration of these schemata that ultimately forms the basis for our understanding" (Rumelhart, 1980, p. 44).

"It is believed that schema inadequacies are responsible for a great many road blocks to reading comprehension" (Pearson & Spiro, 1982, p. 47). If the reader does not have schemata for a particular topic or concept, he or she may form a new schema for that topic if enough information is provided within the text. Or, if the reader has had no experience (or limited experience) with a given topic, he or she will have no schemata (or insufficient schemata) and comprehension will be difficult or impossible if the text does not provide enough information to form a new

schema (Cooper, 1986; Rumelhart, 1980).

Another potential problem is that "the reader may find a consistent interpretation of the text, but may not find the one intended by the author. In this case, the reader will understand the text, but will misunderstand the author" (Rumelhart, 1980, p. 48).

Rumelhart (1980) reported that there are numerous examples of this in the research literature. One is a study by Bransford and Johnson (1973). The following paragraph is one used in one of Bransford and Johnson's studies:

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities, that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important, but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive, as well. At first, the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another facet of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity for this task in the immediate future, but then one can never tell. After the procedure is completed, one arranges the materials into different groups again. Then they can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. However, that is part of life (p. 400).

Most readers did not understand this passage, until they were told it is about washing clothes. Then they were able to activate their clothes-washing schema and make sense out of the text. The difficulty with this passage is that the clues never seemed to suggest the appropriate schemata.

Other readers, though, found the passage comprehensible by finding alternatives to account for it. One was a Washington bureaucrat who thought it was a clear description of his job. He understood the story, but misunderstood the author, one of the potential difficulties pointed out by Rumelhart (1980).

As Anderson and Pearson (1984) put it, "Since what a person already knows is a principal determiner of what he or she can comprehend, the less he or she knows, the less he or she can comprehend" (p. 286). Graves, Prenn, and Cooke (1985) pointed out that "the converse of this is the more a person already knows about a topic, the more he or she can comprehend about it" (p. 595).

"One major tenet of schema theory is that comprehension is as dependent on what is in a reader's head as it is on what is printed" (Durkin,

1981b, p. 25). Similarly, Graves, Prenn, and Cooke (1985) concluded:

In comprehending a text, the reader uses both information gleaned from the printed page and information already stored in his or her head; the more information the reader already has about a text before reading it, the less taxing is the actual reading (p. 595).

Research Findings

Research on comprehension, schemata, and background has suggested that the reader's background and schemata greatly influence comprehension. Tierney and Cunningham (1984) concluded that there is a "causal relationship that exists between the reader's ability to comprehend and the development of background information" (p. 612). In their review of the research on reading comprehension, Tierney and Cunningham cited numerous studies to support this claim (e.g. Hayes and Tierney, 1982; McDowell, 1939; McWhorter, 1935; and others).

McWhorter (1935) reported significant improvements in reading when children, lacking in background information, were provided enriching experiences. Reading readiness of kindergarten

students was greatly improved by providing them with an 'enriched curriculum' (McDowell, 1939). Hayes and Tierney (1982) found that presenting background information related to the topic to be learned helped readers learn from text, regardless of how that background information was presented or how specific or general it was.

They concluded their discussion by emphasizing that research supports the idea that a reader will comprehend better if he or she has specific background understandings about a selection before reading. They found no conclusive evidence in current research, however, that suggests that one approach to developing the reader's background is better than another.

Other research findings have continued to confirm the theory that background knowledge and schemata are crucial components in the comprehension process and that students' reading can be improved by providing or activating background knowledge and schemata on the topic beforehand. For example, the results of the Smith, Readence, and Alvermann (1983) study revealed that students who activated prior knowledge and then read compatible text comprehended more information than students in the other treatments.

In a study of 48 third grade children, Beck, Omanson, and McKeown (1982) found that comprehension and recall of basal stories increased by redesigning commercial lessons to focus on building students' background knowledge relevant to the stories and helping students construct a basic understanding of the stories.

In another study, Pearson, Hansen, and Gordon (1979) tested the comprehension of slightly above-average second grade readers with high and low schemata for knowledge about spiders on a story about spiders. Their results also suggested that greater schemata or background knowledge assisted comprehension of both skilled and less skilled readers.

Dooling and Lachman (1971) found that passages were better recalled if topics were presented to the readers before they read a passage. Subjects were given a passage written in language so general and vague that it was difficult to remember by itself. Some subjects were given a title or topic, before they read the passage, some after, and others not at all. Passage recall was greatly enhanced only when the subjects were given the information before reading.

Without a title or topic, subjects could not invoke a schema, and the reader could not decide what to do with the information in the text.

A similar study by Bransford and Johnson (1973), mentioned earlier, revealed similar findings. They studied the comprehension of texts for which students could not select the appropriate schemata, as well; texts which did not include sufficient clues. As a result, the subjects were led to choose incorrect interpretations, and comprehension significantly declined. On the other hand, students given a passage theme in the form of a title or picture before reading an obscure passage recalled significantly more than those not given a theme or those given a theme after reading.

In a study involving ninth graders, Stevens (1980) found that possessing prior knowledge significantly aided comprehension of that topic. In a later study involving tenth grade history students, Stevens (1982) found that "direct teaching of background knowledge concerning a topic (that is, providing schemata for students) had beneficial results in comprehending reading passages concerning that topic" (p. 327). This later experiment also

suggested the idea that background knowledge can be taught directly. Both studies tied in with a schema-theoretic point of view, in that students who possessed or who were given a schema were better able to read a passage relating to the schema.

Research, then, has strongly supported the theory that the process of comprehension is dependent upon the reader's background information and schemata to provide the structure needed to associate meaning with text. An effective comprehension program must incorporate instructional procedures that help readers activate or develop the background relative to a particular topic to be read and relate that background to the text. This must be done in such a way that readers will learn how to draw from their backgrounds and relate old information to new information. Ultimately, the classroom teacher must decide not only what provisions are necessary to ensure that the reader has the necessary background to read and comprehend a selection, but also what strategy for background development is appropriate.

Classroom Observations

Although the value of preparing students for reading has been recognized and encouraged in the

professional literature, researchers have discovered that many teachers, unfortunately, provide students with little preparation for their reading assignments. Dolores Durkin, as a member of the Center for the Study of Reading, conducted what many hoped would be a definitive study to gain more specific information about the instruction of reading comprehension.

Durkin (1978-1979) observed twenty-four reading and social studies classrooms to determine whether elementary schools provide comprehension instruction, and to find out what amount of time is allotted to it. "On the assumption that there is less of it in the primary grades because of the concern there for decoding skills, middle and upper grades (3-6) were selected for the observations" (Durkin, 1978-1979, p. 493).

She found that less than one percent of the students' time was spent on comprehension instruction. Other kinds of reading instruction were not seen with any frequency, either. She also found that a small amount of time was spent preparing children to read something. She commented:

The typical preview consisted of brief attention to new vocabulary, followed by two

or three questions that were never written. This meant that the children could not refer to them before, during, or after they read. It also meant that they may have been forgotten, not only by the children, but also by the teachers. This is suggested by the fact that questions raised before a story was read were not repeated when the story was discussed (p. 499).

