

Jo Worthy
Karen Broaddus

Fluency beyond the primary grades: From group performance to silent, independent reading

Reading fluency contributes to comprehension and enjoyment, but is not commonly taught beyond the primary grades. Here are several suggestions for incorporating fluency practice in any classroom.

We all know fluent reading when we hear it, but what exactly is it? Fluency is integral to comprehension and is a critical component of successful reading, but even reading researchers don't agree on a single definition (Strecker, Roser, & Martinez, 1998). In fact, fluency is not a simple concept (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Like music, it consists not only of rate, accuracy, and automaticity, but also of phrasing, smoothness, and expressiveness. Fluency gives language its musical quality, its rhythm and flow, and makes reading sound effortless.

Even when classroom contexts and experiences are rich, many students do not develop oral reading fluency on their own (Pinnell et al., 1995) and need explicit instruction and experiences that specifically target fluency. Students also need to understand that the goal of reading is constructing meaning and that fluency in oral reading helps to develop ease, rate, and understanding while reading silently. Traditional methods of fluency practice, such as unrehearsed oral reading, may not focus on either comprehension or student engagement. In the literacy autobiographies of preservice teachers over the past 5 years, we have been struck by their enduring memories of this type of reading aloud in school. All names are pseudonyms.

Stacey: I felt that if I could read fast enough, the other kids wouldn't make fun of me. So while I was reading as fast as I could, I never focused on the meaning. I think this happens a lot because there's such a focus on reading the words right.

Lorraine: I don't remember anything about my first-grade reading experiences, but I do remember loving to read aloud in second grade. I also remember hating it when a few kids would read, because they were behind the rest of us and it took a long time.

Charles: Whenever it was my turn to read I would get cold sweats. I was so frustrated because I could only figure out maybe three words out of a sentence. So when I would try to read to the class *everyone* would laugh at me. I would always try to sound words out, waiting for the teacher to go ahead and tell me the word.

Although we have shared just a few voices, the message is overwhelming. Both experienced and less skilled readers have negative associations with oral reading in school. Where does that leave teachers who recognize that their students need explicit instruction in oral reading fluency? What strategies work and how much classroom time should be used to develop both oral fluency and silent independent reading? In this article, we begin by looking at what research has shown us about the importance of reading fluency in the elementary and middle grades. We also consider the limitations of some traditional

methods of fluency instruction in classroom settings. This article will demonstrate how engaging, effective oral fluency practice can be part of daily reading instruction and how such instruction and practice can help to develop independence and understanding in silent reading. Our approach includes explicit teacher modeling and teacher-guided time for group and independent oral and silent reading practice in materials from all areas of the curriculum.

Revisiting what we know about reading fluency

Reading fluency has a number of core components. Just as musicians learn common chords and melodic sequences, fluent readers must have a vocabulary of high-frequency words, grapho-phonetic skills, and strategies for accurately decoding new words. Frequent opportunities to practice identifying words through meaningful reading and writing experiences help the reader to achieve automatic word identification or automaticity, just as practicing scales and favorite pieces helps the musician to develop technical expertise. As the reader begins to group words together meaningfully, there is a gradual transition from word-by-word reading to reading in meaningful phrases (Bear, 1991; Clay & Imlach, 1971; Schreiber, 1987). As automaticity develops, the reader is able to read more quickly and focus more attention on meaning (Chall, 1979; LaBerge & Samuels, 1974). However, it is possible to read with accuracy, speed, and appropriate phrasing but without fluency and understanding (Aaron, 1989; Worthy & Invernizzi, 1996), just as it is possible to play a musical piece with technical accuracy but limited interpretation. In order to be truly fluent, a reader must comprehend and interpret text (Thurlow & van den Broek, 1997) and read with appropriate timing, expressiveness, stress, and intonation (Dowhower, 1994; National Reading Panel, 2000).

A classroom that fosters fluent reading development is full of interesting, well-written materials on every topic imaginable, in a variety of formats, and with a wide range of difficulty levels. Instructional activities and texts are purposeful and interesting, the atmosphere is positive and engaging, and there are many opportunities to read individually and with others. Just as in

the early grades, teachers read aloud with expression, introduce students to interesting materials, and share their enthusiasm about reading.

