



# The Reader

Metropolitan  
Reading  
Council

Volume 32, Issue 2

Winter 2009

## “How to Reach Calvin...”

Calvin from “Calvin and Hobbes” is obviously a smart young boy. His imagination is boundless; he understands everything from physics to the history of the world; his vocabulary is enormous and his sarcasm and wit have us laughing non-stop. What do we, as professional educators, find so frustrating about Calvin? He doesn't like school. He doesn't want to go to school and finds everything school offers to be boring and stupid. Poor Mrs. Wormwood tries to engage Calvin, but only ends up disciplining him. Calvin is a classic highly intelligent under-achiever.

What can we do about the Calvins in our classrooms? I spend most of my time teaching struggling high school readers. Many of these students are intelligent and often very capable thinkers. I find that they want to discuss, view, draw and think about many complex topics. Unfortunately, they don't always want to read about them. They want to use other sources to gain knowledge. If we really want to tap into our highly intelligent students (at whatever reading level), we need to not only encourage topics of choice, but foster the journey.

Because of these reluctant students, I have been managing my classroom into what I refer to as a tiered lesson approach. As a foundation, I teach students the skills and knowledge I want them to learn and be able to apply (finding main ideas, making inferences, drawing conclusions, vocabulary). Typically mastering these skills and using strategies earn students an average grade. Students may earn higher grades by using the same skills to delve more deeply into topics that truly interest them. I allow them to use multimedia sources (websites of interest - science, history or music websites are common). They need to show they are able to use the skills taught by using strategies with the sources and presenting a project (powerpoint, blogging with others interested in the same topic, video, etc.). The tiered lessons have allowed my students more freedom to apply their skills in areas that truly interest them. We have had better classroom discussions and Reading Class is something many students now seem to enjoy.

It is a challenge to try to marry the skills students need to their interests, especially when we seem to be competing with so many ways for students to gain information other than reading. However, we know that being able to delve deeply into a topic and read critically is more important than ever. We just need to convince the Calvins in our classrooms to apply the skills to a chosen topic and use multimedia to enhance the experience.

Marilyn Kerkhove  
President-elect  
Metropolitan Reading Council

“Being able to delve deeply into a topic and read critically is more important than ever.”

Meet the Author  
N.L. Sharp  
March 7, 2009  
Northwest High School  
9:00 a.m.

<i>Legislative Update</i>	2
<i>Motivate Them to Read Independently</i>	3-5
<i>What's New in YA Literature</i>	5
<i>Professional Literature Review</i>	6
<i>N.L. Sharp</i>	7
<i>Carpe Diem</i>	7
<i>The Grazing Habits of Many Boy Readers</i>	8-9
<i>Current Trends</i>	10-11
<i>Jon Scieszka Helps Reluctant Readers</i>	11



## The Reader

Published since 1966  
Metropolitan Reading Council #30400  
Chartered in 1965

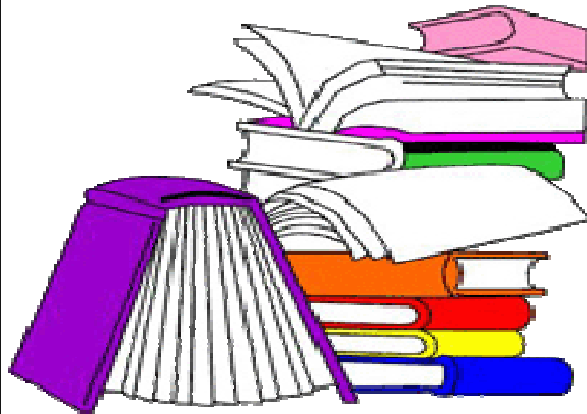
### Publications

Wilma Kulhman, UNO  
Stephanie Burdic, Millard  
Nancy Anderson, Millard

saburdic@mpsomaha.org

### Webmaster

Lynn Thurber  
Stephanie Burdic  
<http://www.metropolitanreadingcouncil.org>



### Metropolitan Reading Council Executive Board 2008-09

President	Jolene Heibel Bellevue
Past President	Ruth Schoonover Ralston
President-Elect	Marilyn Kerkhove Millard
Vice President	Pat Gamble OPS
Membership	Jane Pille Millard
Executive Secretary	Audrey McNamara, Bellevue
Treasurer	Lisa Bethel –Didamo, Bellevue

## Legislative Update

Do you realize that on Wednesday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, the Nebraska unicameral came back into session? Yes, the state senators are back and for a 90-day session.