This was true for the observed social studies classes, as well. Only 1.73% of the time observed was spent preparing the students for reading. Little time was spent defining or discussing difficult terms, previewing the chapter, or posing questions designed to motivate the students and/or guide the reading.

Instead, she found that teachers spent their time asking questions which were designed to assess comprehension, not to facilitate it. Teachers spent a great deal of time giving, completing, and checking assignments, too. Other findings indicated that none of the observed teachers viewed social studies as a time to help with reading comprehension. Instead, covering content material and having children master facts were their main concerns.

In an earlier study (1974-1975), Durkin observed primary classrooms. One major finding of this study was that time given to reading instruction decreased in grades 3 and 4 compared to time spent in grades 1

and 2, whereas the amount of time spent on written assignments increased.

These early studies prompted Durkin (1981a) to examine the manuals of five basal reader programs, kindergarten through grade six, in order to learn more about their suggestions for comprehension instruction. This was done to see whether what the manuals offer was consistent with what was observed in the earlier studies. The results indicated that the manuals gave far more attention to assessment and practice than to direct, explicit instruction. When comprehension procedures were provided, they tended to be brief. Durkin (1981a) concluded, "Until further research is conducted, it will be assumed that basal reader manuals help to account for the fact that little comprehension instruction was seen when classroom teachers were observed" (p. 530).

Durkin (1979, 1981a) pointed out the need for more direct teaching of reading comprehension strategies at the elementary levels. Although her research primarily emphasized instruction with basal reader series, her findings could be applicable to content area instruction, as well.

In 1986, Wiesendanger duplicated Durkin's (1978) study to determine whether any significant changes had been made in the teaching of reading comprehension over the past eight years.

Care was taken to strictly replicate Durkin's (1978) original study, with one exception. The 20 teachers observed received instruction before the study began. They were taught the differences between "process" questions and "product" questions. They were also taught how to formulate such questions. Durkin's (1983) text, Teaching Them to Read, was used. In this text, Durkin differentiated between "process" questions, questions designed to focus on the process of comprehension, and "product" questions, questions designed to focus on comprehension assessment.

The data indicated significant differences in the teachers' use of classtime. In this study, teachers spent 17.65% of classtime teaching for comprehension. Assessment of comprehension was also observed, but careful survey revealed that the teachers used assessment questions to determine the instructional needs of the students. In other words, if a child missed an assessment question, an instruction question

would be formulated to assist in the comprehension process.

In comparison, Durkin's (1978) findings revealed that less than one percent of time was spent on comprehension instruction, and the largest percent of time was spent on comprehension assessment.

Durkin (1978) also observed little emphasis on the teaching of phonics, structural analysis, or word meanings. On the contrary, Wiesendanger's findings revealed that more time was spent teaching structural analysis and word meanings.

Though the teachers in both studies used basal manuals, Durkin (1978) found the emphasis was on the use of ditto sheets and workbooks, while results of this study (Wiesendanger, 1986) revealed that more time was spent preparing for the reading assignment.

"It appears that the teachers in this study spent their time more constructively by maximizing the amount of instruction time" (Wiesendanger, 1986, p. 95). In addition, results suggested that teachers could be taught the difference between questions related to comprehension assessment and questions related to comprehension instruction, and that they

could successfully implement these questioning strategies in the classroom.

More research is recommended before reading professionals fully understand the implications of these findings. It does appear from this study, though, that more direct reading instruction was observed in the classroom.

Strategies Designed to Facilitate Comprehension

What can teachers do immediately in their classrooms to improve students' comprehension? Fortunately, over the past 20 years, many effective pre-reading strategies have been developed to help students better understand selections in their basal readers and content area textbooks. Many of these have been validated to some extent by research; many others, not yet researched thoroughly, have worked for countless teachers in countless classrooms.

One such strategy is the advance organizer, introduced by Ausubel (1960). This strategy was designed "to test the hypothesis that the learning and retention of unfamiliar but meaningful verbal material can be facilitated by the advance introduction of relevant subsuming concepts--organizers" (Ausubel, 1960, p. 267). Readers could use these advance

organizers as anchors for the specific information in a text.

The advance organizer is one of the most widely researched and controversial strategies designed to activate a reader's background knowledge. There is research to support the advantages of advance organizers for improving a reader's comprehension, as well as research to the contrary (Ausubel, 1960; Barnes & Clawson, 1975; Holzman, Allen, & Layne, 1982; Mayer, 1979; and Tierney & Cunningham, 1984).

Despite the fact that several hundred research studies and any number of synthesis attempts have explored the differential worth of advance organizers, we still lack any 'real' closure regarding their instructional value (Tierney and Cunningham, 1984, p. 615).

The best that can be concluded about advance organizers is that they may be helpful in developing background for some readers in some situations.

Another strategy used to improve comprehension and recall is the structured overview, or graphic organizer, as it is sometimes called. Tierney and Cunningham (1984) referred to this strategy as "a hybrid of the advance organizer, used in content classes, such as social studies and science" (p. 616).

A structured overview is a pre-reading device, similar to Ausubel's advance organizer, in that background knowledge is activated and/or developed. A great deal of research has been conducted on the effectiveness of this strategy (Alvermann, 1981; Baker, 1971; Barron, 1979; Berget, 1973; Moore & Readence, 1984; and Walker, 1979). There are indications that some students benefit from this strategy; yet the findings are inconclusive, and further research is recommended.

Research has been conducted on the value of pictures in improving comprehension by activating a student's prior knowledge, but these findings are inconclusive, as well. Research on the topic is difficult to interpret. Some of the studies indicate that pictures are of little or no value to students. In fact, there is some evidence that suggests that pictures accompany story texts may inhibit comprehension if they conflict with story events or story theme (Beck, McKeown, McCaslin, & Burkes, 1979 and Peeck, 1974, as cited by Beck, Omanson, & McKeown, 1982). Other studies have suggested that comprehension and recall are strongly and positively affected by presenting readers with a meaningful picture before reading (Bransford & Johnson, 1973;

Samuels, 1970; Thomas, 1978; and Tierney & Cunningham, 1984).

Webbing and semantic mapping are two similar strategies that claim to assist readers to activate schemata and/or develop background knowledge to further develop an understanding of relationships and ideas before reading. Recent research has supported the use of this strategy (Cleland, 1981; Freedman & Reynolds, 1980; Reutzler, 1985; and Sinatra, Stahl-Gemake, & Berg, 1984).

Cooper (1986) suggested that teachers use prequestions, purpose-setting activities, and objectives, three similar techniques, to help students focus their attention on the topic that is covered before they begin to read. Tierney and Cunningham (1984) offered evidence that suggested that these activities are advantageous in helping readers improve comprehension in different reading situations, by giving them a purpose for reading and by activating schemata and/or developing background knowledge. They cited studies conducted by Borer (1981), Duell (1974), Levin & Pressley (1981), Maier (1980), and Peterson, Glover, & Ronning (1980). They also suggested that more needs to be discovered about these strategies.

Research conducted by Anderson and Briddle (1975, as cited by Bean, 1983) investigated prequestioning and its effects on comprehension. They concluded that prequestioning can facilitate comprehension if one is interested in having students learn answers to specific questions. They advised teachers that if general comprehension of the text is the goal, then prequestioning can have a restricting effect as students will tend to remember only the answers to the prequestions.