Why is fluency important?

After the primary grades, students are expected to read independently. As the volume and complexity of reading expectations and materials expand, students who are not developing fluency have a hard time understanding and keeping up with schoolwork and often find themselves in increasing difficulty even if they have previously done well. Students with inadequate fluency are also likely to avoid reading because of fear of failure and negative attitudes. Students who don't read don't "get good" at reading (Allington, 1977; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988); students who aren't good at reading don't read. Students who avoid reading have less exposure to ideas and vocabulary in books and may lose intellectual as well as academic ground (Stanovich, 1986). For these students, attention to fluency is critical.

What about traditional fluency instruction?

Dedicated fluency instruction is rarely found in classrooms or even in intervention programs (Allington, 1983; National Reading Panel, 2000; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Although shared reading is a feature of many primary classrooms, unrehearsed oral reading of textbooks and novels is often the only time when students read aloud.

Unrehearsed oral reading. This common practice in language arts and content area classes (sometimes called round-robin reading or "popcorn" reading), involves individual students who read an excerpt from a text while the rest of the class listens and follows along (Opitz & Rasinski, 1998). Most likely this activity descended from the late 19th-century practice of oral recitation of lessons. While it has been commonly used with basal readers, teacher's manuals do not recommend the practice because it focuses upon accurate word identification rather than constructing meaning. However, a look inside elementary and middle school classrooms (Worthy, 1996) affirms that round-robin reading still thrives. In the classrooms we've observed, teachers rarely provide feedback except to correct mistakes and tell students unknown words,

Performance-ready and easy-to-script resources for Readers Theatre

Poetry

- Adoff, Arnold. (1995). *Street music: City poems*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Bruchac, Joseph, & London, Jonathan. (1992). *Thirteen moons on turtle's back: A Native American year of moons*. New York: Lawrence Hill.
- Cole, Joanna, & Calmenson, Stephanie. (Eds.). (1990). *Miss Mary Mack and other children's street rhymes*. New York: Beech Tree.
- Fleischman, Paul. (2000). *Big talk: Poems for four voices*. New York: Candlewick.
- Greenfield, Eloise. (1991). *Night on neighborhood street*. New York: Dial.
- Hopkins, Lee Bennett. (Ed.). (1987). *More surprises*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Janeczko, Paul B. (1998). *That sweet diamond*. New York: Atheneum.
- Kuskin, Karla. (1992). *Soap soup, and other verses*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Morrison, Lillian. (Ed.). (1995). *Slam dunk: Basketball poems*. New York: Hyperion.
- Nye, Naomi Shihab. (1992). *This same sky: A collection of poems from around the world*. New York: Four Winds Press.
- Schwartz, Alvin. (1989). *I saw you in the bathtub and other folk rhymes*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Soto, Gary. (1992). *Neighborhood odes*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- Stevenson, James. (1995). *Sweet corn poems*. New York: Greenwillow.

Fiction and folk tales

- Browne, Anthony. (1998). *Voices in the park*. New York: DK Publishing.
- Fletcher, Ralph. (1998). *Flying solo*. New York: Clarion.
- Fox, Mem. (1992). *Hattie and the fox*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Marshall, Edward. (1983). *Fox at School*. New York: Puffin.
- Minters, Frances. (1994). *Cinder Elly*. New York: Viking.
- Pughiano, Carol. (1997). *Easy to read folk and fairy tale plays*. New York: Scholastic. (Easy and short, written at first- to third-grade reading levels.)
- Scieszka, Jon. (1992). *The stinky cheese man and other fairly stupid tales*. New York: Viking.
- Shepard, Aaron. (April 14, 1997). *Aaron Shepard's RT page*. <http://www.aaronsherp.com>. (Readers Theatre written on a range of difficulty levels, from third grade to high school.)
- Thaler, Mike. (1989). *The teacher from the black lagoon*. New York: Scholastic.

