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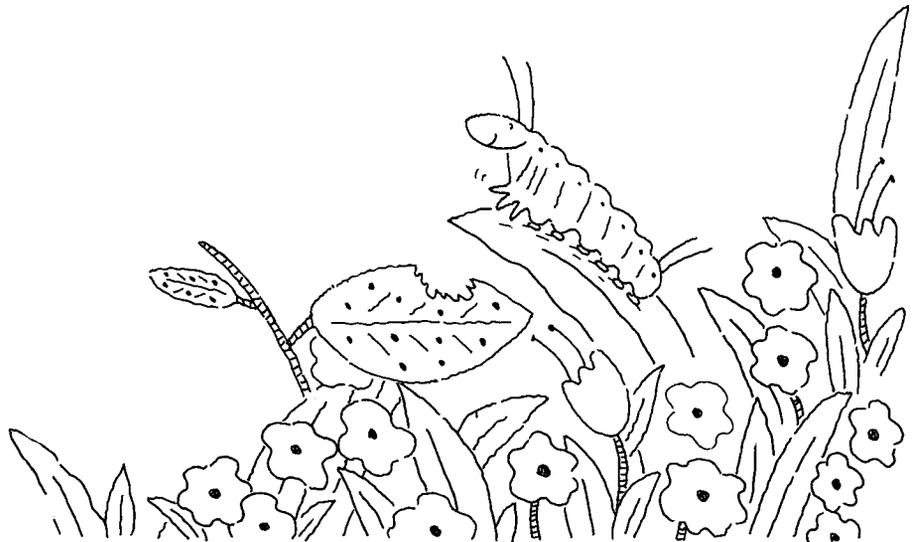
**BEST
PRACTICES**
in Action

Fluency Practice

Read-Aloud Plays

GRADES 1-2

BY KATHLEEN M. HOLLENBECK



NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • AUCKLAND • SYDNEY
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Teaching
Resources



*To Lyn Bernadyn
and Carolyn Kullberg,
whose commitment and expertise
never fail to inspire.*



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Contents



Introduction	4
Fluency: An Overview	5
What Is Fluency?	5
How Does Fluency Develop?	5
Ways to Build Fluency	5
Bringing Oral Reading into Your Classroom	7
Where Does Vocabulary Fit In?	8
Enhancing Comprehension	8
Assessing Fluency	9
Teacher Rubric for Oral Reading Fluency	10
Student Checklist for Self-Assessment	11
Using the Plays to Enhance Fluency	12
A Fluency Mini-Lesson	12
Play Readability Scores	14
Preparing for Difficult or Unfamiliar Text	15
Using Readers Theater	16
Tips for Building Fluency with Readers Theater	16
Using Language Clues to Develop a Strong Performance	17
Manipulating the Script	18
Enhancing the Readers Theater Experience	19
Resources for Reading Fluency, Comprehension, and Readers Theater	21
The Plays	24
Three Nice Mice	24
Who Needs a Fan?	27
Bear Cub Comes Home	30
The Last Apple	34
The Sun Will Come	37
I'm First!	40
Live at the Number Games	44
Polly Learns to Swim	48
Babe Ruth	52
Bella and Jade	56
Betsy Ross	61
Chicken Tricks	65
Cats Care for Their Kittens	70
Hide and Go Seek!	74
Little Puppy	78



INTRODUCTION

Fluency, the ability to decode words quickly and accurately, is more than just a buzzword in education. It is a fundamental skill that must be achieved in order for readers to find meaning in words.

Oral reading offers tremendous insight into a student's level of fluency. The fluent reader glides through text almost effortlessly, reading with meaning, expression, and appropriate pacing. A struggling reader labors over words, deciphering them in a slow, halting manner that hinders comprehension.

Training and practice are essential to achieving reading fluency, and oral reading offers an unmatched opportunity for both. *Read-Aloud Plays for Building Fluency: Grades 1–2* provides 15 oral reading opportunities that make reading practice easy, entertaining, and rewarding. The plays explore topics from core-curricular areas and adhere to national standards for first and second grades.

In addition to the plays, inside this book you'll find activities to strengthen skills in fluency, phonics, and oral reading; a section devoted to enhancing the Readers Theater experience (see Using Readers Theater, page 16); and tools for assessment, including a teacher rubric and a checklist students can use to guide and monitor their own reading progress (see Assessing Fluency, page 9). The plays and activities target specific skills designed to increase word recognition, decoding accuracy, use of expression, and ultimately, comprehension—the primary goal of reading instruction.

