



What is Raising Literacy?

Raising Literacy is a newsletter produced by the Florida Department of Education’s State Regional Literacy Directors (SRLDs). For the 2025-2026 school year, three issues will focus on reading foundations by referencing Lindsay Kemeny’s book *7 Mighty Moves: Research-Backed, Classroom-Tested Strategies to Ensure K-to-3 Reading Success*. Consult your district-adopted materials when planning instruction around these components of reading.

DEFINE FLUENCY

What is Fluency?

Fluency refers to a reader’s ability to read with accuracy, automaticity and appropriate prosody or expression. Accurate reading depends on a reader’s understanding of the relationship between phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships and decoding skills. The ability to read with 98% accuracy allows a reader to “maintain comprehension of most texts” (Kemeny, page 111). As decoding becomes more automatic, accurate word-reading fluency develops, allowing the reader to devote more attention to meaning. Fluent reading also requires prosody, the “the rhythmic and intentional aspect of language” (B.E.S.T. English Language Arts (ELA) Standards, page 217), such as the phrasing, rhythm and expression that resembles natural speech. Prosodic reading reveals a reader’s awareness of phrase boundaries in text as well as how to use vocal tone to express emotion (Kemeny, page 113). The phrasing and tone a reader applies to a text demonstrate his/her interpretation of that text’s meaning; therefore, fluency is often referred to as the bridge between word recognition and comprehension (Kemeny, page 110).

APPLY FLUENCY

In Move 6 of *7 Mighty Moves*, Lindsay Kemeny states that “one of the best ways to improve your students’ fluency is to engage them in repeated oral reading” (page 113). Providing opportunities for repeated readings of text can increase reading rate and accuracy, transferring fluency skills to other texts. While there are various ways to engage students in repeated readings, the approaches described below are adapted from Kemeny.

Individual Fluency Practice

One recommended approach is **Read, Model, Read Again** (page 118) which can be used with students during small group time. First, the student reads a portion of text aloud, such as a sentence, paragraph or page. Next, the teacher models fluent reading of the same text as the student tracks the text with his or her finger. Finally, the student rereads the portion of the text to demonstrate improved fluency. This practice should be paired with corrective feedback to give the student clear strategies for monitoring and refining his/her reading.

Whole-Group Fluency Practice

On page 119, Kemeny shows that fluency can be addressed in the Tier 1 setting in a variety of ways:

- Read aloud a text, modeling appropriate pacing and prosody, while students follow along with a finger on their own copy.
- Do cloze reading, where you pause at words you want students to read, and they read the word.
- Do choral reading, where you and students read aloud in unison.
- Do echo reading, where you read a short section of the text first (a phrase or sentence), and students repeat it.

CONNECT & PRACTICE AT HOME

How Can Families Help at Home?

The following tips can have a powerful impact on a child’s growth as a fluent reader.

- **Encourage Rereading** - Reread to deepen a child’s understanding and usage of words and allow him or her to become more familiar with the structure of the text, leading to improved accuracy, vocabulary and comprehension.
- **Model Reading** - Read the text for a child to demonstrate how it should be read smoothly and clearly with expression.
- **Establish a Reading Time** - Schedule timed reading exercises by setting goals, such as completing a story or specific number of words in a set time limit, leading to more automatic, accurate reading.
- **Provide Variety** - Encourage a child to choose from a variety of texts, improving fluency as he or she becomes more invested in what they are reading.

Adapted from New Worlds Reading. (2024, July 24.) *Four Ways to Increase Fluency*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXd5NUQfnyY>

DEFINE COMPREHENSION

What is Comprehension?

The B.E.S.T. ELA Standards define the word **comprehend** as the ability “to understand fully” (page 213), and ELA Expectation EE.2.1 states that students must “read and comprehend grade-level complex texts proficiently” (page 8). This process involves constructing meaning through purposeful interactions with text informed by background knowledge and understanding of vocabulary vital to comprehension. The intentional design of the B.E.S.T. ELA benchmarks support teachers in planning instruction that strategically deepens students’ reading comprehension.

Kemeny emphasizes in Move 7 that “the most important factor in good reading comprehension is how much vocabulary and background knowledge the reader has on the subject” (page 129). Vocabulary is not just about recognizing words—it is about understanding words deeply and using them meaningfully in context. The B.E.S.T. ELA Standards highlight this in the V.1.3 Context and Connotation benchmark, which guides students at every grade level to use **context clues**, **word relationships** and **background knowledge** to determine the meaning of unfamiliar and multiple-meaning words. Background knowledge provides students a mental framework for understanding text, allowing new information to connect to what they already know. Increased topic knowledge supports more efficient comprehension of complex text. Because vocabulary and background knowledge reinforce one another, students must receive explicit instruction that systematically builds a wide range of knowledge, including vocabulary development, before they can fully comprehend grade-level complex text.

APPLY COMPREHENSION

In Move 7, Kemeny shares a routine for building vocabulary and background knowledge together. This routine, adapted from pages 134-135, supports reading comprehension instruction as well as oral language development.

Oral Language Routine for Developing Vocabulary and Background Knowledge Simultaneously

Day 1: Naming - Have students orally name items using a broad topic (e.g., clothing). Next, while displaying a picture for each, narrow the choices to clothing worn on a hot, summer day and a cold, winter day.

Day 2: Describing - Hold up an item or picture of an item and ask students to describe it using this structure: name the object (e.g., scarf), the categories it might fit in (e.g., clothing, winter clothing, things you knit, things that are soft), sensory details about the item based on prompts you give them (e.g., What does a scarf feel like? What color is it? What is it used for?). Repeat the process with a second object if you have time (e.g., mitten).

Day 3: Listening and Answering Questions - Read aloud a related text to the class (e.g., *The Mitten* by Jan Brett) and then ask questions at the end (e.g., Why did the grandma want the boy to have red mittens? How does the boy lose his mitten?).

Day 4: Retelling - Model how to retell the story and have students retell it to a partner.

Day 5: Writing - Ask students to write a paragraph with a prompt that relates to the topic of the week (e.g., describe a mitten).

CONNECT & PRACTICE AT HOME

How Can Families Help at Home?

As parents and children read together at home, parents can support comprehension by asking open-ended questions like the ones below:

- **Use Question Starters** - Question starters can be used with any book.
 - What do you think...? How do you know...? What would happen if...?
 - Tell me more about...? What would you do...? What happened when...?
- **Give Wait Time** - Wait time is the practice of waiting a short amount of time (3-7 seconds) before expecting a response from a child. Allow a child time to pause and think before responding to an open-ended question.

Adapted from New Worlds Reading. (2023, Jan. 18.) *Asking Open-Ended Questions*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XkVICoOoBHg>