(continued)

making the instructional value of this procedure questionable (Stallings, 1980). Typically, each student reads only a small segment of text while others wait to read, wasting valuable instructional time (National Reading Panel, 2000). Skilled readers are often bored by the slow pace, and less skilled readers are often reading materials that are above their instructional level. Frustration level reading does not improve oral reading fluency and can lead to negative feelings about reading (Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

Repeated reading. This is perhaps the most common form of instruction focused specifically on fluency for upper elementary and middle school students. In contrast to unrehearsed oral reading, repeated reading procedures are designed so that students practice rereading a familiar text with teacher guidance and feedback (National Reading Panel, 2000). The usual format for repeated reading is to choose a book or excerpt that is easy to understand and that provides an appropriate balance of success and challenge in word recognition. The teacher may initially read the text aloud, discuss it with students, and provide support until students can read it independently. Next, students reread the text, usually individually, until they reach an appropriate level of accuracy and speed. A variation on repeated reading often used with older students is timed repeated reading, in which the reading is timed and the rate charted on a graph (Samuels, 1979).

Repeated reading with attention to text comprehension has been shown to be effective in experimental studies, as determined by a meta-analysis conducted by the National Reading Panel (2000). In addition to improving speed and accuracy, guided repeated reading has been shown to improve word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a variety of grade levels and educational settings, with both skilled and challenged readers. How can educators take advantage of the benefits of repeated reading to provide fluency instruction that will be engaging and meaningful for students past the primary grades? In the next section, we describe an approach to fluency instruction using guided repeated reading.

Promoting reading fluency and independent reading through performance

Reading fluency develops over time through modeling and instruction, and guided and independent practice in a variety of texts. In our many years of teaching and working with teachers and students, a practice that we have found that addresses all of these areas is reading performance. This activity combines the proven benefits of repeated reading with inherently meaningful activities that appeal to students. In most classrooms, performance is limited to special occasions. Struggling readers are rarely given speaking parts, a situation that reinforces their already low self-confidence. When reading performance becomes a regular part of the reading program, all students have an opportunity to practice and to successfully perform.

Students engage in repeated reading with a purpose as they rehearse a poem, joke, story, Readers Theatre script, speech, or other text until they can read it fluently and then perform it for an audience. Effective performances are built upon positive social interactions focused on reading. Teacher instruction and feedback are natural components of rehearsing. Reading performance encourages students to read at a rate appropriate to the particular text rather than to simply read faster. When students are able to interpret and read texts with expression, their comprehension improves. In the following sections, we first discuss the teacher's role in modeling and instructing students in oral reading fluency to build a foundation for successful performance. Next, we explore a variety of approaches to reading performance. Finally, we offer suggestions for providing materials and instruction to promote the transfer of fluency to silent independent reading. Texts suitable for modeling and performance are listed in the Sidebar.

Modeling fluent reading with explicit instruction

Modeling by reading aloud helps students understand what fluency sounds like and is essential to its development. Reading aloud exposes and supports students in reading and engaging with texts that they may not be able to handle independently, and it also enhances comprehen-

sion development. In more explicit modeling, students listen to an expert read, usually following the print, and either repeat the text (echo reading) or read along with the expert reader (choral reading). Benefits of modeled reading include gains in rate, accuracy, phrasing, segmentation, and expression (Chomsky, 1978; Schreiber, 1987). Holdaway's shared reading approach (1979) is an example of modeled reading that is excellent for beginning readers but is not typically used beyond the primary grades. Most older students will be moving toward independent reading even if they still have limited skills, and they may be impatient with the approach. However, even in upper elementary and middle school, shared reading can be used to help students learn how to "season" their oral reading with expression and change voices for different characters (Ivey, 1999). Most primary teachers use song and poetry charts that students

Performance-ready and easy-to-script resources for Readers Theatre (continued)

