

Reader's Theater is an approved method of Repeated Guided Oral Reading!

There is an abundance of research supporting that “Repeated Guided Oral Reading” improves reading fluency and comprehension, especially when it includes reading role models. Research also shows four repeated readings sufficiently improve reading fluency. Most traditional texts can NOT hold students’ attention for up to four separate readings. **Reader’s Theater truly engages students and is a popular, approved form of “Repeated Guided Oral Reading.”** Some of the research supporting these methods is reviewed below. Reader’s Theater provides an easy-to-implement dramatic text that does not require memorization, props or a stage.

Improved Vocabulary & Comprehension

Plays inherently come with built-in strategies to help students read better. The acting out of story dialogue compels readers to work more closely with the text to interpret and project meaning into the experience. **As a result, students show improvement in vocabulary, comprehension and retention.**

Colorized Text

According to a Loyola University study, word recognition and reading comprehension improves 27% when text is presented in color compared to bold text, and 35% when presented in color compared to contrasting fonts. **Multi-leveled and colorized Reader’s Theater is an improved form of Reader’s Theater that maximizes students’ learning, allowing students of varying reading abilities to practice and improve together.**

National Reading Panel

Research has shown that “Repeated Guided Oral Reading” is the most effective method for improving fluency (especially when it includes higher level role models). In 1997, Congress approved the formation of a national panel to assess the effectiveness of different approaches used to teach children to read. This became the National Reading Panel. According to the National Reading Panel, oral reading fluency is one of the five major constituents of a research-based reading program. **The National Reading panel conducted an extensive study of the efficacy of repeated oral reading by examining 16 previously conducted studies that met with their research methodology criteria of which they performed a meta-analysis.** The panel also examined 21 additional studies that they included in their qualitative analysis of the findings. (See study at http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/nrp/upload/report_pdf.pdf)

The individual studies are listed below, in the attached appendixes: Appendix 1 includes the 16 examined studies used in the meta-analysis, and Appendix 2 includes the 21 additional studies used in qualitative analysis. After completing a detailed analysis the panel found that “guided repeated oral reading procedures that included guidance from teachers, peers, or parents had a significant and positive impact on word recognition, fluency, and comprehension across a range of grade levels.” **The 16 primary studies include data from 752 elementary and secondary education students, from six U.S. states and 2 other countries, attending 47 different schools. The studies were conducted in both regular and special education classrooms with a variety of age groups. The results are clearly positive, and provide proof that “Repeated Guided Oral Reading” is effective with both proficient and**

struggling readers. It also shows that classrooms are ready to incorporate this type of reading activity and will greatly benefit by so doing. The other 21 studies provide further evidence of the significant benefit of this type of reading program. **Multi-leveled and colorized Reader's Theater provides a fun, structured activity that is effective in improving reading fluency.** The findings of the National Reading Panel are also supported by other studies, including Professor of Education Dr. Timothy Rasinski's research, explained in numerous texts including his book, *The Fluent Reader*.

Fluency a Means to Better Comprehension

To be fluent, a reader must be able to read with speed and accuracy, as well as with proper expression. Fluency is also necessary for comprehension. **Laberge and Samuels find in their article, "Toward a Theory of Automatic Information Processing in Reading," that if a reader is spending too much energy and thought simply trying to decipher words, there will be little brain power left over for comprehension.** The reader can easily become frustrated and begin to dislike and avoid reading altogether. One of the best ways to improve fluency and, therefore, comprehension is through practice. **By reading a text several times, students are able to better improve their fluency, but their interest must be piqued for them to want to repeat what they have already read. Research recommends four repetitions of the material. Reader's Theater is a fun, engaging and entertaining activity that captivates students' interest, and it's an approved method of repeated guided oral reading.** (See reference at <http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/read/rb/edlite-slide019.html>) According to *The Importance of Automaticity and Fluency for Efficient Reading Comprehension* (2002), a study by Hooks and Jones, improvement of fluency and comprehension is also eased by having students read words that are grouped into sentences and sound like natural speech. Reader's Theater, with its complete character dialogue, is a clear method of incorporating this idea into teaching.

Proven Methods of "Repeated Guided Oral Reading"

In her article, *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*, **Dr. Bonnie B. Armbruster of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign recommends that students practice orally rereading text using methods such as student-adult reading, choral reading, partner reading, tape-assisted reading, or Readers' Theater.** Armbruster states that modeling fluent reading for struggling students is essential for improvement. Having both adults and other students read aloud with the class can accomplish this. **Exposing lower level readers to higher level reading, multi-leveled and colorized Reader's Theater becomes the most dynamic solution for including reading role models and keeping students engaged.** By "performing" the story in small non-threatening peer groups, the students are motivated to reread and improve upon their previous effort.

