


Books for Early and Struggling Readers

Laura Lay
Senior Literacy Consultant
Colorado Department of Education



Slide 1

Learning to read is a complex human process that is not naturally occurring. The human brain is hard-wired for spoken language – making learning to speak natural. Any child, unless neurologically or hearing-impaired – or are sensory-deprived – will learn to speak at some point.

Reading and writing, on the other hand, are man-made. The notion that simply surrounding students in a print-rich environment and fostering the love of reading will lead them to become readers may sound ideal, but **that is not how learning to read works**. We are not hard-wired to read; our brains repurpose different parts of the brain for reading to create a reading neural network. Immersing children in literature and language-rich environments is important, but not sufficient on its own to guarantee the development of the necessary literacy skills for successful reading. We are not hard-wired to read and because of this these skills must be explicitly and systematically taught to students along with providing ample opportunity for students to practice these skills. This presentation will discuss ways to support students in practicing their newly learned skills which is essential for early and struggling readers.

Stages of Reading Development

Reading vs. Guessing Habits

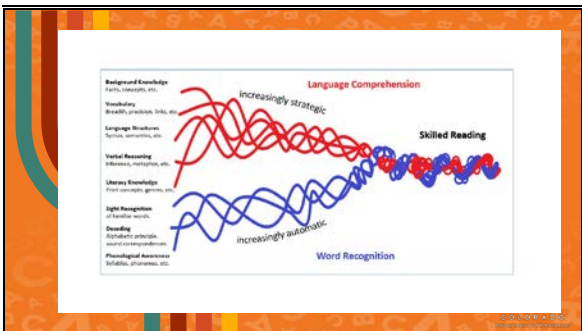
Joy of Successful Reading

Books for Different Purposes



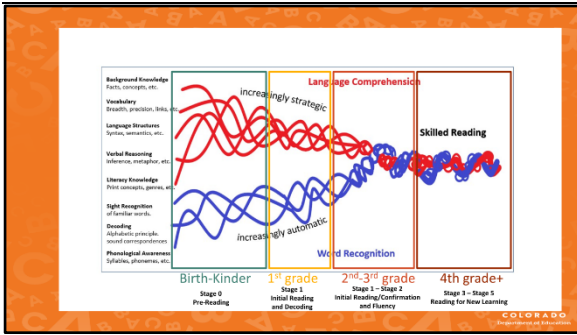
Slide 2

Find more information about learning to read and research aligned practices on CDE’s SoR Myths and Misconceptions page: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/sormythsmisconceptions>



Slide 3

Hollis Scarborough developed with model of reading that depicts multiple skills that are required to successfully read as strands in a rope. The reading rope identifies five language comprehension skills and three word recognition skills. The language comprehension skills needed are background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, and literacy knowledge—these subskills become increasingly strategic as a reader is growing their reading skills. The word recognition or word reading skills are phonological awareness, decoding, and sight recognition. Sight recognition is not to be confused with “sight words” or memorization. Rather, sight recognition is ability to instantly recognize and read a word which happens through a more complex process called orthographic mapping. Students need all three of these word recognition skills which become increasingly automatic as they become skilled readers.



Slide 4

Dr. Jeanne Chall created this model of Stages of Reading Development to support understanding of the stages a reader moves through as they learn to read and grow their reading. The following are approximations for typical ages when these stages may occur with appropriate reading instruction. Students may be advanced or maintain in a reading stage at variant ages because of accelerated skills or skill deficits.

Stage 0: Prereading Stage

The pre-reading stage typically takes place between birth and 6 years old. By the age of 5 or 6 years, young children understand that the spoken word can be represented by print. At this early stage, children begin to name letters and recognize words. They begin to understand the concepts of rhyming words, alliteration, and segmenting sentences such as counting words or deleting words in a sentence.

Stage 1: Initial Reading & Decoding Stage

During the initial reading and decoding stage, students understand the sound and symbol correlations necessary to begin to read words. They analyze simple words from individual parts (letters and sounds) into the whole word. They can also analyze words from the whole word into its parts.

Stage 2: Confirmation and Fluency Stage

Between the ages of 7 and 8, students have typically mastered their phonological awareness and basic phonics skills (at least this is what we hope for at this age). They focus on reading with more fluency. Fluency is the rapid accurate reading of text with expression, which requires well-developed word recognition skills. As students read with more fluency, they can spend more time understanding the text they are reading.

