

Read and reason

Small reading and maths challenges

ABC

5 LESSONS + ANSWERS

1. Find a clue in a story
2. Understand a word from its context
3. Choose the right operation

Before you begin

Five activities to read carefully, explain an answer, calculate and write. Read the example first, then try the challenge on paper. Compare your approach with the answers afterwards. The approximate age range of 8–11 is a guide; this short book does not cover a complete school curriculum. Ask an adult to explain an instruction if needed. The French edition adapts the same activities; this is not a translation course.

03 / 1. Find a clue in a story

04 / 2. Understand a word from its context

05 / 3. Choose the right operation

06 / 4. Work out a duration

07 / 5. Write and reread a short story

Answers on the final page.

1. Find a clue in a story

Read this original story.

Mila is preparing a small classroom display. She brings three shells she found with her father on a beach where collecting them was allowed. Each shell sits on a square of blue paper. Before the other pupils arrive, a window bangs. Two squares fall to the floor. Mila closes the window and puts the papers back on the table. Then she places a small stone on each one, without covering the shells.

Some questions ask for written information: how many shells did Mila bring? The text says three. Other questions ask you to connect clues: why did she add the stones? Think about the window, the fallen papers and how light the papers are.

To answer, write a sentence and point to a helpful detail. If the text does not tell you something, say so. You do not need to invent an answer.

YOUR TURN

A. Why does Mila add stones? B. Do we know the beach's name? Explain.

2. Understand a word from its context

An unfamiliar word does not always mean you must stop reading. Look at the words around it. In 'Lila moves cautiously over the slippery stones', the slippery stones provide a clue: Lila is being careful not to fall.

Replace the word with an expression you know, then read again. 'Lila moves with care' keeps the meaning. 'Lila moves quickly' adds an idea the sentence does not give you.

If several meanings still seem possible, a suitable dictionary can help. Choose the meaning that fits the sentence, not simply the first one listed. The same word can mean different things in different places: the bark of a tree and the bark of a dog are not the same thing.

To remember a word, write a new short sentence using it. This checks whether you can use the word, rather than only repeat a definition.

YOUR TURN

In 'The bag is so light that Sami lifts it with one hand', what does light mean? Write another sentence using that meaning.

3. Choose the right operation

Before calculating, explain the problem in your own words. Are you finding a total, what remains or equal groups? An operation answers a particular question.

Example: a class has four boxes with six pencils in each. To find the total, calculate $4 \times 6 = 24$ pencils. If five are lent out, $24 - 5 = 19$ remain. The two calculations describe different steps.

You can draw the boxes or write a repeated addition: $6 + 6 + 6 + 6$. Drawing is useful when it helps you understand. Keep the units: 24 pencils is not 24 boxes.

Finally, check whether your answer is possible. After lending pencils, there should be fewer left than before. This check does not replace the calculation, but it can help you notice a wrong sign or a missing piece of information.

YOUR TURN

A library receives 3 boxes of 8 books. It puts 7 on a table. How many are left to shelve? Write both calculations.

4. Work out a duration

One hour contains sixty minutes. To find a duration, move to an easy landmark first, then finish the journey. From 9:45 to 10:20, there are fifteen minutes to 10:00, then another twenty minutes. The duration is 35 minutes.

Draw a line with those three times. The jumps along it represent durations; the numbers underneath represent times of day. It helps to keep them separate.

To check, start at the beginning time and add your answer. A negative duration would be impossible if the finish comes after the start on the same day.

When planning an activity, remember transitions too. Getting equipment ready is not always included in an exercise's advertised length. For this question, though, use only the times given. There is no need to invent extra preparation time.

YOUR TURN

A workshop begins at 14:35 and ends at 15:10 on the same day. How long does it last?

5. Write and reread a short story

A short story can have three moments: a situation, an event and an ending. Choose a character, a place and an object. Then ask what changes.

For example, a child looks for a notebook in a library. They discover that it contains readers' recommendations. They decide to add their own. The ending connects to the beginning: the notebook was not lost; its purpose was simply unknown.

Write to tell the story first. Then reread with one question at a time. Is it clear who acts? Do events follow one another? Does each sentence begin with a capital letter and end with punctuation?

Read quietly aloud if that helps. When a sentence feels too long, try dividing it in two. You can improve a piece of writing without changing every idea. A reader should be able to follow your story rather than having to guess it.

YOUR TURN

Write five sentences featuring a character, a key and a garden. Reread using the lesson's three questions.

Answers and suggestions

1. A. The stones hold the papers down; the banging window and fallen papers provide clues. B. No beach name is given.
2. Light means not heavy here. Example: 'This small basket is light.' Other suitable sentences are possible.
3. $3 \times 8 = 24$ books received; $24 - 7 = 17$ books left to shelve.
4. From 14:35 to 15:00: 25 minutes. Then 10 more minutes. Total: 35 minutes.
5. Open answer. Check for the character, key and garden, a clear sequence of events and punctuation. Many different stories can meet the challenge.

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