Basic Reading Comprehension

Is your first grader full of questions? Most children are! With this activity, your child can ask away and develop some important reading and comprehension skills while he's at it.

A vital goal for first grade reading is the ability not just to decode text but to make real sense of it. Your child may be able to string sounds together, but what about plot points? Can he keep all those characters straight, and follow what's happening?

Here's an activity that teachers use all the time, and it works at home, too! It's simple and easy to set up, but it can lead to some very deep and complicated thinking, helping to develop those comprehension skills … just the ticket for your budding reader.

What You Need:

- Pad of sticky notes
- Pen
- Storybook you plan to read to your child

What You Do:

1. Find a book you think is really terrific, and can't wait to read to your child. Give yourself a treat, and read it front to back, just by yourself…no kid yet! What do you like about it? What does it teach?
2. Now go back, looking at each “spread” (the two pages you see when you hold the book open). Ask yourself a question: what's the most important thing happening in these two pages? This will vary, of course: it may be a change in the action; it may be a new character; it may be the way a main character is feeling.
3. For at least five spreads, jot an open ended question that you can ask your child to get at this main idea. Let's say, for example, that you're reading “Curious George.” You'll want to avoid closed ended questions such as “what color is George’s fur”—this will feel too simple to your first grader, and too much like a quiz. Instead, ask questions about George himself: “How does George feel about his broken bicycle?” Narrow your focus on predictions: “Do you think he can get it fixed?” Put your sticky note on that page.
4. Now read the book with your child, and savor it together. Each time you get to a sticky note question, pause and talk it over.
5. As you approach the end of the story, you will have had a rich conversation. Now, bring it to a close by holding the book shut for the very last page or two. Ask: “Okay, after all this, what do you think will happen?” Join your child in making predictions, and then read together. How do you feel at the end? Did the author surprise you? What do you think?
6. Note: If you're making a star chart, this is a great time to stick your evaluation on the wall. Moving forward, encourage your first grader to try writing some of his own sticky notes on a favorite, familiar book and then reading it to a smaller child, perhaps a sibling.