This is the legislature that passed the Safe Haven Law last spring and came back in November to correct problems with the law. This is also the legislature which passed the law creating a statewide test. I hope I have your attention, because as educators we can not be victims; we need to use our voices via letters, emails or phone calls to alert our senators when we are displeased or pleased with their work.

Do you know who your state legislator is? If not, go to [www.unicam.state.ne.us/](http://www.unicam.state.ne.us/). It has an interactive map to help you find the identity of your state senator.

As educators and as people who care about children and families, we need to pay attention to the work of several legislators, particularly Brad Ashford, who will keep the conversation open about how state agencies and funds can support children and parents who are experiencing difficulties. I think all of us can relate in some way to the issues which the Safe Haven Law brought into focus.

The passage of the State Assessment Bill ordered the State Board of Education to create statewide assessments in reading, math and science. As you know, a state writing assessment has been in place for several years.

Teachers from across the state have been and will continue to work on the development of the state reading test, which is to be administered during the 2009-10 school year to grades 3-8 and at one high school grade. You should know that this reading test is being written in one year and will be piloted by any district who wishes to this spring. Nationally, it is recommended that 3 years be spent in researching before constructing a state reading test. This would allow time for review and development of the best evaluation tool to assess our Nebraska children.

To stay tuned to the legislation which will be considered during this session, use the [www.unicam.state.ne.us/](http://www.unicam.state.ne.us/) web site, read the NEA newsletter, or follow the legislature in the media and use your voice to share your opinions.

On a national level, it will be interesting to see how President Obama deals with NCLB and makes adjustments to it as well as the funding which Congress will provide for programs.

Linda Placzek  
Legislative Chair

## Motivate Them to Read Independently!

One of the concerns teachers find most frustrating is the child who is not motivated to read independently in school or at home. Teachers spend hours using their expertise to develop reading curriculum and to implement instructional plans with the ultimate goal of teaching each child to read independently for pleasure and information. Planning and implementing a reading curriculum is a complex task that is time-consuming and requires on-going revision and thoughtful and meaningful discussion. The curriculum seems to always be in a state of change, and educators pour their hearts, minds, and souls into finding the most effective ways to meet each child's needs, only to be disappointed when children do not read independently.

Teachers generally try to have independent reading time during the school day, and librarians offer children many opportunities to choose books and read in the library. Reading instructional time during the school day in an elementary classroom is usually divided into large group/small group or individual instruction, writing, and independent reading. Most of the time the teacher is involved in the group activities and is not available to observe the independent reading habits of the children. The teacher may have time to notice a child picking up a book, going to his/her desk or reading corner, and only casually looking at the book before putting it back, and then maybe finding another selection, or giving up and finding another activity. Why are some children inspired and interested to read and others are not? The research on this topic is extensive, and many articles, papers, and books have been written that outline the research evidence of the factors that have the most impact on a child reading independently.

One of the most engaging and interesting papers I've read on motivating children to read was written and published in July of 2008 by Christina Clark and Caroline Phythian-Sence. The authors are affiliated with National Literacy Trust and Reading is Fundamental. The authors questioned "Why do some individuals become involved and interested in their reading and others do not?" In their paper, titled "Interesting choice: The (relative) importance of choice and interest in reader engagement", Clark and Phythian-Sence present a representative and valid collection of research that supports the importance of choice and interest in motivating children to read. While this topic is not new to college reading classes or to practicing teachers, the depth of research findings are explored to a level that provokes the reader to consider developing a long-term instructional plan for helping children build skills, develop confidence, and self-determination that allows them to make the most of the opportunities they have to select and read varied materials. Clark and Phythian-Sence outline several strategies and teaching practices that will affect children's independent reading behavior.

### **Choice strategies:**

The strategies have been selected from personal experience of educators and articles. The strategies have been taught to students by teachers in the classroom.

### **Clues on the book:**

Students can get clues without opening up the book. Teachers can instruct children on how to ask themselves questions.

- A. Title
- B. Author
- C. Cover illustration
- D. Blurb on back
- E. Key Phrases

### **Elements of the book**

Teachers can teach children to ask themselves questions like "Do I like mystery books?" or suggest that pupils read a page to evaluate it for interest.

