

# 3,2,1....READ! AN ENGAGING READING ROUTINE THAT BUILDS FLUENCY AND MORALE IN SECONDARY READERS

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**T**he need for fluency instruction does not end when students leave elementary school. Although many people equate fluency instruction with younger students (Nageldinger, 2014; Rasinski et al., 2016), educators who work with older students know the real difficulties many of these students face in this area. To make matters worse, “the clock is ticking” with older readers and the consequences of poor reading skills are steep. These can include disengagement, failure, dropout, and worse (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Kamil, 2008; Paige, 2008; Stover, O’Rear, & Morris, 2015).

Also problematic is the fact that most secondary teachers do not possess the knowledge and skills needed to assist these students (Goering & Baker, 2010; Kamil, 2008; Rasinski et al., 2005, Snow, 2010) because secondary teacher education programs tend to place a priority on content knowledge rather than the importance of literacy in the content areas (Snow, 2010).

Fortunately some of the very same methods used successfully with younger readers can be easily adapted for use with older readers to result in interventions that are both engaging and effective. Choral reading and repeated reading are two examples. Repeated reading is just that: reading a text repeatedly until goals are met. It is one of the best known interventions designed to support fluency development (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003). It was also endorsed by the National Reading Panel (2000) as a viable tool for fluency instruction.

Choral reading is reading in unison, like a chorus, with the teacher taking the lead (Rasinski, 1989). It is highly efficient because all students practice at the same time (Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014). It is also effective with struggling readers and English Learners because of the “tent of anonymity” it provides when readers read together rather than on their own (Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012). This is an especially inviting approach to use with readers who have a long history of reading failure (Paige, 2011).

Kuhn (2003) expressed the need for practical interventions that are “classroom-friendly and that can be easily integrated” (p. 339). Both choral reading and repeated reading meet those criteria. In addition, they are methods that can be easily used by secondary teachers who aren’t necessarily equipped to teach reading.

The choral reading routine described below was designed to be a practical tool to develop fluency in older, struggling readers. The intervention consists primarily of instructional strategies commonly used by elementary teachers: choral reading, repeated reading, echo reading, and antiphonal reading.

Performance and choice are incorporated to engage students and create an authentic learning situation. These strategies are put together into a weekly routine that can easily be incorporated into classrooms of all kinds.

The routine is efficient in terms of both time and cost. It was designed to be brief, taking anywhere from 5-10 minutes of class time daily and requires minimal time for preparation, which consists mainly of selecting appropriate texts. Texts should be on grade level or slightly above since a great deal of scaffolding will be provided for the students. They should be short texts or excerpts, and can be any genre. In fact, teachers should make an effort to incorporate a wide variety of genres into their selections. Effort should also be made to find engaging texts that students will enjoy reading aloud multiple times.

The routine is the same each week and can be incorporated into any part of the class period. The routine is as follows: On Monday, the teacher presents two texts and reads them aloud to students, modeling fluent oral reading. The class then selects the text they want to focus on for the week.

Tuesday typically takes the longest amount of time. The teacher begins by giving each student a copy of the selected text. The teacher guides students as they divide the text into parts and label the parts (A and B). Together, the teacher and students discuss the text and make notes, ensuring the students understand the meaning and any unfamiliar words. The teacher might also focus on how to read difficult parts or on an interesting feature of the text. Finally, the teacher leads the class in an echo/choral reading in which the teacher reads a part, then the students echo the same part back, reading chorally. This continues through the entire text. Since many older readers will be unfamiliar with choral reading, it might be helpful for the teacher to do a simple 3, 2, 1 countdown to begin.

Wednesday, students are divided into two groups, and each group is assigned either part A or part B of the text. The teacher leads the students in an antiphonal/choral reading in which group A reads their part chorally, and group B reads their part chorally. The teacher reads with both groups, leading the “chorus”.

Thursday is a repeat of Wednesday’s antiphonal/choral reading followed by the teacher providing specific feedback, either to the class as a whole or to individual students. The class then reads a second time, applying the feedback given by the teacher. Providing feedback should not be limited to Thursday since providing regular feedback and encouragement is critical to the success of this choral reading routine.

Friday is performance day! The teacher plans some type of mini-performance which might be as simple as asking someone (the principal, another class, parents) to visit the class and listen to the students read or as involved as taking the class on a field trip to perform their reading. Performance is key to building confidence in struggling readers since many of these students have not had previous opportunities to read aloud successfully. Performance also lends authenticity to the choral reading routine because students know they are preparing to read before a real audience.

Depending on how many weeks a teacher decides to implement the intervention, it may be adapted slightly to hold students interest. There are many ways to do this as long as the key strategies of repeated reading and choral reading remain. For example, students might be allowed to practice in small groups rather than as a whole group. Another option is to have students switch parts for a day or to have them record themselves, listen to the recordings, and evaluate themselves or each other. The teacher might also record herself reading then have students read along to the recording on a laptop or their phone.

Throughout the intervention, the focus is always on developing fluency to gain comprehension, and this must be communicated explicitly to students. With older students, providing a rationale in real-life terms at the beginning is important so that they will buy-in to the intervention. Many of these students are reluctant to read aloud initially, but once they get into the routine, they typically enjoy it. The reward is in seeing students' confidence grow as their fluency improves and they begin to see themselves as readers!

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