Durkin (1981b), on the other hand, suggested that "a question increases inspection time and the cognitive effort that a reader gives to what is considered relevant for his or her purpose" (p. 37). Rickards and Hatcher (1977, as cited by Durkin, 1981b) have concluded that certain kinds of questions help readers assimilate new material in relation to what is already known. These questions function similarly to advance organizers (Ausubel, 1960). In addition, Rowe and Rayford (1987) found that a broad age range of students can benefit from purpose questions as cues to activate background knowledge.

Somewhat related to prequestions, purpose-setting activities, and objectives are pretests, a teacher-

directed preinstructional strategy. Tierney and Cunningham (1984) offered research findings that have suggested that pretests can have a facilitative effect on comprehension when the material to be read is difficult to comprehend. They warned, though, that "logically, a pretest can only be expected to facilitate activation of existing knowledge if a reader has such knowledge" (p. 618). They also recommended further research on the use of pretests.

Tierney and Cunningham (1984) also discussed analogy, another method of enriching background to improve comprehension. They defined analogy as "an expositional method for comparing sets of information which are similar enough in essential respects to permit transposition of attributes across sets, usually from familiar to unfamiliar information" (p. 613). They pointed out that research on its efficacy has been examined by only a few studies. Yet they cite Ausubel and Fitzgerald (1961), Gick and Holyoak (1980), Hayes and Mateja (1981), Hayes and Tierney (1982), Mayer (1975), Perfetti, Bransford, and Franks (1983), Royer and Cable (1975, 1976), and Vosniadou and Ortony (1984), researchers whose results

avored the use of advance analogous material on readers' comprehension of other passages.

A specialized form of background building and an important component in reading comprehension is vocabulary development.⁴ Most educators and researchers have consistently identified knowledge of words and word meanings as critical factors in reading comprehension (Beck and McKeown, 1983; Carr and Wixson, 1986; Cooper, 1986; Graves and Prenn, 1986; Pearson, 1985; and Thelen, 1986).

Pearson and Johnson (1978) suggested that preteaching vocabulary acts as anchors for new information. Cited by Tierney and Cunningham (1984), Beck, McKeown, McCaslin, and Burkes (1978) and Becker (1977) agreed that "correlations between knowledge of word meanings and ability to comprehend passages containing those words are high and well established" (p. 611). Harkness (1985) cited research by Pany, Jenkins, and Schreck (1982) and Carnine, Freschi, and Kameenvi (1982) to support the positive effects of vocabulary development on comprehension, as well.

Carr and Wixson (1986) advocated a variety of techniques that could be used to associate new vocabulary with students' background knowledge,

including brainstorming, the free form outline, the structured overview, individual vocabulary cards, and capsule vocabulary. They cited research conducted by Barron, 1969; Carr, 1985; Crist, 1975; Herber, 1978; Vacca, 1981; and Wilson, 1984 which support the use of these techniques.

Cooper (1986) suggested that discussion is probably the most widely used of all strategies for helping students activate or develop their existing background. Tierney and Cunningham (1984) added that:

Most basal reading lessons and a number of reading educators advise teachers to begin with either selected questions or a discussion of the story topic designed to facilitate student-teacher and peer interaction in the context of the reading lesson (p. 618).

Stauffer's Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (1959, 1969, as cited by Durkin, 1981) and Manzo's ReQuest Procedure (1969, as cited by Tierney and Cunningham, 1984) are instructional procedures where purpose setting together with student interaction are vital. Durkin (1981) described the DRTA by saying:

A DRTA begins with teachers encouraging children to speculate about the content of whatever it is they will be reading, using both their own knowledge and clues found in the material--in a title, for instance, or

in pictures. From this, questions emerge and, with them, purposes for reading (p. 27).

Manzo's ReQuest Procedure (1969) also uses a questioning format in which students, usually in pairs, generate their own questions before reading.

Though research examining the efficacy of these procedures and similar procedures has supported their use, Alvermann (1984) and Tierney and Cunningham (1984) have suggested that more research is needed to determine the effects of classroom discussion on students' learning from reading.

While research does not conclusively support this claim, Cooper (1986) also suggested that concrete materials, role playing, and field trips can activate or develop background knowledge and improve reading comprehension. "Concrete materials and field trips help to develop real experiences for students; role playing helps to create vicarious experiences for students (Cooper, 1986, p. 100).

In summary, many prereading activities/strategies have been developed to improve reading comprehension by activating or developing background knowledge and/or schemata. Many of these have been validated by

research; but in other instances, more research is needed to determine their usefulness.

The Story Preview

The strategy used in the current study, designed by Graves to improve reading comprehension by building (or activating) background knowledge, is presenting students with a story preview before they read a selection. Researchers Graves, Prenn, and Cooke (1985) claim that "previews can establish an organizational framework to stimulate appropriate schemata, to motivate students, and to provide them with specific knowledge about the text they will be reading" (p. 595).

In a paper presented at the International Reading Association, Graves and Prenn (1986) discussed common examples of the use of previews and their effects outside of education to provide convincing evidence of the value of this technique. Graves pointed out that the most widely recognized instances of previewing are previews of movies, presented in theaters, newspapers, and television ads. Other examples of previewing are when TV shows are previewed on television, in TV Guide, and other magazines and newspapers. Books are previewed in newspapers, in magazines, and on talk

shows, too. Graves concluded:

Somewhat different forms of previews operate when students see a movie and then read the book, read the book and then see the movie, or repeatedly read the same book or see the same movie. In short, everyday experiences offer numerous testimonials that previews are widely used and frequently very effective (Graves & Prenn, 1986, p. 3).

Graves, Palmer, and Furniss (1976) previously recommended that teachers use previews with their students, before their effects were empirically validated. Since then, most of the research has demonstrated the efficacy of the use of previews with a variety of students, and with both expository and narrative texts.

Graves and Palmer (1979) studied 322 seventh, eighth, and ninth graders of middle and high ability. They found that the previews did very little to facilitate students' performance, with those students receiving the previews producing only 3% more correct responses than those who did not receive the previews. No statistically significant difference was found.

Yet the studies since then have reported positive effects. Graves and Palmer (1981) studied the effects of previews with 80 high and low ability 5th and 6th

grade suburban students. Results indicated that both high and low ability students receiving the previews scored significantly higher on multiple-choice tests than those not receiving the previews.

Senior high school students appeared to benefit from story previews, as well. Forty-one tenth grade rural students of varying abilities were given story previews (Hood, 1981). The results indicated that the previews greatly facilitated students' performance. Students who received the previews produced 47% more correct responses than those students who did not receive the previews.

Later, Cosgrove (1984) used story previews with average tenth grade suburban students. Graves and Cooke (1980) used story previews with eleventh grade suburban students of varying levels of ability. Each preview attempted to relate the topic to the students' lives, describe the plot up to the point of climax, and introduce important characters. Results showed that high school students who received the previews scored significantly higher than those who did not. Also, the previews aided students with both factual and inferential questions.

The two studies conducted by Graves, Cooke, and LaBerge (1982) attempted to extend the information on the effects of story previews. First, the subjects of their study were junior high school students, rather than elementary or senior high school students. Second, the subjects of this study were distinctly poorer readers than those who participated in the earlier studies by Graves and Palmer (1981) and Graves and Cooke (1980). The subjects in this study were "among the poorest readers in an inner city school that enrolled a number of students with reading problems" (Graves, Cooke, and LaBerge, 1982, p. 266). Third, this was designed as a two-stage process, providing more information than a single experiment.