- F. Genre
- G. "Dip in"

### **Cautionary clues**

Children can think about what they don't like, look for cautionary elements in the book,

- H. Keywords
- I. Types of characters

# Motivate Them to Read Independently

## **Reading experience desired**

Children may ask themselves, “Is this a book I’m in the mood to read?”

J. Mood—reflect on genre, length, difficulty, purpose for reading

## **Recommendations**

Ask teachers or peers their opinions for book recommendations. This can be done formally or informally.

## **Readability**

Beginning and struggling readers may need to use strategies that help them identify books that they will be able to read.

Five-finger method—the child chooses a page to read in the book, and holds up his or her open hand.

Each time an unknown word is encountered, the student puts a finger down. If the child finds 5 unknown words on a page, and all five fingers are down, then that book is not at an appropriate reading level.

Clark and Pythian-Sence conclude that giving children an opportunity to choose and teaching them effective strategies for making a successful choice can result in greater enjoyment, engagement, and determination to read independently.

## **Interest strategies:**

Paraphrasing from the article, interest is a “powerful influence” that plays a more critical motivational role in children’s self-initiated reading, knowledge of topics, as well as their knowledge of vocabulary and reading comprehension than past achievement or parental income. Clark and Pythian-Sence outlined the following interest strategies that were found in the literature.

### **Provide children with meaningful choices.**

Choice may “increase students interest in text”, and less skilled students should be supported to make meaningful choices.

### **Use well organized texts.**

Pre-select books for a classroom library that have familiar story structures, or organize books in the classroom library that have common themes into identifiable boxes or baskets

### **Pre-select “vivid” texts.**

Books should include “rich imagery” and “suspense” to elicit student interest. Bring in books that capture children’s attention such as books from popular series, joke books, and other materials that will bring a “vivid” picture to children.

### **Use familiar texts.**

Familiar texts (themes, authors, etc.) will support struggling readers’ literacy, while texts from a series or a sequel will provide support to draw the attention of most readers.

### **Encourage active learners.**

Encouraging children to create meaning from the text will increase interest. Use strategies that require children to question what they want to learn.

Actually, the good news is that great minds don't always think alike.  
- Goldman Sachs advertisement in the Wall St. Journal, January 2000

## Young Adult Literature—What's New?

Getting students to read is as simple as getting their hands around good books. Now the trick is to determine what they think good books are. We won't always agree on "good books" but if we can get them to pick something up and read, eventually their skills and maturity will take over and they will move to the really "good books." John Green and Jennifer Bradbury have both written books that fill this bill.

John Green has written his third Young Adult novel and it appears to be a winner...again. He has written *Looking for Alaska* and *An Abundance of Katherines*, both of which were warmly received by high school students in my building. You can tell the books the kids like by the fact they are NOT on the shelves. They come in and they immediately go out. Sometimes they don't even come in, they just get traded - which is a whole other problem within the Media Center...but enough about that.

In his third novel, *Paper Town*, Green examines the difficulty of high school years and unrequited love. Quentin "Q" has been in love with the girl next door, Margo Roth Spiegelman, for as long as he can remember. The problem is they don't move in the same social circles. Margo is popular and a mover and shaker..."Q" is not. Margo commands the attention of most of the students around her and makes life much easier for "Q" and his friends. She commands they be left alone and not bothered. When she disappears after taking "Q" on a night of high adventure, he feels obligated to find her. "Q" feels like she left him clues and expects him to find her...he doesn't want to let her down, and, of course, he is in love with her. The story emphasizes the strong bond/loyalty that teenagers feel and the lengths they will go to support their friends. In this case, that means skipping senior graduation and taking a road trip to where the clues seem to indicate they will find Margo Roth Spiegelman. Green includes great clues the reader can follow as well as an awesome road trip by four friends determined not to make "Q" go in search of Margo alone.

My only problem with the story was the somewhat preachy ending, but my counterpart at Millard North, Stephanie Burdic, disagrees with me. In any event, it is a definite read for high school students. It's not inappropriate for middle school, but save some of the good stuff for 9-12, when they **really** don't like to read.

A second novel is a new one by first time author Jennifer Bradbury entitled *Shift*. It is the story of two friends, Chris and Win, who decide to end their high school year with a road trip on bikes from the east coast to the west coast. The boys start out and encounter many of the adventures one would expect. However, when they get close to the end of their trip, Win leaves Chris behind with a flat tire and disappears. Chris assumes he has gone on. When Chris can't find him, he returns home on the bus as arranged and begins to get ready for college. The problem is that Win doesn't come home.

