

Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years

# Foundational Literacy Skills

January 30, 2025

Presenter:  
Megan Zeni

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## Learning Objectives



- In this workshop, we will explore a scope & sequence for foundational literacy skills, focusing on:
  - evidence-based instructional routines for phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension
  - strategies to support early reading and writing development, including a multi-tiered system of support

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## POPEY's Approach



Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years  
www.popey.ca

- POPEY shares research and knowledge around how we learn to read, the reading brain, and the foundational skills that support learning to read and write.
- In workshops, we offer a collection of evidence-based strategies for teachers to consider.
- Teaching reading is not a one-size fits all model - no two districts are the same, just as no two students are the same.
- We invite teachers to consider implementing evidence-based instructional techniques to ensure literacy success for their diverse learners.

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**Shape of the day**

- 8:30 - 10:30
  - the science of reading and learning
  - comparing three models of reading
  - routines and strategies to support instruction
- 10:45 - 12:00
  - characteristics of strong phonics instruction
  - the reading brain and the role of orthographic mapping
  - Routines and strategies to support instruction
- 1:00 - 2:30
  - article reading and professional dialogue
  - decodable texts - what, when, and why?
  - Routines and strategies to support instruction
  - putting it all together - reflections, connections, and next steps



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**How did you learn to...**



ride a bike?



swim?



drive a car?

*Please choose ONE activity and take ONE minute to reflect individually - how did you learn this skill?*

When you are ready, go ahead and share your thoughts with your table group.

Lesley University Institute: Word Study Teaching Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling in Grades K-3 [www.poey.ca](http://www.poey.ca) @poeybc #POPEYBC POPEY

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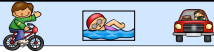
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**How do we learn?**



- Observations of someone skilled (modelling/demonstrating)
- Direct (explicit) instruction
- In environments that support a gradual release of responsibility
- Guided practice / repetition
- Protected time and opportunity for practice
- Supportive encouragement and feedback
- In environments where we feel safe to take risks and try new things
- Within relationships that cultivate motivation and engagement

*With this in mind, how do we create the learning experiences and environments our students need to build foundational literacy skills?*

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### Foundations of Literacy

Our goal is for students to be enthusiastic explorers of words who:

- Can recognize letters and sounds
- Can decode and blend sounds together to create words
- Can recognize words quickly and automatically
- Can build their vocabulary and background knowledge
- Can make meaning of what they read
- Can read with fluency
- Can present their ideas in writing



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### Effective literacy is not an either/ or

and, and, and...

Decodable texts	vs.	Authentic literature
Research	vs.	Classroom Practice
The art of teaching	vs.	The science of reading
Individual student needs	vs.	Whole class efficiency
Direct instruction	vs.	Discovery learning
Practice in isolation	vs.	Practice in context
Mastery of skills	vs.	Joy of reading
Structure	vs.	Choice
Urgency	vs.	Joy

Comprehensive = complete, including all elements or aspects of something

The City of Vancouver & Shifting the Balance - Barkins & Yates | www.pokey.ca | @pokeybc | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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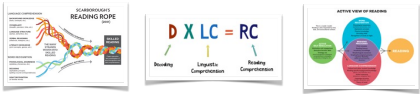
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### Let's unpack this together..

At your table groups, take a look at these three models of reading:

- Notice what is **similar**
- Notice what is **different**
- What's **new, interesting, or affirming** to you?



It is worth noting that:  
All three of these are **models/representations** of reading, **not** of reading instruction or learning to read. They describe the process of reading, the abilities one must marshal to read. - Shanahan, 2023

Shanahan on Learning | www.pokey.ca | @pokeybc | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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### Foundational Skills for Reading

**Foundations of Literacy**

Phonemic Awareness, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension

**ORAL LANGUAGE**

Proficiency in these foundational skills is necessary for all students to be reflective, critical, and independent readers.

Adapted from the National Reading Panel's Five Pillars model

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### MTSS - Multi-Tiered System of Supports

set up to be a continuum of instructional supports that are available to every student from day one of kindergarten

**Tier 3: Intensive**  
Meets the needs of additional 5-10% of students in the class

**Tier 2: Supplemental**  
Meets the needs of additional 5-10% of students in the class

**Tier 1: Universal**  
Meets the needs of at least 80% of all students in the class

- Tier 3:**
  - in addition to Tiers 1 and 2
  - individualized intervention
  - more time, smaller groups
- Tier 2:**
  - extra doses of support for a small body of students
  - in addition to Tier 1
  - delivered in small groups
- Tier 1:**
  - comprehensive, universal instruction for all students
  - primary prevention of reading failure

The MTSS model comes from the idea that we can prevent reading failure for the vast majority of students.

