

# Technology in (Spl) Education » Working on Reading Comprehension with Students with Apraxia (or Any Non-Verbal Students)

<http://techinspecialied.com/2011/09/26/3370/>

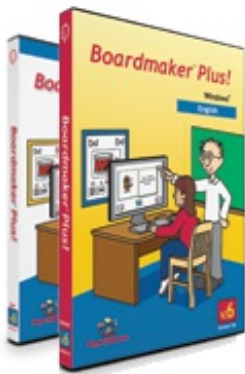
October 6, 2011

I'm not a researcher. I'm not a clinician. I'm not doctor, a Ph.D., or even a developer of a reading program. I am a teacher. I'm a teacher and I can only relay information that has worked for me.

So, please take this blog post with a grain of salt. And then throw it over your shoulder. Because you'll need an extra helping of good luck when it comes to working on reading comprehension with students with apraxia or any other non-verbal student. But it can be done.

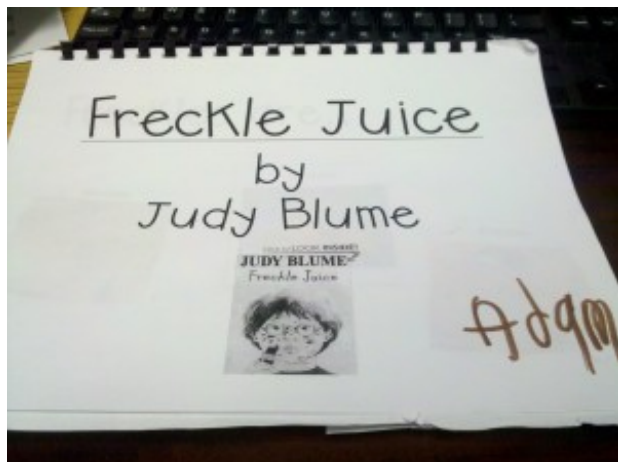
It can be done.

Here are some thoughts on how it can be done, followed by some of the things I have done that have worked...



1. **USE VISUALS.** First, determine what level your student may be at when using visuals. Does your child/student use a visual schedule? Is he working with objects, photos, picture icons, or symbols? Determine which make the most sense to your student. Use those types of visuals.
2. **USE VISUALS.** It's obviously easier to do when reading a picture book or decodable reader, but you can also make your own visuals to go with chapter books, nonfiction books, even text books. Use Google Images or Picture Symbols. Search for clip art or cut pictures out of magazines.
3. **USE VISUALS.** Are you sensing a pattern here?
4. **USE VISUALS.** After reading a story, article, or book using additional visuals (photos or icons), use those same icons to create a comprehension assessment or check for understanding. Since the student you are working

with struggles with expressive language, be sure that you cater to his/her receptive language skills. Ask a question and give three picture choices as possible responses. Students should point to or circle their answer.



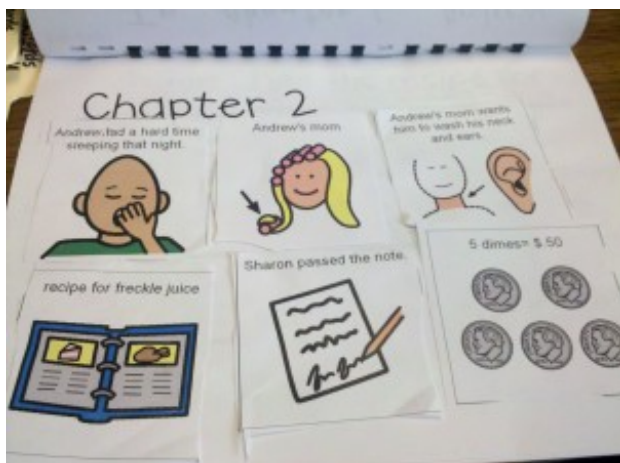
1. student's "level" as you begin this task, however, determine whether your student can make choices from 2, 3, or more picture choices. Also, if your student is struggling to comprehend a picture book designed for typical Kindergarten students, don't assume that he/she may understand a chapter book now that he may be in third grade. Work up to that level.
5. **USE YOURDATA.** You will likely know your

Here's an example of a unit we did last year with 3 third grade students who had limited expressive language.

I had a plan to read the short chapter book *Freckle Juice* by Judy Blume.

Before beginning the lesson, 3 “notebooks” were created with blank pages titled “Characters,” “Setting,” “Chapter 1,” “Chapter 2,” “Chapter 3,” “Chapter 4,” “Chapter 5,” and “New Vocabulary.” Each page, or several pages, was left blank to leave room to glue in additional visuals for the story. Each student received a notebook that traveled home at night and back to school each day (to keep parents in the loop).