"I Never Thought I Could be a Star: A Reader's Theatre ticket to Reading Fluency," published in *The Reading Teacher*, explains the findings of Martinez, Roser, and Streckler in their study of second grade students. The subjects were taught short lessons on fluency, and then practiced Reader's Theater scripts in class for 30 minutes per day. The study ran for 10 weeks, and each Friday the students performed the script for an audience. The students were also given a copy of the text to read at home. **After the 10 weeks, the students who had practiced scripts gained 17 words per minute, twice that of the control group, who did not use Reader's Theater scripts. The experimental group also gained twice as much progress in comprehension and overall reading as the control group, and when used regularly, Reader's Theater typically helped the students improve their reading skills by a year.**

Long term fluency progress is also achieved by use of “Repeated Guided Oral Reading.” A study by Morgan and Lyon showed that use of this technique for junior high students over a 6-month period yielded an 11-month gain on a standardized test that evaluated comprehension skills.

A *Scholastic Instructor* article, “The Power of Reader’s Theater,” features a fourth grade teacher’s success story. Teacher Lorraine Griffith found that focusing on improving comprehension took valuable time away from teaching reading accuracy, and her students were struggling to read. Griffith decided to try a method of repeated reading: Reader’s Theater. **After ten weeks of using Reader’s Theater, each student had gained a full grade level in reading ability, and after one year, the students had gained three grade levels.** The article also discusses the emotional benefits of Reader’s Theater. Rick Swallow, an educator who uses Reader’s Theater in his teaching, states that **“students who were usually reluctant to express themselves orally blossomed in the Reader’s Theater arena. Students would often compete to see who could read a part most convincingly.”** He goes on to describe one student who went through a remarkable change after participating in Reader’s Theater, from the shyest in the class to one of the most talkative.

Conclusion

In conclusion, multi-leveled and colorized Reader’s Theater is a research-supported method of improving reading fluency. **It is a recommended form of “Repeated Guided Oral Reading” and studies have shown that its use results in dramatic grade-level gains in reading and comprehension skills.** Multi-leveled Reader’s Theater provides modeling of fluent reading for struggling readers, makes repeated reading easy and fun, and even improves student participation and confidence. **Because reading the dialogue of a story character is so much fun, students are engaged in the activity and are excited to read the text aloud over and over, improving their fluency with every reading.**

Appendix 1

National Reading Panel Articles Included in Meta-Analysis on Guided Oral Reading Procedures

Conte, R., & Humphreys, R. (1989). Repeated readings using audiotaped material enhances oral reading in children with reading difficulties. *Journal of Communications Disorders*, 22, 65-79.

Eldredge, J. L. (1990). Increasing the performance of poor readers in the third grade with a group-assisted strategy. *Journal of Educational Research*, 84, 69-77.

Eldredge, J. L., Reutzel, D. R., & Hollingsworth, P.M. (1996). Comparing the effectiveness of two oral reading practices: Round-robin reading and the shared book experience. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 28, 201-225.

Hollingsworth, P. M. (1978). An experimental approach to the impress method of teaching reading. *Reading Teacher*, 31, 624-627.

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Mathes, P. G., & Fuchs, L. S. (1993). Peer mediated reading instruction in special education resource rooms. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 8, 233-243.

Miller, A., Robson, D., & Bushell, R. (1986). Parental participation in paired reading: A controlled study. *Educational Psychology*, 6, 277-284.

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Reutzel, D. R., & Hollingsworth, P. M. (1993). Effects of fluency training on second graders' reading comprehension. *Journal of Educational Research*, 86, 325-331.

Shany, M. T., & Biemiller, A. (1995). Assisted reading practice: Effects on performance for poor readers in grade 3 and 4. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 30, 382-395.

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Simmons, D.C., Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., Mathes, P., & Hodge, J. P. (1995). Effects of explicit teaching and peer tutoring on the reading achievement of learning-disabled and low-performing students in regular classrooms. *Elementary School Journal*, 95, 387-408.

Thomas, A., & Clapp, T. (1989). A comparison of computer-assisted component reading skills training and repeated reading for adolescent poor readers. *Canadian Journal of Special Education*, 5, 135-144.

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Appendix 2

National Reading Panel Additional Articles Used in Qualitative Analysis

Faulkner, H. J., & Levy, B. A. (1999). Fluent and nonfluent forms of transfer in reading: Words and their message. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 6, 111-116.

Levy, B. A., Nicholls, A., & Kohen, D. (1993). Repeated readings: Process benefits for good and poor readers. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 56, 303-327.

Neill, K. (1979). Turn kids on with repeated reading. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 12, 63-64.

O'Shea, L. J., Sindelar, P. T., & O'Shea, D. J. (1985). The effects of repeated readings and attentional cues on reading fluency and comprehension. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 17, 129-142.

Pany, D., & McCoy, K. M. (1988). Effects of corrective feedback on word accuracy and reading comprehension of readers with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 21, 546-550.

Rasinski, T. V. (1990). Effects of repeated reading and listening-while-reading on reading fluency. *Journal of Educational Research*, 83, 147-150.

Reitsma, P. (1988). Reading practice for beginners: Effects of guided reading, reading-while-listening, and independent reading with computer-based speech feedback. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23, 219-235.

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Taylor, N. E., Wade, M. R., & Yekovich, F. R. (1985). The effects of text manipulation and multiple reading strategies on the reading performance of good and poor readers. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 20, 566- 574.

Turpie, J. J., & Paratore, J. R. (1995). Using repeated reading to promote success in a heterogeneously grouped first grade. In K. A.

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Appendix 2 (continued)

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