Mathematics, social studies, and science

- Carle, Eric. (Ed.). (1989). *Animals, animals*. New York: Scholastic.
- Cummings, Pat, & Cummings, Linda. (Eds.). (1998). *Talking with adventurers*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society.
- Demi. (1997). *One grain of rice: A mathematical folktale*. New York: Scholastic.
- Florian, Douglas. (1998). *insectlopedia*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace.
- Hopkins, Lee Bennett. (Ed.). (1997). *Marvelous math*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Hutchins, Pat. (1986). *The doorbell rang*. New York: Greenwillow.
- King, Casey, & Osborne, Linda Barrett. (1997). *Oh, freedom! Kids talk about the Civil Rights movement with the people who made it happen*. New York: Knopf.
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1997). *I have a dream*. New York: Scholastic. (King's speech illustrated.)
- Koss, Amy Goldman. (1987). *Where do fish go in the winter and answers to other great mysteries*. Los Angeles: Price Stern Sloan.
- Lawlor, Veronica. (1995). *I was dreaming of coming to America: Memories from the Ellis Island oral history project*. New York: Penguin.
- Polacco, Patricia. (1994). *Pink and Say*. New York: Philomel.
- Scieszka, Jon. (1995). *Math curse*. New York: Viking.
- Turner, Ann Warren. (1997). *Mississippi mud: Three prairie journals*. New York: HarperCollins.

learn to read and sing. This is also an excellent activity for elementary and even middle school. The teacher or students might choose a poem or song per week, write it on a chart, and start off each day or period with a choral reading. Suggested poetry collections, which contain humorous poems and poems from various cultures and countries, are included in the "Poetry" section of the Sidebar.

Some students may need more explicit instruction and modeling in fluency. Just as metacognitive strategy instruction helps students learn to monitor their reading, metacognitive instruction can help students develop and monitor their fluency. Students need to recognize that they are partners in the learning process and that the teacher is available as a coach or consultant rather than as the director or sole bearer of information. Students who feel in control of their own learning, who know *why* fluency is important and what can help to improve it, are more likely to engage in the kinds of repeated practice that lead to improved fluency. These experiences help students learn how to adapt their reading to different situations and texts. Thus, all fluency instruction should include demonstrations and discussions of the what, how, when, and why of the activity.

A minilesson format is helpful for teaching different aspects of fluency, but it is important that students start with a big picture before focusing on a specific component. A minilesson on reading with expression using the book *Tacky the Penguin* (Lester, 1988), for example, might begin with a read-aloud, with the teacher modeling fluent reading to students. The book is about an outgoing, boisterous penguin, who is very different from his reserved, well-mannered friends. The book is perfect for demonstrating how to read dialogue with appropriate voice and expression based on character interpretation. The process begins with modeling and discussion, with the teacher asking students to listen carefully to the voices of Tacky (loud, obnoxious, and off-key) and the other penguins (soft and harmonious). The teacher and students then talk about how and why the voices were read differently. The next step is guided practice, in which students practice reading the parts as a group while the teacher listens and provides feedback on interpretation and expression. For practice, students can work either independently or in groups, read-

ing dialogue from *Tacky* or other books with lively characters and dialogue (e.g., Thaler's 1989 *The Teacher From the Black Lagoon*).

Modeled reading may be especially beneficial for struggling readers (Chomsky, 1978; Samuels, 1979). When teachers read high-interest books aloud to their class, they are familiarizing students with new texts that they can reread either during group practice or silent, independent reading. Using books on audiotape also allows students access to a wide range of texts for independent listening. Audiotaped books "encourage less able readers to use the meaning of the language to help them decode, increase fluency and comprehend," and give second language learners "an opportunity to hear the rhythm of the language" (Barr & Johnson, 1991, p. 403). It is important, however, that students understand their task and learn the procedures well enough to do them independently, and that teachers have a system for monitoring comprehension and progress, such as retelling the events of the text and then predicting what will happen next. When they have learned the procedures, students can listen to audiotapes during free-reading time, center or seatwork time, or at home. Reading audiotaped books is a great combination approach for focusing simultaneously on fluency and comprehension improvement. Modeled reading and explicit fluency instruction are natural setups for reading performance.

Reading performance

Readers Theatre. In this activity, students perform a play (usually a book adapted in script form) by reading it aloud to an audience. Props are used sparingly, as the focus is on reading fluently to convey meaning. Because the difficulty level of parts within a script can vary widely, Readers Theatre is an excellent activity for grouping students by interest rather than reading level. It is critical, however, that students take parts in which they can be successful.