Chris realizes all was not well with Win at home, Win's father is extremely wealthy and is used to getting his own way. Win's father becomes more and more intimidating and threatens Chris's father's job, Chris's enrollment in college, as well as trying bribery to get information on Win's whereabouts. He also hires an FBI agent to put pressure on Chris at school and follows him around. Chris suspects Win is not dead, but does not know what has happened or why.

As the story unfolds, through the interviews of the FBI agent, you begin to get an understanding of what was going through Win's head and what might have happened. Bradbury weaves an excellent story and keeps the reader in suspense, while giving hints to the eventual outcome.

Sherryl Shannon  
Millard North High School

## Motivate Them To Read Independently

### Highlight the relevance of the task.

The research suggests that "when tasks are linked to a greater goal, interest in the task will be greater." Strategies may include highlighting the information that could be acquired from a given non-fiction books, or encouraging children to read and then share opinions as part of a book-club of peers.

In part, the authors conclude this paper with a challenge to educators: "strive to make choice and interest practices a part of regular classroom activities in order to support the development of sustainable interest in reading." They also stressed the importance of making available a wide range of reading material, including magazines, newspapers, and websites to stimulate the interest of children and youth.

To read this entire paper, Google Christina Clark, Interesting Choice.

Jolene Heibel  
MRC President

## Professional Literature Review

As the school year enters its second semester, there is no doubt teachers and administrators continue to seek new ideas and ways to improve student performance in literacy. My goal is to share a few publications with you which may help you address your students' needs and see things from a different perspective.

The top of my list is **Read Right** by Dee Tadlock, Ph.D. with Rhonda Stone. This book was originally written for parents. The author, Dee Tadlock, was a teacher with a son who was experiencing difficulty in learning to read. After working with his teacher who was trying all of the strategies, she came to the conclusion that the way to help struggling readers like her son was to look at the function of the brain in the reading process. She studied brain research for a number of years and came up with the Read Right System. In brief, the three keys to the system are excellence, intent and the predictive strategy. I won't tell you more, but I will encourage you to read the book. The Read Right strategy is being utilized with great success in one of the Metro. districts and the ideas and information are applicable to many children, as well as adults.

Next, for those of you who are interested in trying literature groups in your classroom, I'd suggest, **Literature Groups All Year Long** by Jennifer Allen with Carolyn Bridges. This is a DVD which takes you into Carolyn Bridges' fourth grade classroom as she works with Jennifer Allen to launch and sustain student-led literature discussions. Check with the professional library in your district or ESU for this DVD. You may convince your building principal to buy it for the building's professional library since the cost is \$95.00. It is available from Choice Literacy.

Two other books I'd like to share are ASCD products. The first, **Checking for Understanding** by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, presents in a very clear and interesting manner formative assessment techniques for your classroom. It evaluates the various ways we gather information from our students and provides numerous new ideas. The second book is **How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students** by Susan Brookhart. This book also provides practical suggestions and classroom examples that demonstrate what to do and not to do to have a positive impact on students as well as ways to adjust feedback for various content areas. You can browse excerpts from both of these books at <http://www.ascd.org/books> to help you decide if you are interested in this topic.

Stephen R. Covey, bestselling author of **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People**, has now written, **The Leader in Me**. The book tells the story of a very special school, A.B. Combs Elementary School in Raleigh, North Carolina. The school has experienced tremendous success since it opened as a magnet school in 1999. The focus on teaching children leadership skills has had outstanding results. Student achievement has soared and student problems such as attendance and discipline issues have rapidly declined. Teacher and administrator job satisfaction has increased. The 7 habits of Steven Covey were systematically taught to the students and the leadership roles they grew into have brought international focus to the school. I had the pleasure of seeing this school in action in May 2004. The student level of cooperation and the level of communication skills I experienced were awesome! The beauty of the 7 habits is that they can be applied in a classroom, school, or even in our homes. If you'd like to read a real success story, don't miss this book. For more information, visit: [www.TheLeaderinMeBook.org](http://www.TheLeaderinMeBook.org).

Linda Placzek

### MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

The Metropolitan Reading Council will participate in the Cinco De Mayo celebration on Saturday, May 2, 2009. We will march in the parade, carrying the MRC banner, and also assist the South Omaha Branch Library in registering children for summer reading activities. Save the date, and join your fellow MRC members at this great event!!!