The text adheres to vocabulary standards based on the studies of Harris and Jacobson. These standards ensure that your students will encounter words contained in the first- and second-grade reading vocabularies rather than those that might hinder their progress.

The text of each play has been leveled using readability scores from the Lexile Framework for Reading (see chart, page 14). These scores offer guidelines to help you select the scripts that best match the needs and reading levels of each student. The plays are ready for use to practice, strengthen, and assess skills in reading fluency. And they all share the same objective: to give students practice reading comfortably, confidently, and with enthusiasm, helping to build an ever-growing flock of fluent readers within the walls of your classroom.



Fluency: An Overview

What Is Fluency?

Fluency is the mark of a proficient reader. When a student reads text quickly, gets most of the words right, and uses appropriate expression and phrasing, we say that he or she has achieved fluency. Fluency frees readers from the struggle that slows them down. Hence, they are able to read for meaning and to understand. They can attend to the details of text, pausing as indicated and varying tone and pace to enhance comprehension for both themselves and potential listeners.

How Does Fluency Develop?

As with every skill worth developing, fluency sharpens with experience. Exposure to print, immersion in a rich linguistic environment, and practice, practice, practice all lead to fluent reading.

From the emergent on up, readers must learn and apply tools to help them advance. The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) speaks of fluency as a skill in flux.

“Fluency is not a stage of development at which readers can read all words quickly and easily. Fluency changes, depending on what readers are reading, their familiarity with the words, and the amount of their practice with reading text. Even very skilled readers may read in a slow, labored manner when reading texts with many unfamiliar words or topics.” (NIFL, 2001)

Readers are most comfortable (and most fluent) when reading what they have seen before or what they know most about. When venturing beyond these areas, they must rely on word attack skills, prior knowledge, and the host of tools that have helped them advance to this point.

Ways to Build Fluency

Two words encompass what readers require for the development of fluency: *exposure* and *practice*. To foster fluent reading, be sure to:

- * **MODEL FLUENT READING.** Read aloud to students. As you read, model (and point out) aspects of fluent reading such as phrasing, pacing, and expression. Help students understand that people aren't born knowing how to do this; they learn it by hearing it and trying it themselves.

“Fluent readers read aloud effortlessly and with expression. Their reading sounds natural, as if they are speaking. Readers who have not yet developed fluency read slowly, word by word. Their oral reading is choppy and plodding.”

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
LITERACY, 2001



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- * **PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH PLENTY OF READING PRACTICE.** Oral reading is highly effective for tracking and strengthening fluency. It enables both the reader and the listener to hear the reader and assess progress, and it allows the listener to provide guidance as needed. Whisper reading serves as a transition from oral to silent reading. In whisper reading, all students read aloud at the same time, but at a volume that is just barely audible. The student is able to self-monitor, and the teacher can move around the room, noting progress, keeping students on task, and offering guidance as needed. For silent reading, students read an assigned passage or a book of their own choice. Because the reader cannot be heard, assessment of reading skill is not possible. The value of silent reading is that it increases time spent reading and gives students “opportunities to expand and practice reading strategies” (Fountas and Pinnell, 2001).
 - * **SELECT APPROPRIATE TEXT.** To develop fluency, a student must practice reading text at his or her independent reading level—the level at which he or she is able to accurately decode 96 to 100 percent of the words in a given text. This level varies for every student. By assessing each student’s reading level up front, you will be prepared to select appropriate texts and ensure that your students get a lot of practice reading at a level at which they achieve success (Rasinski, 2003; Worthy and Broaddus, 2001/2002). For information about how to use text to assess fluency, see *Assessing Fluency*, page 9.
 - * **RAISE THE BAR.** Read aloud to students from text that is above their independent reading level, exposing them to new and more difficult words and concepts without the pressure of having to decode.
 - * **GIVE ROOM TO GROW.** To help a student advance in fluency, present text at his or her instructional level. This text can be read with 90 to 95 percent accuracy. With a little help, the student can get almost all the words right (Blevins, 2001a; Rasinski, 2003).
 - * **PROVIDE DIRECT INSTRUCTION AND FEEDBACK.** Prepare students before they read. First review phonics skills they will need to decode words. Draw attention to sight words, root words, affixes, and word chunks. Preteach difficult or unfamiliar words. Demonstrate the use of intonation, phrasing, and expression, and tell children when they have done these well. Listen to children read, and offer praise as well as helpful tips for the next attempt.
 - * **USE A VARIETY OF READING MATERIALS.** In addition to the plays included in this book, fiction stories, nonfiction passages, and poetry offer a rich and varied reading experience. Expose your students to each of these. Give them many opportunities to get excited about and immerse themselves in what they are reading.