Poetry is also perfect for reading performance. After completing a unit on poetry, one fifth-grade class decided to perform their favorite humorous poems by Jack Prelutsky and Shel Silverstein. The teacher divided the 25 students into groups of 5, each responsible for presenting several poems. Students had 3 days (approximately 15 minutes each day) to prepare for the performance. Each group presented their

poems to the laughter and applause of the rest of the class. This experience and the class's response was especially gratifying for the struggling readers, who were able to read smoothly because they had sufficient practice and teacher guidance. Average and high-achieving readers also benefit from fluency practice and the opportunity to make personal decisions about how a character might be portrayed or a poem interpreted. Some of the most confident and accurate readers in this class tended to read too quickly, with little expression or attention to punctuation. Practicing to perform gave these students a chance to refine their oral reading and emphasize the importance of phrasing and expression.

Preparing for performances. For successful performances, it is important that students consider the audience in choosing what text to perform and practice. Ample rehearsal time makes the difference for struggling readers in any kind of performance, as they can decide when they are ready to perform. Some struggling readers or reserved students may not want to perform in front of a group, but most lose their fear after having opportunities to practice a script with a teacher, tutor, or friends in a supportive atmosphere. Each success leads to increased self-confidence and to motivation to repeat the success. Teachers and others who have successfully used Readers Theatre and other performance approaches in both elementary and middle school stress the importance of having a regular sequence of activities leading to the performance (Ivey, 1999; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). The sequence should include choosing texts (teacher and students jointly), practicing in small groups and at home, and teacher feedback and support during small group practice. The students can plan, practice, and perform new texts as often as every week.

It is also important to remember that students and teachers will need time to plan and establish routines and appropriate behavior. It may take several weeks of explaining, role modeling, and guided practice before such activities run smoothly. However, when students have regular opportunities to prepare and perform in small groups, managing Readers Theatre can work very smoothly. Students learn what is needed to prepare for a successful performance and are motivated to work and practice together productively. This focused activity frees the teacher to move

around from group to group, listening and offering feedback as students practice.

Choosing and writing texts for performance. There are many books and Web sites devoted to Readers Theatre. Many teachers start with these resources; however, most soon find that they need to supplement what is available by writing their own scripts. Texts chosen for performance should not be above readers' instructional levels. They should have straightforward plots with characters talking through dilemmas (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker). It is also helpful to use books from a series or by the same author to capitalize on familiar plot structures, language, and characters. Many scripts practically write themselves. In picture-book versions of folk and fairy tales, for example, dialogue is turned into speaking parts and description becomes narration. Examples of books with simple forms of dialogue are Galdone's *The Little Red Hen* (1979) and Zemach's *The Judge* (1978). Various cultural versions of fairy tales can provide more challenging dialogue for scripts, such as *Smoky Mountain Rose: An Appalachian Cinderella* (Schroeder, 1997) or *Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella* (San Souci, 1998).

Speeches and poetry provide performance-ready formats in which to focus on fluency. Both lend themselves to rhythmic choral reading as well as to independent and group performance. Expose students to models of gifted speakers (e.g., Maya Angelou) through audiotape recordings, television, and movies. Ask students to discuss how a speaker conveys meaning and inspiration through carefully chosen words and prosodic language and how an effective speaker can influence emotions. Encourage students to exaggerate expression and emotion as they perform poetry or mock speeches for the class.

The booklist in the Sidebar includes a selection of resources that are performance ready as well as a books and poetry related to content area topics. These materials can be scripted for performance and are excellent for improving fluency and comprehension. As you gain more confidence in writing scripts, you may choose to adapt less straightforward books for performance, condensing the narration and inserting appropriate dialogue. With initial support from the teacher, students can and should write their own scripts, song lyrics, raps, and poetry for performance. For example, favorite scenes from novels can be turned into scripts and performed

as book advertisements. Documentary novels, such as *Regarding the Fountain* (Klise, 1998), contain mock phone conversations, dialogue, memos, letters, and newspaper articles, and can be adapted for Readers Theatre.