In Experiment 1, the subjects were 32 eighth grade students, who were assigned to read four short stories and complete a group-administered multiple-choice test on each story. The stories were intended to be difficult for most of the students. In Experiment 2, the subjects were 40 seventh grade students, who were assigned to read two of the four stories used in Experiment 1. The previews for the

stories used in Experiment 2 were those used in Experiment 1.

Taken together, the results of Experiments 1 and 2 constituted a strong argument for the value of using previews with potentially difficult short stories for low ability junior high school students. In both experiments, students scored higher with previews than without them on a variety of measures of comprehension and retention, including factual and inferential comprehension and unprompted oral recall.

One recent study (Graves & Prenn, 1984) showed positive results of previewing expository passages. Eighth grade students, with low, average, and above average abilities, from a suburban junior high school, were selected. Students were given oral previews consisting of four sections: an interest-building section; a section designed to provide students with background knowledge necessary for understanding the passage; a section designed to provide information about the passage itself; and a section designed to provide directions for giving students a strategy for reading the passage. The major conclusion of this study was that the oral previews did increase the

comprehension of expository passages for low-ability students, as well as for the more able students.

In all of these studies, a variety of students and texts were used, as well as a variety of comprehension measures.⁶ These included multiple-choice tests composed of factual and inferential questions, written and oral free recall, and oral prompted recall. Results indicated that students who received the previews outscored those who did not by 10% to slightly over 100% (Graves, Prenn, & Cooke, 1985, p. 596).

In reviewing this work, Graves and Slater (1981, as cited by Tierney and Cunningham, 1984) concluded that story previews generally had a moderate and positive effect on story comprehension and retention, especially when the stories being read were difficult for the students. They concluded, too, that the previews assisted the readers in making inferences.

In most of these studies (Graves & Cooke, 1980; Graves, Cooke, & LaBerge, 1982; Graves & Prenn, 1984), students were also given attitude surveys, to determine their reactions to the previews. The majority of the students reported that the previews helped them read and understand the stories. They did

not indicate that the previews gave away too much of the stories, and they suggested that previews be given before assigning difficult selections.

Issues of importance concerning the use of previews have been considered. Graves, Cooke, and LaBerge (1982) have been concerned over what constitutes an effective preview. They have pointed out that it is impossible to specify how to create an effective preview for a particular story.

Subtle differences between stories, subtle differences between students, and still more subtle differences involving interactions between stories and students make it unlikely that a fully developed definition of what constitutes an effective preview can be constructed in the near future (p. 273).

Another issue of concern has been the matter of determining under what circumstances previews are effective. Some information has already been gathered concerning the age and ability of the readers. The results of earlier studies have indicated that previews can be effective with upper elementary and junior and senior high school students. However, Graves, Cooke, and LaBerge (1982) warn against overgeneralizations, and they have also pointed out that no information is known about the effectiveness

of previews with primary grade students or college students.

The difficulty of the text for which previews are effective has been a matter of concern, too. Earlier studies have suggested that previews are effective with more difficult selections and with less competent and confident readers. Graves, Cooke, and LaBerge (1982) have questioned the effectiveness of this technique with selections that are less difficult for the students. Graves, Prenn, and Cooke (1985) have suggested that all students do not need to receive lengthy previews with all the stories they read. Options have included using a preview for all of the students in a class or only with students who are likely to have difficulty with the upcoming selection. They have also suggested that if a story is well within the reading ability of the students, it is unnecessary to provide any sort of preview. Graves and Cooke (1980) and Graves and Prenn (1986) have agreed. Ultimately, the classroom teacher must decide what is appropriate.

Another matter of concern has been with the text type. Research has indicated that previews are effective with short stories, but future investigation

is needed to determine the effectiveness of previews with novels, as well as with all types of nonfiction.

In summary, researchers have claimed that story previews improve comprehension by providing background information and/or activating schemata and focusing attention before reading. Research has indicated that story previews have appeared to be useful with elementary and junior and senior high school students, with varying levels of ability. Students have responded quite favorably to story previews, too. Yet, further research is needed to validate these findings.

Summary

Research has confirmed the theory that background knowledge and schemata are crucial components in the comprehension process and that students' reading can be improved by providing or activating background knowledge and schemata on a topic before reading. Fortunately, many effective pre-reading strategies have been developed and validated, to some extent, by research. Some of these strategies include the advance organizer, the structured overview, pictures, the story map, prequestions, purpose-setting

activities, objectives, pretests, analogies, vocabulary development, and discussion.

The story preview, the strategy used in the current study, is another pre-reading activity used to stimulate appropriate schemata, develop background knowledge, and/or motivate students before reading. Research has suggested that the story preview is facilitative with elementary and junior and senior high school students with varying levels of abilities. Students have responded favorably to them, too. Yet more research is needed to determine the efficacy of the story preview on reading comprehension.

Chapter III

Design of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of story previews when used as a prereading activity with ninth grade students with varying levels of reading ability.

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was investigated in both phases of this study:

There is no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores in reading comprehension of ninth grade students who received a story preview and those ninth grade students who did not receive a story preview.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects involved in this study were 50 ninth grade students, with varying levels of reading ability, as indicated by the results from the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests: Second Edition. Students were selected from four English classes at a public high school in Western New York.

The subjects were evenly divided into two groups: Group A and Group B. Group A consisted of 25 ninth graders from two English classes, and Group B consisted of 25 ninth graders from two English classes. In Phase I of this study, students from Group A received the treatment with the preview, and students from Group B received the treatment without the preview. In Phase II of the study, students from Group B received the treatment with the preview, and students from Group A received the treatment without the preview.

As indicated by the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests: Second Edition, Test E, Form 1, administered in September 1987, the mean raw comprehension score for Group A was 29.400, with a standard deviation of +5.338. The mean raw comprehension score for Group B was 30.280, with a standard deviation of +5.798. Both fell within the normal distribution range. These data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
 Mean Comprehension Scores of the
Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests

Group Number	Mean Comprehension Raw Score	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	
A	25	29.400	29	+5.338	0.225
B	25	30.280	32	+5.798	-0.889

Note: Maximum Score = 43

A t test of independent means at the .05 level of significance was used to determine whether the difference between the mean comprehension score of Group A and the mean comprehension score of Group B was statistically significant. These data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Two-tailed t test of Significant Difference on the Mean Comprehension Scores of Group A and Group B

Group	\bar{x}	s.d.	t	p
A	29.400	5.338	-0.558	
B	30.280	5.798		.05

Note: d.f. = 48 ($n_A + n_B - 2$)

The calculated t value was -0.558. For a two-tailed test set at the .05 level of significance, the critical value for 48 degrees of freedom is ± 2.01 . Since the calculated t value (-0.558) was less than the critical t value (± 2.01), the associated probability (p .05) was less than a 5% chance that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean comprehension pretest scores of Group A and Group B.

Instruments

Materials for this study included two short stories, a teacher-made preview for each story (see Appendix A), and a teacher-prepared posttest for each story (see Appendix B).