Defining MTSS with Steeborn, Steiner – Podcast

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### Where do we start?

**Phonological Awareness**  
The ability to hear and manipulate the spoken parts of words and sentences.

**Phonemic Awareness**  
The ability to work with the individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

Word Awareness, Rhyme, Syllable, Onset - Rime, Phoneme Blending, Phoneme Substitution, Phoneme Manipulation, Phoneme Segmentation

Hanging around in primary.com

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### A scope & sequence for phonemic awareness

the understanding that spoken words are made up of individual sounds

Isolation  
Blending  
Segmenting  
Addition  
Deletion  
Substitution

simplest  
most complex

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### Ways to play with phonemic awareness

- Rhyming walks (tree/ she; sun/ fun; flower/ tower)
- Segmenting and blending walks with environmental print (stop signs)
- I spy games
- Scavenger hunts
- Chalk hopscotch segmenting
- Sound sorts (alphabet tubs)
- Songs and tongue twister line ups

Rachel Tidd, Wild Learning www.pokey.ca @pokeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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### Small Group Supports for Phonemic Awareness

#### Manipulatives to support phonemic awareness & orthographic mapping

**Elkonin Boxes**

Tip: Mix it up and use play-doh balls, pom-poms, little toys, or point stampers to represent the sound!

c / a / t

<b>Say it</b> 	<b>Connect to Meaning</b> 	<b>Stretch it</b> 
<b>Tap it</b>		
<b>Write it</b>		<b>Check it!</b>

Hegarty Phonics Awareness Curriculum 1 Sarah Paul (@sarahcpaul) on Instagram www.pokey.ca @pokeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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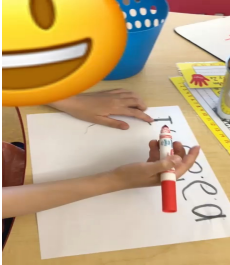
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**Phonemic Awareness Application**



Erhi et al. suggest that "phonemic awareness is not taught for its own sake but rather for its value in helping children understand and use the alphabetic system to read and write". Further, that it ought not to be taught "blindly in isolation and nauseam without any connection to reading and writing" (2001).

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**Readiness Skills**



The two best predictors of early reading success are phonemic awareness and a student's understanding of the alphabetic principle.

**Phonemic Awareness**  
Students' ability to hear and manipulate the smallest units of sound in a word – phonemes

**Alphabetic Principle**  
The understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between sounds and letters.

\*these skills open the gate for reading\* – Wiley Blevins

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**Letter Sound Recognition & Alphabetic Principle**

**How many words can you make from these letters?**

**s, m, t, d, l**

vs

**s, m, a, t, d**

When a child memorizes ten words, they can only read ten words.  
If a child learns the sounds of ten letters, they will be able to read 350 three-sound words, 4,320 four-sound words, and 21,650 five-sound words.

*Dr. Martin Kurland*

Shifting the Balance Burkins & Yates www.pokey.ca @pokeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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### Phonemic Awareness Instruction



**Keep in mind:**

- Short and frequent sessions
- Focus primarily on blending and segmenting (phoneme-level skills)
- Begin to add letters to this work
- Often integrated into phonics lesson

**Ideas for instructional strategies:**

- Use manipulatives to keep it playful
  - Elkonin boxes + bingo chips
  - Pop It fidget toys
  - Race cars + tracks
  - Unifix cubes
- Encourage gestures
  - Hand choppers
  - Tap down arm
  - Finger/thumb tap
- Word Chains - build phonemic awareness and phonics skills at the same time

7 Mighty Moves - Kimmory 2023 | www.pokey.ca | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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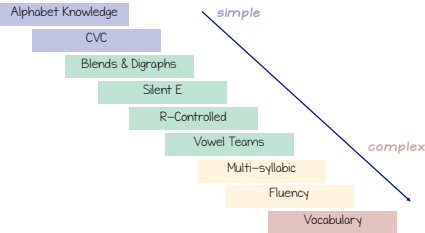
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### A scope and sequence for phonics instruction



Alphabet Knowledge

CVC

Blends & Digraphs

Silent E

R-Controlled

Vowel Teams

Multi-syllabic

Fluency

Vocabulary

simple

complex

A Fresh Look at Phonics - Blevins | www.pokey.ca | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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### Characteristics of Strong Phonics Instruction

- **Systematic**
  - It has a logical scope and sequence.
  - Skills and concepts are taught in a particular order - prerequisite skills are taught first.
- **Explicit**
  - Clear and direct instruction of important skills and concepts.
- **Cumulative**
  - Build on previously learned skills.
  - Sufficient repetition and review for mastery.