* **HIGHLIGHT PHRASING.** One of the most effective ways to help students who are struggling with fluency is to use phrase-cued text. Phrase-cued text is marked by slashes to indicate where readers should pause. One slash indicates a pause or meaningful chunk of text within a sentence. Two slashes indicates a longer pause at the end of a sentence. Ready-made samples of phrase-cued text are available (see Resources for Reading Fluency, Comprehension, and Readers Theater, page 21), but you can also convert any passage of text to phrase-cued text by reading it aloud, listening for pauses and meaningful chunks of text, and drawing slashes in the appropriate places. (See the example, below, from the play “Bear Cub Comes Home,” page 30.) Model fluent reading with proper phrasing and invite students to practice with the text you have marked.

Narrator : The little cub/ walked and walked.//
He came/ to a forest.

Bear Cub: I am/ very sleepy.// I will/ lie down/ and rest.//
I will/ look for/ my home/ tomorrow.//

Bringing Oral Reading into Your Classroom

Provide opportunities for children to read aloud. This may include any or all of the following:

- * **INTERACTIVE READ-ALoud:** An adult reader demonstrates fluent oral reading and talks about how he or she changes tone, pace, or expression in response to the play, story, or poem. Students enjoy a dramatic reading and absorb skills in fluent reading. In addition, the interactive read-aloud provides an opportunity for teachers to ask open-ended questions before, during, and after the reading, soliciting students’ prior knowledge and extending their understanding, comprehension, and connection with the topic. This connection can advance student interaction with the text and promote optimal conditions for fluency.
- * **SHARED READING:** An adult reader models fluent reading and then invites children to read along, using Big Books or small-group instruction.
- * **CHORAL READING:** An adult and children read aloud together. This activity works especially well with poetry and cumulative tales.
- * **ECHO READING:** A child repeats phrases or sentences read by someone else, mimicking tone, expression, and pacing.

“Students who are having trouble with comprehension may not be putting words together in meaningful phrases or chunks as they read. Their oral reading is characterized by a choppy, word-by-word delivery that impedes comprehension. These students need instruction in phrasing written text into appropriate segments.”

(BLEVINS, 2001A)

As the child approaches a new text he is entitled to an introduction so that when he reads, the gist of the whole or partly revealed story can provide some guide for a fluent reading. He will understand what he reads if it refers to things he knows about, or has read about previously, so that he is familiar with the topic, the vocabulary or the story itself. ”

(CLAY, 1991)

- * **REPEATED READING:** An adult reads aloud while a student listens and then reads again while the student follows along. Then the adult invites the student to read along, and finally, the student reads the same text aloud alone. This technique is most helpful for struggling readers.
- * **PAIRED REPEATED READING:** Teachers group students in pairs, matching above-level readers with on-level readers and on-level readers with those below level. Partners are encouraged to take turns reading aloud to each other, each reading a short passage three times and then getting feedback. The manner of grouping provides every struggling reader with a more proficient reader to model.
- * **READERS THEATER:** Students work in groups to rehearse and perform one or more plays from this book. Performing can be exciting, and the drive to present well can be a powerful force behind mastering fluency in reading and speech, motivating both struggling and proficient readers. (For more about Readers Theater, including activities for building fluency, see page 16.)
- * **TAPE-ASSISTED READING:** Children listen to books on tape while reading along in a book. (Consider recording your own tapes if commercially made tapes go too quickly, or if the tapes include background elements, such as music or sound effects, which can be distracting.) Children can also listen to and critique their own reading on tape.
- * **PHRASE-CUED TEXT:** See Highlight Phrasing, page 7.

Where Does Vocabulary Fit In?

Stumbling over words constitutes one of the main setbacks on the way to fluency. It remains in your students' best interest, then, to grow familiar with words they will likely encounter in reading. Cunningham and Allington (2003) urge active use of word walls, inviting student participation in choosing words to put on the walls, eliminating words rarely used, and reviewing the list of words daily.