The short stories used in this study were Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" and Sir Arthur

Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." "The Cask of Amontillado" is approximately 2700 words long, and "The Adventure of the Speckled Band" is approximately 7500 words long. According to the SMOG (McLaughlin, 1969) grading formula, the Doyle story is written at the 9.0 grade level; and the Poe story is written at the 10.0 grade level. Both stories are intended for competent, mature readers. Both stories have been assigned readings for former classes, who frequently complained that they were difficult, with long, complicated story lines and hard words.

Each preview began with the title and author of each story. Each preview contained an introductory paragraph which attempted to provide a link between the story and the students' lives. Next, specific details of the setting, characters, point of view, and plot were given. Details of the setting included the time and place of the story. Details of the characters included the pronunciation, identification, and description of each. Students were told who was narrating each story. Details of the plot included a description of the major events of the story, up to the point of the climax. Difficult words were listed and defined, and any foreign phrases/words were

translated. In addition, each preview concluded with a statement designed to motivate the students to try to solve the mystery as they read.

The tests for both stories were designed to include 13 short-answer comprehension questions. Six of the questions were factual, and answered in the preview; six were factual, but not answered in the preview; and one was an inferential question concerning a major point of the story, and not answered in the preview.

Procedure

This study required six class periods, over a two week time period. Three class periods were needed for Phase I of the study, to present "The Cask of Amontillado"; and three class periods were needed for Phase II of the study, to present "The Adventure of the Speckled Band." The treatments for each story required two 45 minute class periods to present the preview and read the story, as well as part of the third class period to administer the test.

The treatments were administered to the students in both groups in their regular classrooms by the researcher. During Phase I of the study, the students in Group A received a preview for "The Cask of

Amontillado," while the students in Group B did not. During Phase II of the study, the students in Group B received a preview for "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," while the students in Group A did not.

When administering the preview treatments in both phases of the study, the researcher instructed the students that they would receive a preview to the upcoming story, after which they would complete the reading silently in class and take a test on the story the third day. The researcher distributed the previews, read the previews, and then collected the previews, to avoid any exchange between members of both treatment groups. The students were given the remainder of that class period, as well as the entire class period the following day, to finish reading. The test was administered on the third day.

When administering the no-preview treatments in both phases of the study, the researcher assigned the reading and announced the test. The students were given the remainder of that class period, as well as the entire class period the following day, to finish reading. The test was administered on the third day.

Students in both treatment groups, in both phases of the study, who completed the reading early, were

instructed to work on another assignment or project, quietly, without disturbing the rest of the class.

Analysis of the Data

In both phases of the study, a t test of independent means at the .05 level of significance was used to determine the usefulness of story previews on the reading comprehension of ninth grade students.

Summary

This study was designed to investigate the effects of story previews on the reading comprehension of two groups of ninth grade English students. In both phases of the study, after exposure to the treatments, the reading comprehension scores of the preview treatment groups were compared with the scores of the no-preview treatment groups to determine whether a statistically significant difference between the two groups existed. A t test of independent means at the .05 level of significance was used.

Chapter IV

Analysis of the Data

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of the story preview when used as a prereading activity with ninth grade students with varying levels of reading ability.

Analysis of the Findings

The following null hypotheses were investigated in this study:

1. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores in reading comprehension of ninth grade students who received a story preview (Group A) and those ninth grade students who did not receive a story preview (Group B) during Phase I of the study.

2. There is no statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores in reading comprehension of ninth grade students who received a story preview (Group B) and those ninth grade students who did not receive a story preview (Group A) during Phase II of the study.

As indicated by the results of the posttest following Phase I of the study, the mean raw comprehension score for Group A (the preview treatment group) was 7.760, with a standard deviation of ± 2.367 . The mean comprehension score for Group B (the no-preview treatment group) was 5.720, with a standard deviation of ± 2.245 . Both fell within the normal distribution range. These data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Mean Comprehension Scores of the Posttest (Phase I)

Group	n	\bar{x}	md.	s.d.	sk.
A	25	7.760	8	2.367	-0.304
B	25	5.720	5	2.245	0.962

Note: Maximum Score = 13

A t test of independent means at the .05 level of significance was used to determine whether the difference between the mean comprehension posttest score of Group A and the mean comprehension posttest score of Group B was statistically significant. These data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Two-tailed t test of Significant Difference on the
Mean Comprehension Posttest Scores in Phase I

Group	\bar{x}	s.d.	t	p
A	7.760	2.367	3.133	
B	5.720	2.245		.05

Note: d.f. = 48 ($n_a + n_b - 2$)

The calculated t value was 3.133. For a two-tailed test set at the .05 level of significance, the critical value for 48 degrees of freedom is ± 2.01 . Since the calculated t value (3.133) was greater than the critical t value (± 2.01), the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there was a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores of Group A (the preview treatment group) and Group B (the no-preview treatment group) in Phase I of this study.

As indicated by the results of the posttest following Phase II of the study, the mean raw comprehension score for Group A (the no-preview treatment group) was 9.240, with a standard deviation of ± 1.963 . The mean raw comprehension score for Group B (the preview treatment group) was 10.720, with a

standard deviation of ± 1.620 . Both fell within the normal distribution range. These data are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Mean Comprehension Scores of the Posttest (Phase II)

Group	n	\bar{x}	md.	s.d.	sk.
A	25	9.240	9	1.963	0.366
B	25	10.720	11	1.620	-0.518

Note: Maximum Score = 13

A t test of independent means at the .05 level of significance was used to determine whether the difference between the mean comprehension posttest score of Group A (the no-preview treatment group) and the mean comprehension posttest score of Group B (the preview treatment group) was statistically significant. These data are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Two-tailed t test of Significant Difference on the Mean Comprehension Scores of the Posttest in Phase II

Group	\bar{x}	s.d.	t	p
A	9.240	1.963	-2.913	
B	10.720	1.620		.05

Note: d.f. = 48 ($n_a + n_b - 2$)

The calculated t value was -2.913. For a two-tailed test set at the .05 level of significance, the critical value for 48 degrees of freedom is ± 2.01 . Since the calculated t value (-2.913) was greater than the critical t value (± 2.01), the null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there was a statistically significant difference between the posttest scores of Group A (the no-preview treatment group) and Group B (the preview treatment group) in Phase II of the study.

Interpretation of the Data

The present study was designed to determine whether or not story previews significantly affect the reading comprehension of ninth grade students of varying levels of ability. An analysis of the data from Phase I of this study indicated that there was a statistically

significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the preview treatment group (Group A) and the no-preview treatment group (Group B), in favor of the treatment group. Furthermore, an analysis of the data from Phase II of the study revealed similar findings. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the preview treatment group (Group B) and the no-preview treatment group (Group A), in favor of the preview treatment group. In both phases of the study, the null hypothesis was rejected. The evidence suggested, then, that story previews significantly affected the reading comprehension of ninth grade students of varying levels of ability.

Summary

An analysis of the data from both phases of this study indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the preview treatment groups and the no-preview treatment groups, favoring the preview treatment. The difference between the means, in both phases of this study, was not due to chance or error.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Implications

Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of story previews on the reading comprehension of ninth grade students with varying levels of ability.