## Meet the Author!

### N.L. Sharp

Metropolitan Reading Council invites you to attend "Meet The Author" at Northwest High School, 8204 Crown Point Avenue, on March 7. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.; with the program starting at 9:00 a.m. Metro student authors will be honored, and children's author and educational writing consultant Nancy Sharp Wagner, aka N. L. Sharp, will present.

Mrs. Wagner has written the following books:

*Effie's Image*: A Learning Magazine's 2006 Teachers' Choice Award Winner and a K-3 Golden Sower Award nominee for 2007-2008

*The Ring Bear*: Nebraska's Center for the Book 2004 Winner in the Children's Category

*Today I'm Going Fishing with My Dad*: K-3 Golden Sower Award nominee for 1995-1996

The program is free and open to the public. The Bookworm will have books available for purchase. Mrs. Wagner will be available for autographs. Two posters teaching the six traits of writing, created by Mrs. Wagner, will also be for sale.

Questions? Contact MRC president JoLene Heibel at [jheibel@cox.net](mailto:jheibel@cox.net)

## Carpe Diem: Expand Your Students' Vocabulary

Students interested in dinosaurs have told me with relish that tyrannosaurus rex means king of terrible (or tyrant of) lizards. They were, perhaps unwittingly, using Greek and Latin root meanings. Saurus is Greek for lizard, tyranno is Greek for tyrant, and rex is Latin for king. One could analyze other dinosaur names, breaking down word parts and exploring their meanings. What a wonderful invitation to students to discover words derived from Greek and Latin roots, thus building vocabulary in a meaningful and entertaining way.

What student hasn't heard of the evil Maleficent from *Snow White*? Mal is a Latin prefix meaning "bad, evil, or ill." Cent is Latin for "hundred." After supplying that information, ask students what the name "Maleficent" means. This could lead to brainstorming words that have "mal" in them: malice, malady, malnutrition, malignant, and many more. Or perhaps "cent" would prompt curiosity about other Latin and Greek numbers: uni, mono, bi, tri, and so on. Think of the vocabulary your students would be learning as they build words based on these number prefixes.

A more recent name in literature that many students know is J.K. Rowling's Voldemort in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*. Vol, Latin for "to will" or "to wish" and vort, Latin for "death" are clues that students would use with enthusiasm to interpret Voldemort's name. Then challenge your students to find other words with vol and mort: volunteer, involuntary, volition, mortal, immortal, mortuary, mortician, and so on.

Once you have motivated students in this way, it is easy to find common Latin and Greek roots in resource books or on the internet. Students could work in pairs or small groups, creating lists of words. You may want them to use these words in sentences, to illustrate their words, and most definitely use these words in conversations as discoveries are shared.

One entertaining resource is a picture book called *Cryptomania: Teleporting into Greek and Latin with the Cryptokids* by Edith Hope Fine and illustrated by Kim Doner. The book is fun but also manages to give an abundance of information about the meaning of common Greek and Latin prefixes and roots, acting as a springboard for children to add to their vocabulary.

A professional resource I find valuable is *Making Reading Relevant: The Art of Connecting* by Teri Quick, Melissa Zimmer, and Diane Hocevar. The authors, from Metropolitan Community College, have written a book that supplies the reader with information that is pertinent for successful reading. Though intended for a college reading course, teachers from intermediate grades on up would find this a valuable resource to use with their students. The first chapter is on vocabulary strategies, with Latin and Greek words being part of a word analysis section. Websites are given for learning Greek and Latin word parts, providing practice such as matching and concentration games. Other chapters cover many comprehension strategies as well as computer reading and writing strategies. This book is rich in information.

Carpe Diem. Help students expand their vocabulary in a meaningful way and watch them have fun doing it.

Nancy Comfort Anderson  
MRC Publications

## Children's Literature: The Grazing Habits of Many Boy Readers

I have six grandsons (yup, no granddaughters) that I'm crazy about. They range in age from 20 to 2 years, and I've observed each of the older guys become readers and in two instances (the only ones old enough to have strong attitudes), they became the epitome of our theme for this issue – "Readers who can but don't want to read." I could talk about school policies that I believe contributed to their reluctance, but I'll leave that for a longer discussion.