Stage 3: Reading for Learning

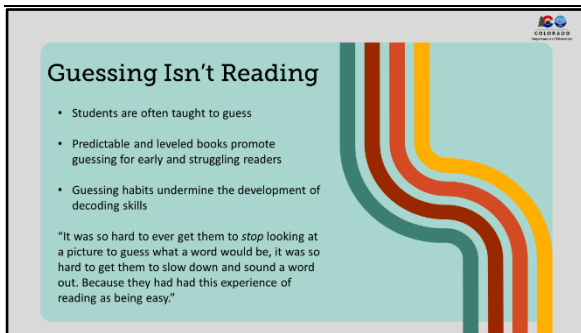
That brings us to stage 3—students at this stage have mastered the foundational skills of reading and are using those skills to learn content area information and gain new knowledge. This takes place between 4th and 9th grades.

Stage 4: Reading for Multiple View Points

Students between 14 and 18 typically read text from more than one point of view. They can now think and react critically to the text and consider multiple points of view. At this stage of reading development, students can now comprehend and interact with text with many layers of facts.

Stage 5: Construction and Reconstruction Stage

During this stage, individuals are selective about their reading. Selected texts are more related to personal interests and desire for academic knowledge. Readers at this stage construct knowledge for themselves and can form opinions and make judgements. For readers in stage 5, reading is more efficient than listening.



Guessing Isn't Reading

- Students are often taught to guess
- Predictable and leveled books promote guessing for early and struggling readers
- Guessing habits undermine the development of decoding skills

"It was so hard to ever get them to *stop* looking at a picture to guess what a word would be, it was so hard to get them to slow down and sound a word out. Because they had had this experience of reading as being easy."

Slide 5

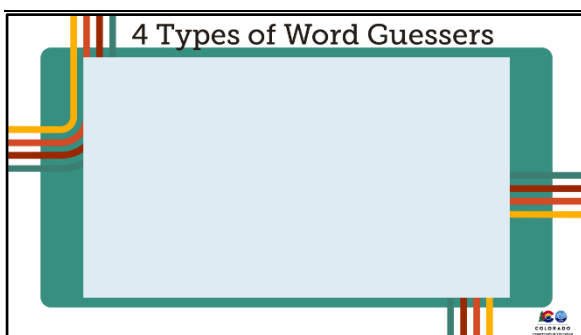
A common instructional approach which **does not align** with the science of reading is to provide young children with picture books that include a lot of repetition and encourage the child to guess words based on the sentence frame—something like the classic *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* This is an example of an excellent book to read together for pleasure reading, but not a book to use to practice newly learned decoding skills. The book can be used for that purpose if the child can read the text without the pictures and without guessing.

Children can memorize the phrases that repeat and look at pictures for clues to words they don't know. They may have learned some principles of phonics, but they don't need to use them to figure out the words.

In fact, many of the words in these "predictable" books don't match up with the phonics rules that have already been taught, so kids basically *have* to guess.

"It was so hard to ever get them to *stop* looking at a picture to guess what a word would be, it was so hard to get them to slow down and sound a word out. Because they had had this experience of reading as being easy."

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nataliewexler/2019/08/22/why-most-beginning-readers-are-taught-to-guess-at-wordsand-how-that-holds-them-back/?sh=995daf160f44>



4 Types of Word Guessers

Slide 6

<https://blog.allaboutlearningpress.com/break-the-word-guessing-habit/>

Guessing is a hard habit to break and detrimental to reading growth. Here are the 4 types of word guessers:

"First Letter" Guesser: This child looks at the first letter and guesses what the word is. For example, if the word is heart, the child looks at the H and says horse.

"Word Shape" Guesser: This child looks at the first and last letters of the word and at the basic shape in the middle of the word, and takes a wild guess. For example, if the word is maple, the child says maybe. Both words begin with M and end with E, and the words have a similar shape in the middle.

"Picture Clue" Guesser: This child looks at the pictures to help him guess the word. For example, the child may come across a sentence like The scary dog barked at the cat. The child doesn't know the word

scary, so he looks at the picture of the angry-looking dog and guesses the word angry.

“Context Clue” Guesser: This child uses context clues to guess the missing word. For example, the child may come across a sentence like The farmer bought grain for his cattle. The child doesn’t know the word cattle, but the first letter is C, and based on the context she guesses the word chickens.