Conclusions

Analysis of the data from both phases of this study indicated a statistically significant difference between the mean posttest scores of the preview treatment groups and the no-preview treatment groups, favoring the preview treatment. These findings, consistent with previous research (Cosgrove, 1984; Graves & Cooke, 1980; Graves, Cooke, & LaBerge, 1982; Graves & Palmer, 1981; Graves, Prenn, & Cooke, 1985; and Hood, 1981), support the claim that previews facilitate the comprehension of potentially difficult short stories with elementary and junior and senior high school students with varying levels of abilities.

In addition, informal observations indicated that most of the students preferred receiving the previews and found them helpful. In both phases of the study,

students who received the treatment without the story previews complained that the stories were too long and the words were too difficult. Many commented that the stories were "stupid" and they did not understand "what was going on." Most finished reading in less than 30 minutes. On the other hand, in both phases of the study, students who received the treatment with the story previews did not complain about the length or difficulty of the selections. Most of these students read quietly for the class periods provided. These observations were consistent with previous findings, as well (Graves & Cooke, 1980; Graves, Cooke, & LaBerge, 1982; and Graves & Prenn, 1984). Attitude surveys from these studies revealed that the majority of the students involved found the previews facilitative.

Implications for Research

Further investigations into the effectiveness of story previews to facilitate comprehension are suggested. Though the results to date indicate the positive effects of previews with elementary and junior and senior high school students of various ability levels, little is known about the effects of previews with younger readers (primary grade students)

or older readers (college students). This matter deserves further attention.

In addition, most of the previous research dealt with the effects of previews with short stories. To date, only one study (Graves & Prenn, 1984) has examined the effectiveness of previewing expository passages. Future investigations could examine the effects of previews with non-fiction material, as well as full length novels.

In addition, though research provides reasonable evidence of the effectiveness of previewing, other strategies designed to increase comprehension have been developed, as well. Future researchers could compare the effects of story previews to one of the other recommended pre-reading strategies.

Implications for Classroom Practice

Since research supports the use of story previews to increase reading comprehension by building or activating background knowledge/schemata, classroom use should be encouraged. Typically, basal readers and content texts have not included the type or amount of background development that readers need to help them relate their existing schemata to the selection

in a way that will lead to improved comprehension. Instead, teachers' guides have included very general or topical development and not development that relates directly to the story line or main ideas in the selection. Until these inadequacies are corrected, classroom teachers could construct and present brief story previews, with the necessary concepts, vocabulary, details, and background needed. Normally, only a few minutes of the teacher's time would be required to construct and to present such a preview.

One alternative suggestion is for the students to write the previews themselves. Graves and Prenn (1986) suggested that this would be an excellent opportunity for students to write for a real audience with a real purpose.

Another suggestion is for students to read the previews either to the same age or to younger age classes. "This provides students with an opportunity to practice oral reading skills in a 'real' situation" (Graves & Prenn, 1986, p. 14).

In conclusion, most researchers do not suggest that classroom teachers need to use previews with every student for every selection. They do suggest,

however, that previews are helpful with potentially difficult selections and less skilled readers. Ultimately, though, the classroom teacher must decide what is appropriate.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of story previews on the reading comprehension of ninth grade students. Students in this study received the treatment with a story preview and the treatment without a story preview. Analysis of the data revealed a statistically significant difference between the two treatments, favoring the treatment with the story previews. These results are consistent with previous research.

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Appendix A

Results of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests

Group A		Group B	
Student	Raw Score	Student	Raw Score
1.	27	1.	36
2.	25	2.	32
3.	36	3.	17
4.	31	4.	34
5.	20	5.	32
6.	27	6.	37
7.	26	7.	32
8.	26	8.	19
9.	27	9.	31
10.	25	10.	22
11.	24	11.	34
12.	25	12.	39
13.	31	13.	37
14.	27	14.	34
15.	37	15.	27
16.	39	16.	33
17.	31	17.	29
18.	33	18.	26
19.	22	19.	30
20.	33	20.	29

Group A		Group B	
Student	Raw Score	Student	Raw Score
21.	29	21.	30
22.	42	22.	24
23.	29	23.	33
24.	29	24.	37
25.	34	25.	23

Results

Group A

 $n = 25$ $\bar{x} = 29.400$

md = 29

 $s = 5.338$

sk = 0.225

Group B

 $n = 25$ $\bar{x} = 30.280$

md = 32

 $s = 5.798$

sk = -0.889

Appendix B
Story Previews

Preview for "The Cask of Amontillado"

by Edgar Allan Poe

Have you ever been insulted or embarrassed by someone? Were you in a public place, where other people overheard the remark or witnessed the incident? Or were you in private, alone? Was the remark or insult intentional, or were you being overly sensitive? Could you have been just imagining it?

How did you feel? Did you feel hurt or did you feel angry? Did you feel like crying or did you feel like getting even, getting revenge?

The story you are about to read involves a similar conflict. The two key characters involved are Montresor and Fortunato, two wealthy, Italian noblemen. They are also wine connoisseurs--expert judges on the purity and vintage of fine wines.

Montresor believes he has been insulted or embarrassed in some way by Fortunato. These insults are never explained in the story. Something suggests that Montresor is just insanely jealous of Fortunato. For what ever reason, controlled by his insane hatred and desire for revenge, Montresor plots a fantastic, horrible scheme to avenge Fortunato.

The story, narrated by Montresor fifty years after the crime, takes place in Italy, one evening during the carnival season. This is a festival, similar to the Mardi Gras celebrated yearly in New Orleans. Crowds of people, dressed in outlandish costumes, mingle through the streets--eating, drinking, and partying.

The story begins at dusk when Montresor meets Fortunato on the street. Montresor is wearing a black cloak, and Fortunato, appropriately dressed for the season, is wearing a brightly-colored jester suit and a pointed cap with bells. They shake hands and stop to talk.

Montresor casually mentions to Fortunato that he has recently acquired a cask, or barrel, of Amontillado, a fine, expensive, rare Spanish sherry or wine. Playing upon his "friend's" vanity and weakness for fine wine, Montresor lures Fortunato into going to his cellar to taste the wine in order to determine its purity and vintage. Montresor leads Fortunato into the cellars under his Italian palace, down to the special chamber where the prized Amontillado wine is supposed to be stored. There, Montresor gets his revenge and commits the perfect crime.

What happens to Fortunato? Where were Montresor's attendants or servants? What happens to Montresor? Read the story to find out!

But before you begin reading, there are a few difficult vocabulary words that need to be defined. "I would be avenged" (p. 68). This means that Montresor wants to get even with Fortunato. He wants revenge.

"I must not only punish, but I must punish with impunity" (p. 68). This means that Montresor wants to be free from punishment himself. In other words, Montresor wants to commit the perfect crime.

"My smile now was at the thought of his immolation" (p. 68). This means that Montresor laughed when he thought of Fortunato's death, or destruction or sacrifice.

"He prided himself on his connoisseurship in wine" (p. 68). This refers to his good taste. A connoisseur is an expert or critical judge of art, food, or drink.

"Fortunato wore motley" (p. 68). This is a brightly colored costume, usually worn by a clown or court jester.

"We hurried to my palazzo" (p. 69). This is a palace or an Italian mansion.

"The servants had absconded to make merry in honor of the time" (p. 69). In other words, the servants disappeared or 'left secretly.