In her 2005 article, Donna Taylor refers to her own son's issues with school reading and sobering research that indicates the considerable gap between girls' and boys' reading achievement. Coupled with the persistent survey results that indicate boys find reading boring or something they will not choose during free time, etc., we can't ignore the calls of our young men for better connections with the materials we offer or suggest for their reading time. Marilyn Kerkhove writes about Calvin in her article in this issue, and he fits the profile I'm seeing.

As I've read about boys as readers and listened to my grandsons talk about reading, I've come to consider grazing as a metaphor for many of these guys. Think about how you eat when you're at a smorgasbord. Most of us try a little bit of lots of different foods that attract us – we graze. My sister, on the other hand, chooses only the foods that will compose a regular meal for her and takes meal-sized portions. She does not graze. Nine-year-old grandson Aaron told me that he really prefers non-fiction books that he can learn from, and he really likes the Castle book I got him for Christmas, and he spends a lot of time reading a book about WWII. He likes the facts – he reads literally and not for symbolism nor character development (with some exceptions). In short, he likes to read a section he finds interesting, go do something else and return to favorite books over and over – ones that have "real stuff" in them. But he does not see himself as a strong reader, mostly because he doesn't do well on school-related reading tasks and tests.

Since this column is about children's literature, I'll share some ideas for books that can "hit the spot" for these readers. Two books I share I have not read, but I read reviews for books I thought Aaron would like. Maybe he's like some of the young men you know and work with, and these might connect with them as well.

Ellen Scott at The Bookworm told me that boys really like *The Dangerous Book for Boys* by Conn and Hal Iggulden. It's now available in a Pocket version (2008, published by Collins) with a "collection of useful trivia and information: things that every boy should know" (from title page). This is an excellent example of a grazing book. It has 36 separate sections with topics ranging from Spy codes and ciphers, poems every boy should know, girls, and role-playing games (which will intrigue Aaron). I found the Latin phrases every boy should know quite fascinating, and I learned a few, but was surprised how many I knew. The diversity of topics and the ease with which one can read a section is engaging. Vocabulary is challenging in places, but one could skip those parts for later. Oh, and the brief history of artillery was interesting even to me. I bought a copy to give to Aaron next time I see him.

A Revolutionary War book (an interest Aaron says he wants to read about) that received a starred review from School Library Journal, *Let It Begin Here! April 19, 1775* by Don Brown (2008, Roaring Brook Press), certainly appeals to me from the review. Listed as suitable for ages 9 – 12, the book includes stories of people we've heard of and people we haven't heard of like "Flinty Whittemore," a 78-year-old who fought off the British with a musket, two pistols, a sword, was bayoneted 14 times and still lived another 18 years to brag about it." Reviewers call it detailed, yet accessible. I appreciated the student-friendly description of King George III's money troubles that could easily be fixed through taxing people in New England. It seems he really underestimated the colonists' independent attitudes.

K.C. Kelley's *Hottest NASCAR Machines* (2007, Enslow Publishers) won top honors from the fifth and sixth graders voting for Children's Choices last year. Reviewers indicate it appeals to spectators as well as aspiring drivers. The topic is certainly "hot" for many young men (as well as their dads). In the third and fourth grade choices category, students chose *How Big is It? A BIG book All About BIGNESS* by Ben Hillman (2007, Scholastic). Facts about BIG objects (living, extinct, human-made, and geological) are presented with text and photographs that help young people compare sizes to common objects. This would truly be a book for grazing and going back to many times.

Ellen Scott recommends: *The Dangerous Book for Boys*

## Children's Literature: The Grazing Habits of Many Boy Readers (Continued)

For most young readers, don't forget series books. Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver's *Hank Zipzer* series can often get boys reading. They're not so much grazing books as "yeah, me, too" books with a dose of reality and humor. Winkler has done a good job of keeping Hank fairly ageless, so even middle school boys can find easier books that are OK to read. The latest in the series *The Life of Me (Enter at Your Own Risk)* (2008, Grosset & Dunlap) has Hank in a dilemma about after school programs – Tae Kwon Do with his two best buddies or Reading Gym with a cool teacher and Zoe, his new heart throb. Hank's italicized thoughts make his struggles and appeal very real. Winkler has done an outstanding job for very active boys.