Enhancing Comprehension

In all reading instruction, it is important to remember that reading imparts meaning, and so the fundamental goal of reading is to comprehend. All other instruction—phonics, phonemic awareness, auditory discrimination—is wasted effort if comprehension gets lost in the process. Consequently, those who find no purpose or meaning in the written word will soon lose interest in reading it altogether. Avoid this by teaching your students strategies to enhance comprehension. Help them learn to question the text they are reading. *What is the message? Does it make sense to them? Do they know what it means?* Find out by asking questions. Ask questions before



students read, to prepare them for the play. Ask as they read, to deepen their understanding of the text. Ask additional questions after they read, to clear up any comprehension issues and summarize the play. Teach your students to formulate questions of their own to give them a vested interest in what they are reading.

Assessing Fluency

There are two ways to assess a student's progress in fluency: informally and formally. Informal assessment involves listening to students read aloud, noting how easily, quickly, and accurately they read, and deciding how well they attend to phrasing, expression, and other elements. Formal assessment involves timing a student's oral reading to create a tangible record of his or her progress throughout the school year.

To conduct an informal assessment of students' reading fluency, use the reproducible Teacher Rubric for Oral Reading Fluency on page 10. Have a student read aloud for five to seven minutes while you note on the form the strategies the student uses as well as his or her reading strengths and difficulties.

Students can monitor their own progress using the Student Checklist for Self-Assessment on page 11. Photocopy and laminate this form for each student. Review the checklist components with students many times, until they understand the purpose of the checklist and the meaning of each statement. Encourage students to mentally complete the checklist from time to time to track their own reading fluency.

To carry out what is called timed repeated reading, select a passage of text (150–200 words) that is at the student's independent reading level and that he or she has never read before. Have the student read aloud the passage for one minute. Track your own copy of the text while he or she reads, marking words omitted or pronounced incorrectly. Count the number of words the student read correctly. Then give the student three one-minute opportunities (in separate sessions) to read the same text, and average the scores to obtain his or her oral reading fluency rate.*



IN CONCLUSION

Does fluency instruction work? Research has shown that concentrated reading instruction can dramatically improve reading comprehension and fluency, which in turn affect academic performance, self-esteem, and overall achievement. With this in mind, it is not only helpful to instruct with an eye toward fluency, it is essential.



“Instruction that focuses too heavily on word-perfect decoding sends a message that good reading is nothing more than accurate word recognition. As a result, students tend to shoot for accuracy at the expense of everything else, including meaning.”

(RASINSKI, 2004)



* For more detailed information on timed reading, consult Blevins (2001a, pp. 9–12) and Rasinski (2003, pp. 82–83).

Teacher Rubric for Oral Reading Fluency

Child's Name: _____ Date: _____

Grade: _____ Passage: _____

For each category, circle the number that best describes the student's performance.

Accuracy

4	Recognizes most words; works to pronounce unfamiliar words, repeating them to self-correct if necessary.
3	Recognizes most words; works to pronounce unfamiliar words, self-correcting if necessary; sometimes requires assistance.
2	Struggles to decode and decipher words; hesitates before attempting to pronounce new words; usually requires assistance.
1	Recognizes very few words; makes no attempt to pronounce unfamiliar words.

Expression and Volume

4	Uses expression and volume that is natural to conversational language and that varies according to the content of the text.
3	Uses expression and volume that is appropriate to conversational language and the content of the text; sometimes hesitates when unsure of text.
2	Often speaks softly and in a monotone; pays little attention to expression or volume; focuses on getting through the text.
1	Reads words in a monotone and in a quiet voice.

Phrasing

4	Groups words into meaningful phrases or chunks of text.
3	Usually groups words into meaningful phrases or chunks of text.
2	Reads primarily in groups of two or three words.
1	Reads word by word without meaning.

Pace

4	Reads at a suitable pace and responds to punctuation with appropriate pausing and intonation.
3	Usually reads at a suitable pace and attends to most punctuation with appropriate pausing and intonation; halts at times when unsure.
2	Reads slowly, sometimes two or three words at a time; halts often; pays little attention to punctuation or pacing.
1	Reads words slowly in a string; does not heed punctuation.

Prosody

4	Attends to the rhythm of language, reading comfortably and without hesitating or halting.
3	Occasionally halts or runs sentences together when challenged by words or sentence structure.
2	Reads smoothly at times but most often slowly.
1	Reading sounds stilted and unnatural and lacks meaning.

Source: Adapted from "Training Teachers to Attend to Their Students' Oral Reading Fluency," by J. Zurell and T. V. Rasinski, 1991, *Theory Into Practice*, 30, pp. 211–217. Used with permission of the authors. • *Fluency Practice Read-Aloud Plays: Grades 1–2* Scholastic Teaching Resources