"I took from the sconces two flambeaux" (p. 70). These are torches, used to light the darkness of the cellar.

"We stood together on the damp ground of the catacombs of the Montresors" (p. 70). These are tunnels used as tombs or ancestral burial places.

"A draught of this Medoc will defend us from the damps" (p. 70). Medoc is a red wine from France which they drink to warm themselves from the damp cold of the cellars.

"I forget your arms" (p. 71). This is a family symbol on a coat of arms.

"Nemo me impune lacessit" (p. 71). This saying or motto, found on the Montresor's family coat of arms, translates that no one can attack or hurt a family member with impunity or without getting hurt in return.

"The niter hangs like moss upon the vaults" (p. 71). Niter is salt deposits formed on rock.

"I broke and reached him a flagon of De Grave" (p. 71). This is a bottle of white wine from France.

"You are not of the masons" (p. 71). This word has two meanings. First, it refers to a stoneworker or concrete worker, and Montresor laughs because he is carrying a trowel with him. It also refers to a member of a secret all-male society, the Freemasons, which teaches brotherhood, faithfulness, and honor. Montresor is not a member of this society.

"We passed through a range of low arches, and arrived at a deep crypt" (p. 72). This is an underground chamber or room.

"A moment more and I had fettered him to the granite" (p. 72). In other words, Montresor chained Fortunato to a rock.

"In pace requiescat" (p. 74). This is translated, "May he rest in peace."

PREVIEW FOR "THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND"

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Do you like to watch detective movies or television shows? Have you ever watched "Magnum, P.I.", "Hunter", "Spenser: For Hire", or "MacGyver"? Have you ever seen a James Bond, 007 movie? What characteristics or qualities do these detectives share? Are they courageous, strong, intelligent? Which of these qualities do you consider most important?

You are going to read a detective story today. The main character in this story is the famous detective, Sherlock Holmes. You read another Sherlock Holmes story earlier this year. Do you remember the story "The Adventure of the Dying Detective"? This was the story where Holmes fakes a tropical illness to trap Culverton Smith into confessing to the murder of Victor Savage. Remember?

The main characters in today's story are Helen Stoner, Holmes' new client; Julia Stoner, Helen's dead sister; Dr. Roylott, their greedy stepfather; Sherlock Holmes, the famous detective; and Dr. Watson, Holmes' assistant.

The story takes place in England, early in April, 1883. Holmes and Watson still work out of their place on Baker Street in London. This is where Helen meets them to discuss her case. She lives at Stoke Moran in Surrey, England. Stoke Moran is the family estate or mansion. Surrey is a small town, located about two hours from London. After they agree to take Helen's case, Holmes and Watson travel to Stoke Moran in Surrey, where they solve the case and catch the murderer. As usual, Dr. Watson narrates this story.

The story begins when Helen Stoner arrives at their place on Baker Street, early one morning. She is obviously very frightened. She introduces herself, explains her problem, and asks for their help. Holmes and Watson sit quietly as she speaks.

Helen begins her story by telling them that she is presently living with her stepfather, Dr. Roylott, at the family estate in Surrey. Her mother, a wealthy widow, met and married Dr. Roylott when they were living in India. There, Dr. Roylott practiced medicine, until he was thrown into prison for beating his butler to death. After Roylott's release from prison, the family returned to England: Helen's

mother, Dr. Roylott, Helen, and her twin sister, Julia.

Helen continues, explaining her mother's sudden death, eight years ago, in a railway accident. At the time of her death, Dr. Roylott inherited all of her money, with one provision. A certain yearly amount of money would be given to both girls, Helen and Julia, when (and if) they married.

Helen also mentions the dramatic change in Roylott's life since her mother's death. He has no friends, except the gypsies who camp on their property. He has had many violent arguments with the village people. And, he has developed an unusual passion for Indian animals. A cheetah and a baboon freely wander around the estate.

Helen also describes her sister's mysterious death, two years ago, on the eve of her wedding. Before going to bed that night, Julia told Helen about a low, clear whistle that she has heard for several nights. Later, in the middle of the night, Helen heard Julia's screams. She ran from her room, into the hallway, to Julia's room. There she found the door unlocked and Julia on the floor, twisting and

turning in pain. Just before she died, Julia said something about a band, a speckled band.

Helen finishes her story, telling them of her own engagement to Percy Armitage and her recent fears. She explains that she has been sleeping in Julia's room while hers is being redecorated. She has been awakened in the middle of the night, several times. She hears the whistle, the same one that Julia spoke of the night she died. Helen fears she, too, will die mysteriously. So she begs for their help, and they agree to take her case. Then they make arrangements to meet her at the estate that afternoon.

Shortly after Helen leaves, Dr. Roylott, her stepfather arrives at Holmes' office. He is furious. He tells them that he has followed Helen to their office, and he threatens the two men, insisting that they stay out of his business.

After Roylott leaves, Holmes and Watson go to Stoke Moran, as planned, to secretly examine the rooms and look for some link to Julia's death. They carefully examine Julia's room and Dr. Roylott's room. Then they set up a plan with Helen and leave the estate and go to the Crown Inn, where they wait until 11 PM for Helen's signal.

How did Julia die? Who was her murderer? What was the speckled band? What happens to Helen? Read the story to find out. But before you begin reading, there are a few difficult vocabulary words that must be defined.

"You are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to" (p. 73). This means to pay or furnish the money for.

"Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream" (p. 74). This is a low wall or railing along a balcony or bridge.

"What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles" (p. 78). These are whistles or sounds heard in the night.

"If both girls had married, Royslott would have had a mere pittance left" (p. 79). This is a small amount of money.

"Your life may depend upon your compliance" (p. 82). This is an agreement or a giving in to a wish, request, or demand. Holmes wants Helen to follow his directions carefully.

"I think there was probably some more tangible cause" (p. 83). This is anything that can be touched or felt by touch; something having actual form and

substance. Helen asks Holmes if Julia died from fear, and he said that there was a more tangible reason for her death.

"I have some scruples about taking you tonite because there is a distinct element of danger" (p. 83). A scruple is a feeling of doubt or hesitancy in deciding what is wrong or right. In other words, Holmes was unsure about whether Watson should go along or not.

Appendix C

Posttests

Comprehension Quiz

"The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe

- _____ 1. Montresor's reason for murdering Fortunato are:

 - a. completely explained at the beginning of the story
 - b. normal for anyone, under the circumstances.
 - c. completely explained at the end of the story
 - d. completely abnormal and never really explained

- _____ 2. The "I" or narrator of the story is:

 - a. Edgar Allan Poe, the author
 - b. Montresor, the murderer
 - c. Fortunato, the victim
 - d. Luchesi, another connoisseur and close friend

- _____ 3. This story takes place at:

 - a. Fortunato's palazzo, one night during the carnival season
 - b. Montresor's home in Spain, one night during the carnival season
 - c. Montresor's Italian villa, one night during the carnival season
 - d. Montresor's wine cellars in Medoc, France, one night during the carnival season

- _____ 4. Fortunato goes with Montresor to:

 - a. have a drink of Amontillado with him to celebrate
 - b. to buy the cask of Amontillado from him
 - c. to discuss their differences.
 - d. to taste the Amontillado to see if Montresor has been cheated