The younger set of boys in my family are really attracted to humor – sometimes to their parents' distraction. Five-year-old Riley wanted to hear *Christmas Knock-Knock Jokes* over and over during the holiday. He made sure to get that book home with him. Two favorite books of Riley and his six-year-old cousin Justin are Melanie Watt's *Chester* books, and I confess that I can read them aloud over and over and still smile. *Chester* is a 2007 publication and *Chester's Back* came out in 2008 (published by Kids Can Press). Both books feature an on-going battle between Melanie Watt and her very large cat, Chester over who will be in charge of the authorship of the books. The first time you read these books, you'll literally laugh out loud. Then you want to be sure to read the cover flaps, the title page, as well as the dedication to get even more of the battle of the authors. Chester uses his red marker, while Melanie's text is the traditional black. They "dialog" about the stories, who gets to decide the storyline, and the "star power" of Chester. When Melanie takes Chester literally, the results are hilarious. These aren't just guy books – but the guys sure like to hear them and read them.

As you think about the boys in your classes, try to forget your love of "feeling" fiction some of the time and read aloud some non-fiction or articles from a magazine, especially *Sports Illustrated for Kids* or other magazines with current events. Maybe you can show by examples that grazing through books is reading, too. And make sure they're available and supported for those guys to read during silent reading time, with response choices that fit non-fiction that doesn't have fiction literary elements.

Taylor, D. L. (2005). "Not just boring stories": Reconsidering the gender gap for boys. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 48 (4). 290-298.

Wilma Kuhlman, Faculty Liaison  
Professor, Teacher Education Dept.  
University of NE at Omaha



Photos from MRC's Fall Event!

## Current Trends: Oral Fluency

When I read Jack and Drew Cassidy's list of "What's Hot for Literacy in 2008," I noticed that my previous topics of "Response to Intervention" and "Vocabulary" are still "hot." Another "very hot" topic on this year's list was "Oral Fluency" (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2008). That is the topic I decided to focus on in this article.

I have been reading several articles and books, as well as listening to speakers on this topic lately. I was able to attend Allington's one-day workshop on fluent reading last June. I read his latest book, *What Really Matters in Fluency* (2009), and learned even more about current trends and research in this area. I have also learned so much whenever I had the opportunity to hear Tim Rasinski speak about fluency or through reading his book, *The Fluent Reader* (2003). A major strength of this book is the teacher-friendly lists of books and materials, as well as step-by-step implementation suggestions. I am looking forward to hearing Tim speak on "Teaching the Real Fluency" at the NSRA Conference, February 26-28<sup>th</sup> in Kearney, Nebraska.

Fluency is no longer the neglected component in quality literacy programs. The National Reading Panel identified fluency as one of the five foundational areas of literacy instruction. Fluency can be defined at several different levels. Allington (2009, p.2) presented several definitions of fluent reading. He shared Huey's definition of fluency in 1908, "reading aloud with accuracy, speed, and expression," as the most commonly given definition. The automatic theory from LeBerge and Samuels defines literacy as "reading accurately while also comprehending what is read." The most recent definition Allington shared was from Good and Kaminski, "fluency is reading aloud fast and accurately." This is at odds with the previous two because it does not mention expression or comprehension.

Allington combined the first two definitions when sharing his definition of fluency, and then warned the audience of the concerns related to the third definition. His warning focused on the common practice of monitoring students' fluency progress by encouraging them to orally read as much of a grade-level passage as possible in one minute. Expression and comprehension often are not included in this assessment and, therefore, can seem less important to students. Barclay Marcell calls this developing "NASCAR readers ...who care little about the scenery along the side of the road" and become word callers (2007, p.18). Jerry Johns (2007) has two major concerns about one-minute readings: struggling readers or lower-functioning students may find the grade-level passages very difficult or frustrating, and students may conclude that important reading takes place in one-minute bursts with little thought to comprehension.

Fluency is a critical aspect of proficient reading and needs procedures in place to monitor its development. "Fluency assessment, particularly the monitoring of development in beginning readers, allows instruction to be modified when fluency difficulties first appear" (Allington, 2009, p.48). Allington supported the use of running records and the words correct per minute to provide rate and accuracy data, though he repeated some of his concerns. He recommended the use of curriculum-based reading passages with these measurement techniques to improve both teaching and learning. Word recognition also impacts fluency and is another element in overall reading success that can be assessed through running records and word correct per minute as well as the use of miscue analysis (Rasinski, 2003).