A Fresh Look at Phonics, Grade K-2 - Blevins | www.pokey.ca | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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### Mini-Lesson: time for students to do the heavy lifting



- mini, not maxi (five minutes)
- strategy-focused
- model, model, model
- direct and explicit instruction
- guided practice in a safe, supportive setting
- gradual transfer to independence

"Whoever does the work in the lesson does the learning" – Wiley Blevins

Write From the Start: Writing Workshop in K-3 – POPEY Presentation | www.pokey.ca | @popeybc | #POPEYBC | POPEY

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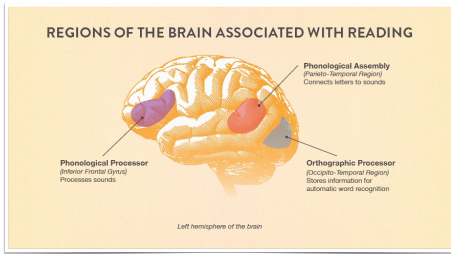
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### The Reading Brain



REGIONS OF THE BRAIN ASSOCIATED WITH READING

- Phonological Processor** (Anterior Frontal Gyrus) Processes sounds
- Phonological Assembly** (Parieto-Temporal Region) Connects letters to sounds
- Orthographic Processor** (Occipito-Temporal Region) Stores information for automatic word recognition

Left hemisphere of the brain

Evidence for a New Era of Reading Instruction | www.pokey.ca | @popeybc | #POPEYBC | POPEY

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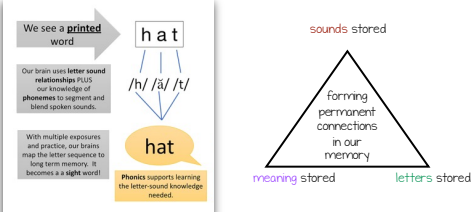
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### Orthographic Mapping

The **process** of storing a word permanently in memory for instant retrieval is called **orthographic mapping**.



We see a **printed** word → **h a t**

Our brain uses **letter-sound relationships** PLUS our knowledge of **phonemes** to segment and blend spoken sounds.

With multiple exposures and practice, our brains map the letter sequence to long-term memory. It becomes a **single word**.

Phonics supports learning the letter-sound knowledge needed.

sounds stored

forming permanent connections in our memory

meaning stored      letters stored

Positive Dockets – Bonus: Subit Words & Orthsounds Memory | www.pokey.ca | @popeybc | #POPEYBC | POPEY

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**Word Mapping** supporting the cognitive process of orthographic mapping

Word mapping is a **physical** way to represent the **relationship** between the **phonemes (sounds)** and **graphemes (letters)**.

**WORD MAPPING**

Say the word

Tap the word

Map the word

Graph the word

Write the word

Check for meaning  
Check for context

Shifting the Balance: Burkens & Yates | www.popecy.ca | @popeybc | #POPEYBC | POPEY

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**High frequency power words**

109 Power Words  
Jan Burkens and Kari Yates © 2020 thesdiditll.com

1	the	23	his	41	which	61	into	81	made	101	got
2	up	22	was	42	them	62	from	82	and	102	through
3	you	23	from	43	and	63	more	83	at	103	back
4	to	24	it	44	if	64	for	84	down	104	much
5	up	25	water	45	so	65	had	85	way	105	before
6	in	26	or	46	well	66	like	86	very	106	go
7	is	27	by	47	each	67	has	87	first	107	good
8	you	28	can	48	about	68	and	88	and	108	near
9	that	29	had	49	how	69	one	89	my	109	write
10	it	30	not	50	up	70	could	90	water		
11	the	31	had	51	out	71	in	91	the		
12	the	32	what	52	them	72	mine	92	the		
13	the	33	at	53	than	73	than	93	very		
14	an	34	was	54	the	74	not	94	of		
15	are	35	when	55	my	75	been	95	words		
16	an	36	we	56	some	76	to	96	could		
17	and	37	there	57	is	77	also	97	just		
18	the	38	can	58	these	78	now	98	where		
19	they	39	an	59	what	79	make	99	not		
20	at	40	can	60	other	80	the	100	was		

\* Words 1-13 make up 25% of the words in children's texts.

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**High-leverage instructional routines for phonics instruction**

Explicitly and systematically teach the secrets of how to crack the written code.