- _____ 5. Montresor is dress in:
- a. a black cape
 - b. a brightly-colored costume
 - c. a dark, striped business suit
 - d. a mason's outfit, carrying a trowel
- _____ 6. Luchesi is:
- a. one of Montresor's closest friends
 - b. one of Fortunato's closest friends
 - c. a witness to this crime
 - d. another wine expert who Montresor threatens to consult
- _____ 7. Fortunato is easily tricked by Montresor because:
- a. he trusts Montresor because they have been close friends for many years
 - b. he respects Montresor because of his honorable reputation
 - c. he is drunk and unable to think clearly
 - d. he is a fool and easily flattered
- _____ 8. When Montresor meets Fortunato on the street, he is:
- a. very friendly to Fortunato
 - b. unfriendly and aloof to Fortunato
 - c. obviously still very angry with Fortunato
 - d. impolite at first because he is speaking with Luchesi about something important
- _____ 9. The servants do not greet the men when they arrive at the house because:
- a. Montresor's wife had given them the evening off
 - b. Montresor had given them permission to attend the carnival
 - c. they had secretly left the house, without Montresor's permission
 - d. they were asleep because the men did not arrive until after midnight

- _____ 10. At the end of the story, the reader realizes that:
- a. Montresor was never punished for the crime
 - b. Fortunato's body was eventually found by the servants, 50 years later
 - c. Montresor released Fortunato, after frightening him a little
 - d. one of the servants witnessed the crime, and Montresor was arrested shortly afterwards
- _____ 11. At the end of the story, Montresor is:
- a. full of regret for what he has done
 - b. at rest and peace with himself, content about what he has done
 - c. proud about committing the perfect crime
 - d. rehabilitated after spending 50 years in jail
- _____ 12. Fortunato realizes what is happening to him when:
- a. they reach the vaults and Montresor gives him a torch
 - b. Montresor offers him the Medoc
 - c. Montresor shows him the trowel
 - d. Montresor chains him in the recess
- _____ 13. The theme or main idea of this story is:
- a. Don't trust strangers.
 - b. Crime does pay off.
 - c. Revenge is bitter.
 - d. If at first you don't succeed, try again.

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band"
Comprehension Quiz

- _____ 1. Helen Stoner visits Holmes because she:
- a. has received a threat from her stepfather.
 - b. suspects her sister, Julia.
 - c. fears for her life.
 - d. has received upsetting information about the man she is engaged to.
- _____ 2. Dr. Roylott visits Holmes in order to:
- a. threaten Holmes.
 - b. ask for help.
 - c. blackmail Holmes.
 - d. talk about his money problems.
- _____ 3. The narrator of this story is:
- a. Sherlock Holmes the famous detective.
 - b. Dr. Watson, Holmes' assistant.
 - c. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author.
 - d. Helen Stoner, Holmes' new client.
- _____ 4. Stoke Moran is:
- a. where Helen's mother met Dr. Roylott.
 - b. the hotel in Surrey where Holmes and Watson wait.
 - c. Holmes' office on Baker Street.
 - d. the family home outside London.
- _____ 5. When Helen visits Holmes, she tells him that:
- a. her stepfather keeps a deadly snake in his room.
 - b. she hears a whistle in the middle of the night.
 - c. she thinks that the doctor killed her mother.
 - d. she is certain that Dr. Roylott is following her.

- _____ 6. Helen does not tell Holmes that:
- a. Dr. Roylott murdered his butler.
 - b. Dr. Roylott has had many violent arguments with the village people.
 - c. Dr. Roylott allows a band of gypsies to camp on their lawn.
 - d. Dr. Roylott will be penniless when Helen marries.
- _____ 7. Holmes' first guess about the speckled band was:
- a. the gypsies.
 - b. Dr. Roylott.
 - c. the snake.
 - d. the baboon.
- _____ 8. Holmes carefully inspected both Julia's and Dr. Roylott's rooms. Which item in the doctor's room did not alert Holmes?
- a. the saucer of milk on the safe.
 - b. the locked shutters.
 - c. the ventilator leading to Julia's room.
 - d. the footprints on the chair.
- _____ 9. When Holmes discovered that Julia's bed couldn't be moved and it would always stay just below the ventilator with the bell rope hanging down beside the bed, he figured that:
- a. Julia wanted her room to stay the way it was arranged.
 - b. People need a lot of air when they sleep.
 - c. The architect did not want his design to be spoiled by moving the furniture around.
 - d. If Julia had been able to move her bed, the plan to murder her might not have worked.
- _____ 10. This story has an interesting twist at the end because:
- a. Helen's life is saved.
 - b. Holmes is tricked by Dr. Roylott.
 - c. Watson is bitten by the snake.
 - d. Roylott is killed by his own plan.

- _____ 11. The motive (or reason) for the crime is:
- a. greed.
 - b. revenge.
 - c. insanity.
 - d. jealousy.
- _____ 12. The speckled band was:
- a. the swamp adder.
 - b. the gypsies.
 - c. the dog's leash.
 - d. Dr. Roylott's cheetah.
- _____ 13. Sherlock probably figured out this case:
- a. after Helen's first visit.
 - b. after inspecting the rooms at the estate.
 - c. after Roylott's visit.
 - d. at the end of the story.

Appendix D
Posttest Scores for Phase I

Group A (Preview)		Group B (No-Preview)	
Student	Raw Score	Student	Raw Score
1.	7	1.	6
2.	2	2.	5
3.	9	3.	3
4.	8	4.	4
5.	6	5.	6
6.	9	6.	5
7.	5	7.	7
8.	8	8.	6
9.	5	9.	5
10.	7	10.	3
11.	7	11.	5
12.	5	12.	8
13.	8	13.	9
14.	4	14.	5
15.	10	15.	6
16.	10	16.	10
17.	9	17.	5
18.	10	18.	2
19.	8	19.	5
20.	8	20.	9

Group A (Preview)

Group B (No-Preview)

Student	Raw Score	Student	Raw Score
21.	9	21.	4
22.	13	22.	5
23.	11	23.	11
24.	8	24.	6
25.	8	25.	3

Posttest Results

Group A (Preview)

Group B (No-Preview)

$\bar{x} = 7.760$

$\bar{x} = 5.720$

$s = 2.367$

$s = 2.245$

Appendix E
Posttest Scores for Phase II

Group A (No-preview)**Group B (Preview)**

Student	Raw Score	Student	Raw Score
1.	9	1.	11
2.	6	2.	11
3.	10	3.	8
4.	9	4.	10
5.	8	5.	10
6.	11	6.	12
7.	6	7.	11
8.	11	8.	11
9.	9	9.	10
10.	13	10.	10
11.	10	11.	11
12.	7	12.	12
13.	8	13.	13
14.	7	14.	10
15.	7	15.	11
16.	9	16.	12
17.	13	17.	11
18.	10	18.	8
19.	7	19.	11
20.	9	20.	13

Group A (No-Preview)**Group B (Preview)**

Student	Raw Score	Student	Raw Score
21.	9	21.	12
22.	12	22.	7
23.	10	23.	12
24.	10	24.	13
25.	11	25.	8

Posttest Results**Group A (No-Preview)****Group B (Preview)**

$$\bar{x} = 9.240$$

$$\bar{x} = 10.720$$

$$s = 1.963$$

$$s = 1.620$$