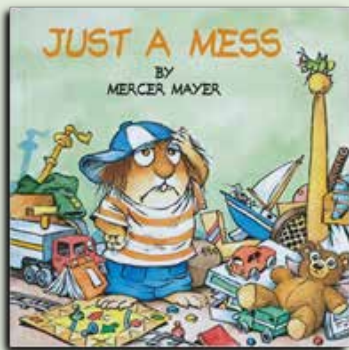


Book Nook

This month's Book Nook topic is...



Developing story comprehension with *Just a Mess*

Have you ever read a book with your child and noticed that he or she doesn't really grasp the whole story? This might be because she focuses on unimportant details or has difficulty connecting the different events in the story.

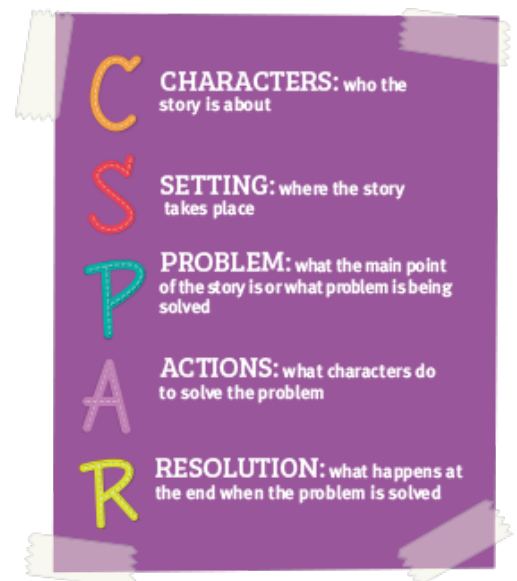
In this Book Nook topic, I'll share some tips on what you can do during book reading to help your child better understand what you are reading. This post will focus on building your child's **understanding of story structure** – a key skill that will prepare your child for making sense of the stories she'll read on her own later.

Let's get started!

Story structure: CSPAR

One way to help your child understand what you are reading is to highlight the important parts of a story. Most stories revolve around a problem that the characters are attempting to solve. This means that for your child to fully understand what is happening, she needs to know the **characters** (who the story is about), the **setting** (where the story takes place), what the **problem** is, the **actions** that occur to solve the problem and the **resolution** (how the problem is solved and what happens in the end).

To remember what these key parts of the story are, Hanen uses the acronym CSPAR.



My chosen book:

Just a Mess. Written by Mercer Mayer.

Why I picked it:

I love the little critter series – the story lines are simple and clear, with a few characters and lots of problems to solve – making them ideal for talking about story structure. In *Just a Mess*, Little Critter has lost his baseball glove, and he needs to clean his room in order to find it. This is a problem that many preschoolers can relate to.

The first time you read the book:

The first time you read *Just a Mess*, the goal is to help your child understand what's happening in the words and the pictures of the story. You can point out different elements of CSPAR to your child:

For **Character**, when looking at the cover, you could say: "That's Little Critter, the story is about him."

For **Setting**, again looking at the cover, you could say: "The setting of our story is Little Critter's room. It sure looks messy!"

On the first page, you could say "Little Critter has a **problem** – he can't find his baseball mitt."

You can talk about what's happening in the pictures of the book to highlight all the **actions** that are taking place. For example, you could say "Little Critter is looking in his tree house for his baseball mitt, but it's not there."

After you read the book, you can talk about the **resolution**. You could say, "So, Little Critter solved the problem. When he cleaned his room, he found his baseball mitt." All of these comments are helping your child pay attention, and develop an understanding of story structure.

The second time you read the book:

A key strategy for highlighting CSPAR is actually using the CSPAR terms, even if these are new to your child. So, now that you've pointed out specific points of the story, be sure to use the CSPAR names during this second reading. You will need to explain each term when you use it.

When your child points to or comments about something happening in the book, use it as an opportunity to highlight an element of CSPAR.

For example, if your child points to or mentions Little Critter, you could say: "That's Little Critter – he's our main **character** – he is the main person in the story, the one who the story is about."

If your child shows interest in the cover, you could say: "The **setting** of the story is where the story takes place. Our **setting** is Little Critter's room."

When looking at the first page, your child might notice that Little Critter looks angry. You could say: "Uh-oh, there's a big **problem** here – Little Critter can't find his baseball. Let's see what actions Little Critter takes to solve his **problem**."

On the page where Little Critter is trying to put his belongings in his closet, you could say "Little Critter is taking **action** by cleaning his room. He wants to solve the problem and find his mitt."

After the reading, or on the last page, you could say: "So, Little Critter found his baseball mitt when he cleaned his room. Now he can go and play baseball. That's the **resolution**; that means that Little Critter solved his problem and it all worked out well in the end."

The third time you read the book:

Now that your child has heard the story a couple of times, I might ask one or two of the following questions when looking at the cover of the book:

- Who are the other **characters** in this story?
- What is the **setting** in this story?
- What is the **problem** in this story?
- What **action** is Little Critter going to take next?
- Do you remember what the **resolution** was at the end of the story?

We don't want to ask too many of these questions, as they can make your child feel like he's being tested, but asking a few at the beginning of your third reading will help solidify your child's understanding of story structure and, ideally, will help your child bring this understanding to other stories that he or she hears.

Happy reading!

-Tamara

I hope you enjoyed this Book Nook topic. If you have a favorite book that you use to promote story comprehension, I'd love to hear about it! Please send me your feedback.



A little more about me

I'm a Speech-Language Pathologist working at The Hanen Centre as a Program Specialist. I combine my background in language and literacy development with my knowledge of adult learning to offer evidence-based face to face and online trainings to early childhood educators, SLPs and parents.

The Book Nook combines my passion for children's literature with my knowledge of language and literacy development. I hope you enjoy it!

Tamara