The words correct per minute (wcpm) data from the one-minute readings has been shown to be an accurate indicator of overall reading competencies, especially its strong correlation with comprehension (Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006). There are many sources of oral reading fluency norms to use when evaluating your students' proficiency. Allington recommends using the website [www.prel.org/products/re\\_assessingfluency.pdf](http://www.prel.org/products/re_assessingfluency.pdf) which includes an explanation by Rasinski (2009, p.63). I often use the table in Hasbrouck and Tinal's article in *The Reading Teacher* (2006, p.639).

Allington suggested combining the data from these rate and accuracy measurements with the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) four-point fluency scale to monitor a student's fluency development. This scale rates a student's fluency from Level 1, "reading primarily word-by-word" with occasional short phrases, through Level 4, "reading primarily in larger, meaningful phrase groups" with appropriate expression (Allington, 2009, p.71).

## Current Trends: Oral Fluency (Continued)

There are many effective strategies for direct instruction, reinforcement, and practice of fluency within daily literacy instruction, as well as integrated within the content area curriculum. Tim Rasinski (2003) discussed four major classroom strategies for fostering fluent reading in his book, *The Fluent Reader*; read aloud, supported reading, repeated reading, and performance reading. As educators, we all have learned about the positive impact of modeling fluent reading. Teachers and parents motivate children to become readers by **reading aloud** to them from a variety of genres in a comfortable environment, while modeling fluent, expressive reading. **Supported reading** uses scaffolding as a tool or safety net for developing and struggling readers, that is slowly withdrawn as students become more proficient readers. This can include shared, choral, paired, or echo reading. Providing opportunities to practice fluency through **repeated reading** is usually part of any study or discussion of fluency. This low-stress practice helps students gain automaticity in their mastery of high frequency words and decoding while reading. **Performance reading** can make repeated reading more engaging by providing a purpose for practicing the oral reading for some sort of public sharing. This can include activities like radio reading, Readers' Theater, choral reading, and sharing poetry in a coffeehouse environment.

Fluency should be a "hot topic" in literacy education today. Fluency has a reciprocal relationship with comprehension, another important critical component of reading. It reinforces the reader's use of decoding and word recognition skills. Monitoring students' fluency progress should happen on a regular basis, more often with struggling students. This can be as simple as using running records during a guided reading group or using one-minute readings at the beginning, middle and end of the school year. Direct instruction and practice of fluency, as well as modeling, can be incorporated within daily classroom instruction. It is an important component of a quality literacy program.

### References

- Allington, R.L. (2009). *What really matters in fluency?* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Cassidy, J. & Cassidy, D. (2008). What's hot for 2008? *Reading Today* 25(4), 10-11.
- Hasbrouck, J. & Tindal, G.A. (2006). Oral reading fluency norms: A valuable assessment tool for reading teachers. *The Reading Teacher*, 59(7).636-644.
- Johns, J. (2007). Monitoring progress in fluency: Possible unintended consequences. *Reading Today*, 24(6), 18.
- Marcell, B. (2007). Fluent to a fault: Put fluency in the passenger seat and let comprehension take the wheel, *Reading Today*, 24(6), 18.
- Rasinski, T.V. (2003). *The fluent reader*. New York: Scholastic.

Lynn Olson  
Creighton University

### Jon Scieszka Helps Reluctant Readers

Advertising companies know they cannot bore a customer into buying a product. A customer needs to be interested in order to buy something. This is also true in the "selling" of reading. Teachers need to motivate their students. Many students need to be convinced that books are worth their time.

Jon Scieszka – rhymes with Fresca - has helped with a website for reluctant readers aimed at boys called guysread.com. I urge you to go to this website to see the booklists Jon has created as well as his ideas about how to help reluctant readers. You may also download and reproduce a Guys Read poster, stickers for recommended books, and bookmarks. If you are familiar with Jon Scieszka's work, you will not be surprised to find that his website is quirky and fun to read.

Nancy Comfort Anderson



Metropolitan Reading Council  
3403 Montreal Circle  
Bellevue, NE 68123

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S Postage  
**Paid**  
Omaha, NE  
Permit No. 657

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Nebraska State Reading Association  
Annual Conference  
February 26—28, 2009  
Kearney Nebraska



This is Nebraska's Premiere  
Professional Development Event for  
Reading and Language Arts!

Not Just a Conference, but an Exposition, too.  
See Displays of the Latest and Best  
Educational Products.  
Amazing Learning Opportunities!

For More Information: Go to  
<http://www.nereads.org/conference/index.html>

The Metropolitan Reading Council is an Honor Council of the  
International Reading Association