Each child was also assigned to reread the chapter each night that we had read during the school day. Again, the “notebook” went home with the students in order to use additional visuals to improve attention to the story as it was being read aloud.



All 3 students were then introduced to the book *Freckle Juice*. Together, we tried to make predictions using picture cues. Students were given visual picture symbols from the Boardmaker Plus software and asked to choose reasonable visuals to show their predictions.

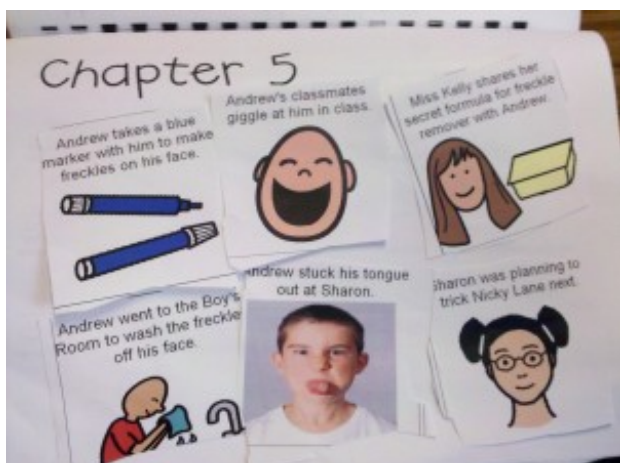
Predictions were then posted on a “graphic blog” known as a “glog” as this is a visual representation of linguistic information.

Next, we began to read aloud. Each time a new character was introduced to the story, we would stop and glue his/her picture (photo or icon level) into our “notebooks.” Each time a new setting was

introduced, we would stop to glue in this picture as well. Each time we had completed a chapter, we would glue in new visuals. We would then read the chapter again the next day to review and incorporate those visuals.

Also, at the end of each chapter, we would fill in the events on our “graphic blog” to be visually reminded of the events in each chapter. We could go to this “glog” on [edu.glogster.com](http://edu.glogster.com) daily to review our story map before reading aloud.

Because *Freckle Juice* is a relatively short chapter book, we checked for understanding after chapters 1 and 2, then after chapters 3-5. We used the same visual cues that were provided in the notebook on the assessment. Students had to circle their answers from a choice of 2, 3, or 4 picture choices (depending on each child).



Remarkably, all 3 students maintained an 80% or higher on both assessments.

And because of this success, we tried the process again with the book *Beezus and Ramona* by Beverly Cleary. Although we eventually stopped at chapter 5 in *Beezus and Ramona* due to stamina and attention span, students had an average of 70% or higher on the end of chapter assessments.

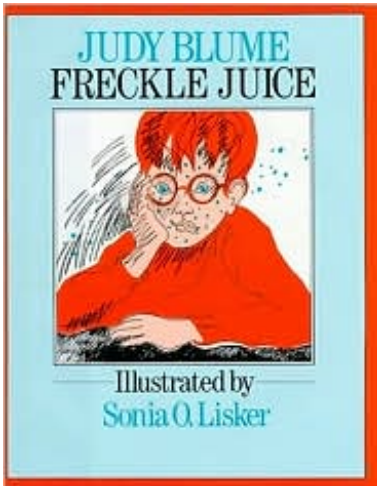
(If interested, please go to <http://www.boardmakershare.com> to find the *Freckle Juice* and *Beezus and Ramona* visuals and assessments that we made.)

Additionally, at school, we planned to read the book using the iPad (Kindle for iPad App) in order to enlarge the few visuals already found in the book.

In closing, it is clear to me that our students need to be taught the way they learn best. Many of our students with apraxia and those who are non-verbal learn best visually. They also learn kinesthetically (cutting and gluing, turning the pages of the notebook, holding an object that pertains to the story, manipulating web sites on an interactive whiteboard, etc.). Teaching and assessing reading comprehension is a concept that has to be individualized for each student, and if we provide enough support, we will realize the abilities to comprehend material has been there all along.

I encourage you to find your own ways to teach and assess reading comprehension, but I encourage you to make it fun! Make it meaningful! Make it purposeful! And make it VISUAL!

### Book used



Supporting Docs:

1. [Freckle Juice-Visuals](#)
2. Freckle Juice – [Quizzes with visual supports](#)

Short Bio: Morgan Kolis is a special education teacher who has been worked with students with mild, moderate, and intensive special needs for the past 9 years. Morgan maintains two teaching licensures (in Early Education PreK-3 and as an Intervention Specialist), and one endorsement (Reading K-12) in Ohio. Morgan has also earned a Master's of Education degree in the area of Educational Technology. Morgan is a former Cleveland Cavaliers' Head of the Class Teacher and a Plain Dealer Crystal Apple award recipient. Morgan maintains two blogs, one at

<http://staff.bbhcscd.org/kolism> and one at <http://mlkolis.blogspot.com>.

