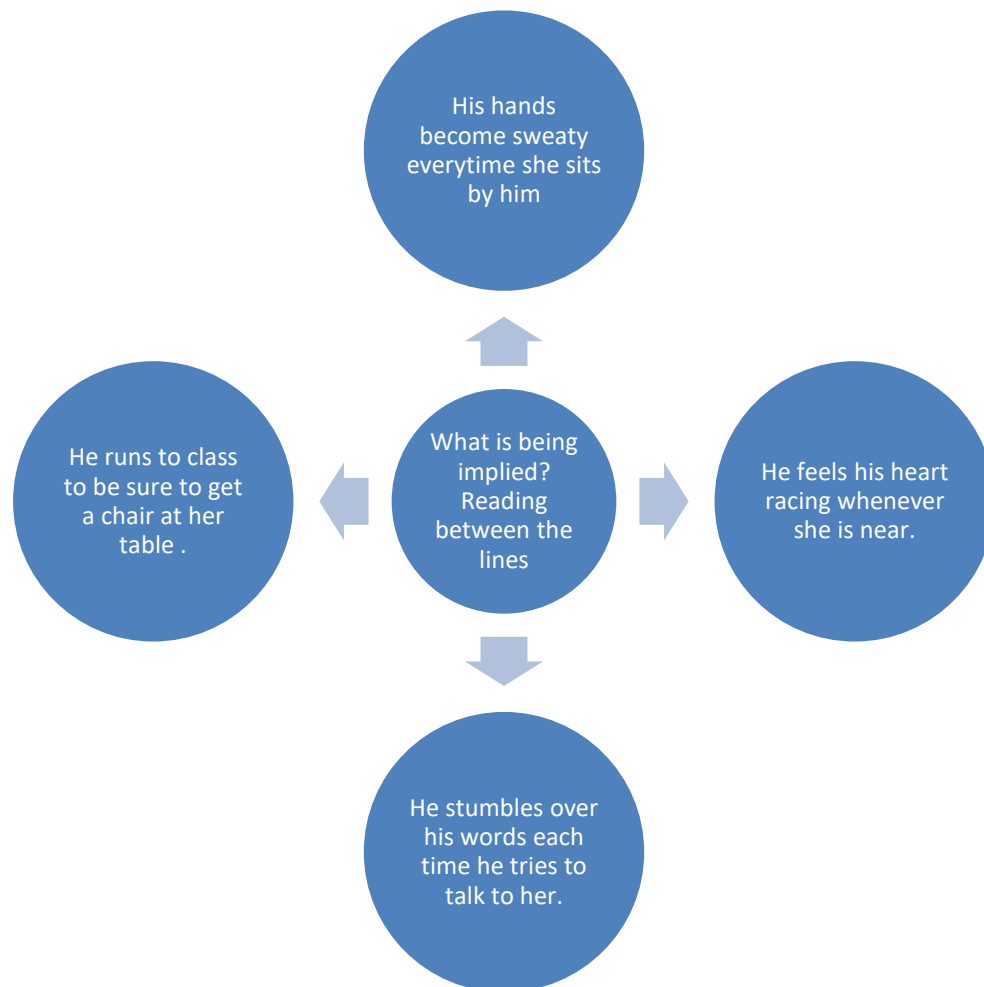Why they may struggle- Students on the spectrum will often score two to four grade levels below their peers on reading comprehension, even though they are reading material at much higher levels. In the typical phonics-based reading models we assume that all students will flow from decoding, to fluency, and then next comes comprehension. However, if you learn to read by matching words to pictures then those assumptions do not hold. Most of these students are visual learners. Through repetition of seeing objects paired with words they tend to have a "picture card dictionary" in their heads. This strategy works very well for Nouns. Verbs that put the objects in motion are not much trouble either. Descriptive and limiting adjectives simply adjust the picture in their minds. What does a "very" look like? What does a question mark do to a picture? Is the "He" or "She" the same picture as the name of the person the paragraph was talking about? As they scan each word they may be running something like a Google Image search on each word. This gives them a very literal interpretation of the written word.

His hands become sweaty everytime she sits by him

He runs to class to be sure to get a chair at her table .

What is being implied? Reading between the lines

He feels his heart racing whenever she is near.

He stumbles over his words each time he tries to talk to her.

Excerpted from "Solving the Autism Puzzle Piece by Piece: Strategies for Teachers and Parents, Bruno & Pontello

Strategies

o **Skills Model-** Like every other skill we teach, this is going to require Modeling, Guided Practice, Independent Practice, and Feedback. Move from easy to hard and concrete to abstract.

o **Punctuation-** When students convert language to pictures they can have great difficulty understanding how a sentence changes based on the punctuation. What does a question mark do to a picture? When I see quotation marks can I link the quote to the correct speaker? Learning to link pronouns to the subject requires practice and is best taught by physically marking up a text or completing a graphic organizer.

o **Non-Fiction, then Fiction-** Using non-fiction to practice the skills eliminates problems with inference, tone, author's perspective, genre, etc. This is an object centered brain and non-fiction is a little easier to search for the factual information and practice reading comprehension skills. As the basic skills are mastered you can then begin to move to simple fiction that has a limited amount of complications such as having a narrator who is not a character or texts that require a high amount of inferencing.

o **Graphic Organizers-** Having a visual tool to help decode a paragraph or a chapter will help the student learn to analyze text and break it down into the important parts. This will also help you determine where they are struggling the most. Frayer models, labeling elements of a genre, identifying figures of speech, and diagraming concept maps that help identify what is being inferred are all helpful to visual thinkers.

o **Mapping out Perspectives-** Perspective taking is a deficit so understanding a text that uses a narrator will be difficult. Helping to show how a text can tell a story from different character's perspectives can help.

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