Buddy reading. This is another type of meaningful reading performance, in which students practice reading a book to a younger child. This practice encourages even the most reticent students to read out loud, because young students are usually nonthreatening. Reading to a younger child also opens up more possibilities for choice in literature, allowing older learners to read easy books designed for young children without losing face. This is an especially important time for struggling readers in the upper elementary grades, who have an opportunity to read a practiced text with a supportive audience and to experience the role of expert in helping a younger buddy. It is critical for students to choose books that they can easily read and that are appropriate and interesting for their younger buddies. It is also essential that the older students prepare carefully and that they are paired with students with significantly less advanced reading skills. Struggling readers can be embarrassed by not having enough preparation or by having a younger buddy correct their reading.

Sharing favorite books with peers is also appealing, especially to less successful or reluctant readers whose prior experiences with public reading may have consisted mainly of whole-class, unrehearsed oral reading of too difficult texts. When struggling readers have a chance to choose the books, short stories, or poems they will share and to rehearse before they read aloud, they can feel like competent, valued members of their classroom literacy communities. A related activity is to make a class library of books on audiotape by having students choose books, practice them, and then record them. To prepare a tape that is polished enough to be placed in the classroom library, students will naturally want to practice, edit, and reread until they have a "perfect" final copy.

Moving from reading fluency practice to silent, independent reading

The ease, speed, and understanding gained during meaningful, guided oral fluency instruction and practice helps to develop students' abil-

ity to read silently for meaning, a major aim of reading instruction. Teachers must make a commitment to provide regular classroom time for students to read independently. This is not just an add-on to the reading curriculum to promote interest in reading, but should be daily instructional time for students to practice reading with teacher coaching, modeling, and explicit instruction. It is also a time for teachers to assess students in all aspects of reading, modify instruction and texts accordingly, and keep records of students' progress.

Using free-choice reading time with feedback to provide independent reading practice. One common classroom practice that promotes independent reading is sustained, free-choice reading (Manning & Manning, 1984; Sadoski, 1984), in which students read texts of their choice for a given time. This practice is often called DEAR (drop everything and read) or SSR (sustained silent reading). While some educators recommend that teachers also read during this time, leaving students to read independently without guidance, we suggest that teachers use this time to assess and provide appropriate instruction, as they would during guided reading fluency practice (Manning & Manning, 1984; National Reading Panel, 2000). Other suggestions for an effective and engaging free-choice reading time include the following: (a) Provide a wide variety of reading materials based on students' interests and comfort levels, (b) give students informal time to share their books with peers, (c) introduce interesting books to students and share enthusiasm about books they are reading, (d) provide time every day for reading (20 to 45 minutes), and (e) give students choices of purposeful response activities rather than busywork (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994).

Recently, we interviewed Susan, a third-grade teacher who uses free-choice reading in her classroom. She explained that her free-choice reading time did not happen overnight—"We began with a 10-minute reading time and gradually increased the time to 35 minutes." After assessing her students' reading levels and interests, the librarian helped her gather appropriate materials to add to her growing classroom library. While students are reading, Susan provides guidance and instructive feedback in a variety of forms, depending on the kinds of support students need. She explained,

I know how important it is for students to experience success, especially at the beginning of the year. In addition to interesting grade-level and more difficult texts, I gathered many fun, easy books that everyone could read, and also high-interest books in every genre possible, including old favorites that I knew my students had read in second grade. At first, I helped them to choose their books and then taught them how to choose manageable books themselves. Everyone is reading at their level and improving their skill and love of reading every day. At the end of each free-choice reading time, I give students a few minutes to share the books they are reading with their friends, and I make a point of gathering and introducing books that I think they will like. They often choose to read the books that they have heard about from their friends or from me.

For the greatest benefits to fluency and independent reading development, students should read interesting and manageable texts every day, ideally at their independent or easy reading level. Students should be able to read at least 95% of the words correctly and be able to understand the text without difficulty. Although these criteria may sound simple, less skilled readers often do not have access to interesting reading materials that they can read with reasonable accuracy and understanding (Lipson & Lang, 1991). Thus, rather than improving their fluency, sustained reading can be a frustrating experience that can lead to anxiety and avoidance of reading.