Bolster Success



- Reading success develops a confidence and love of reading
- Low reading self-concept begins as early as the end of first grade
- Foundational skill development and early reading success is important for students to think of themselves as readers
- Decodable texts are important for young readers to experience early reading success

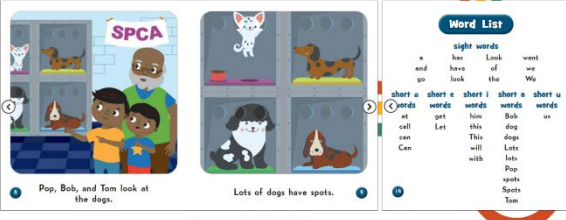



Reading success for early readers is essential in building confidence, joy, and allowing children to see themselves as readers.

Decodable books are an avenue for students to experience success without guessing or becoming frustrated. This is not incompatible with calls for “real” or “authentic” texts. Shared reading can and must continue, with texts that challenge and inspire, and bring joy.

Slide 7

Decodable Book Example



Pop, Bob, and Tom look at the dogs.

Lots of dogs have spots.

Word List

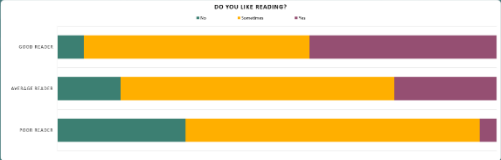
single words	went
has	look
of	we
and	the
go	We
short a	short e
short i	short u
words	words
words	words
at	him
get	Bob
call	this
can	Let
will	dog
with	Lots
	like
	Pop
	spots
	Spots
	Tom

Decodable books are books that a student can decode. For our earliest readers, it might look something like this example. Books published specifically as decodable books like this example are purposeful and temporary supports.

For students who are accelerated in their reading skills (moved into stage 2), a book decodable to that student might be much more complex than this. Students able to read more complex books independently without guessing or becoming frustrated should.

Slide 8

Literacy skills impact enjoyment.
Enjoyment does not lead to increased reading skills..



Reader Level	No	Sometimes	Yes
GOOD READER	10%	40%	50%
AVERAGE READER	20%	50%	30%
POOR READER	30%	40%	30%

A body of research shows a unidirectional influence of literacy skills on enjoyment. Better readers are more motivated to read, including finding reading enjoyable and engaging and reading more often.

Literacy Skills Seem to Fuel Literacy Enjoyment, Rather Than Vice Versa, <https://psyarxiv.com/3kfgd/>

Students experience the thrill of the skill when they learn to read and it’s not a guessing game.

Slide 9

Different Texts for Different Purposes

- **Not a call to remove** any books from your collection
- **Not a call to restrict** reading in any way
- **It is a call to be thoughtful** about if your collection is supportive to all readers

DON'T WEED BOOKS BASED ON THIS INFORMATION!

Slide 10

We all use different texts for different purposes. Personally, I seek books to expand my knowledge, for enjoyment, to expand my worldview, to relax, and probably a few more reasons. I enjoy literature, non-fiction, audiobooks, graphic novels, YA, middle grade books, memoirs, and more.

It's the same with beginning and struggling readers. We use different texts for different purposes. Some text choices lend themselves better to practicing reading for those who have not yet mastered the code.

Recipe for Successful and Joyful Reading

- Effective Reading Instruction at School
- Joyful Early Reading Experiences
- Interesting and Engaging Books
- Robust Library of Diverse Books, Including Books at Different Levels of Decodability
- Book Choice

Slide 11

The recipe for successful and joyful reading should include all of these. Students need effective reading instruction in school. This is the job of the school and not the library, but as librarians it is helpful to understand what this looks like and to make sure we are not spreading harmful myths about reading.

We should not perpetuate misinformation such as reading being a natural process, the idea of late bloomers and that children will catch up, or that a child just hasn't found the right book.

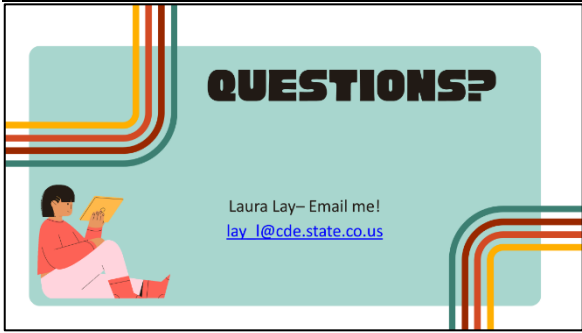
We *can* play a role in creating and promoting joyful early reading experiences, providing access to interesting and engaging books, providing access to diverse books and books are various levels of decodability, and promoting book choice as an important part of the library experience.

Booklists & Bookmarks

Slide 12

Read Don't Guess Bookmarks:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/readdontguessbookmark>

Decodable Booklists:
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/beginningreaderbooks>



Feel free to email me with any questions: lay_l@cde.state.co.us

Slide 13