Using series books to increase students' comfort level. For older students, reading books in a series or on the same theme or topic provides experiences and benefits that are similar to those of repeated reading of the same text. Series books give readers a sense of mastery over the conventions of reading. With characters, language, and content that grow more familiar with each book read, "even a reader inexperienced in an absolute sense has the opportunity to behave like an experienced reader" (Mackey, 1990, p. 484). Thus, series books have great potential for improving attitudes toward reading as well as for increasing voluntary reading, engagement, and fluency. Series books also are an excellent vehicle for helping students to move toward reading longer books for sustained periods. Some popular series for students just starting to read chapter books include Marshall's Fox and Rylant's Henry and Mudge. (See Sidebar for sample titles.) Slightly more complex series are Sachar's Marvin Redpost and Park's Junie B. Jones. For students who have made the transition to longer books, series such as Hest's books on

the young writer Katie Roberts, Danziger's Amber Brown, Scieska's Time Warp Trio, and Applegate's science fiction Animorphs allow repeated practice in books with similar plot structures and the same characters.

With the recent proliferation of series books on a multitude of topics and difficulty levels, even reluctant readers can usually find a series that they would be willing and able to read (Worthy, 1996). Matt Christopher writes books about sports in a variety of genres, and there are several series about animals and other high-interest content topics available. Many series books have sophisticated plots, vocabulary, and characterization, and usually lead students to even more complex materials (Dorrell & Carroll, 1981). Further, many contemporary children's classics, such as Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (1998), Taylor's *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976), and Voigt's *Homecoming* (1983), are each part of a series.

Using nonfiction and thematic reading to support fluency in the content areas. According to the National Research Council (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998), "Adequate progress in learning to read English (or any alphabetic language) beyond the initial level depends on sufficient practice in reading to achieve fluency in different texts" (p. 233). Nonfiction trade books can be excellent sources for reading, particularly since illustrations add to both engagement and comprehension. Reading widely in thematic materials or a text set collection is a good strategy for improving both fluency and independent reading comprehension in the content areas. Providing books on diverse topics at varied reading levels offers many of the same benefits as series reading, and it also prepares students for reading content textbooks. For example, the Eyewitness Junior series, *Amazing Bats* (Greenaway, 1991) has fascinating facts about bats in short captions, each illustrated with a vivid photograph. On the same subject, the easy-to-read format of Earle's *Zippping, Zapping, Zooming Bats* (1995) includes different types of reading, such as instructions for how to make a bat house and the useful "bat facts" at the end. As with fiction, it is important to remember to have informational books available that are easy for all students to read.

Like series books, thematic materials provide repeated exposure to challenging vocabulary, sophisticated concepts, and important details

related to the topic under study in a wide variety of formats. A text set on sports, for example, might include biographies of past and current sports figures, how-to-play books, jokes, novels, short stories, poetry, picture books, student-written stories and articles, and current news sources (e.g., the Web, magazines, newspapers, game schedules). Combining a text set with approaches such as Readers Theatre provides students with opportunities to examine critically and interpret various types of content material.

Making fluency a focus benefits everyone

Oral reading fluency is an essential aspect of mature reading. However, fluency instruction has not traditionally played a major role in classrooms. Students who developed fluency usually did so on their own. Struggling readers often suffered the burden of reading frustration-level materials out loud with little support. Fortunately, there are many approaches to guided fluency development that are meaningful and engaging. Teacher read-alouds provide models of fluent reading, and explicit instruction shows students how to develop their own fluency. Performance activities such as Readers Theatre and reading to other students provide real reasons for student rehearsal with a focus on accurate reading as well as understanding and interpretation of text. High-interest series books and other meaningful texts motivate students to practice reading on their own. When teachers make fluency a major classroom focus and when instruction and materials are engaging, students can accomplish the major goal of reading instruction—reading independently for learning and enjoyment.

Worthy teaches at the University of Texas–Austin. She may be contacted at 1807 Winter Park Road, Austin, TX 78746, USA, or by e-mail at worthy@mail.utexas.edu. Broaddus teaches at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA.

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Errata

The following annotation was left out of the Intermediate Readers section of the 2001 Children's Choices, published in the October 2001 issue of *The Reading Teacher*. The International Reading Association apologizes for this oversight.

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