- ✓ Let's play with sounds - daily
- ✓ Let's study something new - 1-3 times per week
- ✓ Let's blend some words - daily
- ✓ Let's build some words - 2-3 times per week
- ✓ Let's write some words - 2-3 times per week
- ✓ Let's study some spellings - 2-3 times per week
- ✓ Let's read! - daily
- ✓ Let's review something that was a little tricky - as needed

Including **both** systematic phonics and meaningful interactions with texts leads to the most powerful outcomes for beginning readers.

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### Phonics Instruction: A Lesson Flow

**HEAR IT**  
• phonemic awareness

**TEACH IT**  
• name and teach new skill/sound

**DECODE IT**  
• decodes words with target skill

**ENCODE IT**  
• spell words with target skill

**READ IT**  
• read words, sentences and decodable passages

The last two steps should be approximately 50% of your lesson time. Blevins states "students progress at a much faster rate in phonics when the bulk of instructional time is spent on applying the skill to authentic reading and writing experiences" (2017).

Heidi Ann Messmer - Lesson Flow | www.pokey.ca | @POPEYBC | #POPEYBC | POPEY

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### Word Ladders - playing with sounds, letters, words

Word ladders are easily differentiated to be responsive to your students' varied abilities & needs and can be extended to literacy centres for additional engagement & practice.

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### Word Building / Word Chains

This is sophisticated phonemic awareness work: Students are substituting, deleting, and adding sounds (encoding). And then they're using their knowledge of spelling to create the new word and then read (decode) the new word to make sure it's correct.

UFLI Foundations Manual | www.pokey.ca | @POPEYBC | #POPEYBC | POPEY

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**Instructional Strategy: Word Chains**

Teacher Language	Skill
(Begin with mat.) Change mat to sat.	encoding
Change the S to an F. Now tell me what word you have?	decoding
Change fat to fit.	encoding
Change the F to an S. What word is that?	decoding
What letter do you need to change sit to lit?	encoding
Now add an S to the beginning of lit. What word do you get?	decoding

UFLI Foundations Manual | www.popecy.ca | @POPEYBC | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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**A Phonics Centre Activity - Letter Bank**

Letter Bank  
b d d e  
e e e  
l n n  
p s t

Wiley Beane - TLA workshop: Adding Decoding to Phonics Lessons, Oct 2023 | www.popecy.ca | @POPEYBC | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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**A Phonics Centre Activity - Spin It** Word Awareness

Spinner 1 Spinner 2 Spinner 3

TEAM 1 TEAM 2

Spin it by spelling pattern

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### A Phonics Centre Activity - Roll It

Word Awareness

TEAM 1 TEAM 2

-ear -air -are -ear -air -are

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### Spelling or Syllable Cards

Students practice decoding and encoding by manipulating, deleting, substituting, and blending recently taught letters & sounds to make new words.

Spelling or Syllable Cards

s a d m o p t

- Use small set of letter cards.
- Focus on target skill at first.
- Then fold in review skills.
- Do subset during small groups for students needing extra support.

sad	sad	sad	sad	sad	sad
mad	sat	sit	mad	mad	mad
bad	hat	sit	map	map	map
had	had	hit	tap	mop	mop
		hit	tan	top	top
			man	man	man
			man	man	man

Valley Bears - TLA workshop: Adding Encoding to Phonics Lessons, Oct. 2023 www.pokey.ca @pokeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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### A Phonics Centre Activity - Word Sorts

road  
show  
grow  
boat  
blow  
coat  
row  
goat

Word Sort

-o	-ow	-ow	oddballs
no	show	boat	were
mother	throw	foad	goal
soak	cold	yellow	don't
know	toast	soap	father
			follow

Valley Bears - TLA workshop: Adding Encoding to Phonics Lessons, Oct. 2023 www.pokey.ca @pokeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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**Living Words - make a word**

Living Words

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**Living Words - make a word**

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**Phonics Instruction Review!**

**Keep in mind:**

- Systematic: Move from simple to complex
  - Following a scope and sequence
- Explicit: "Today I want to teach you..."
- Keep students engaged by:
  - Inviting student responses
  - Have students come to the board to find a word, highlight a phonics skill in a word

**Ideas for instructional Strategies:**

- Understand "the code" yourself
- Consider using a systematic and explicit phonics program
- White boards are a fabulous tool!
- Keep lessons lively, and stick to suggested times
- Don't forget to unpack word meaning
- Word sorts
- Word chains
- Try multi-sensory methods
- Use Elkonin (sound) boxes to support encoding

7 Mighty Moves - Kenney, 2023 | www.pokey.ca | @pokeybc | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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The best phonics instruction is active, engaging, and thought provoking. Students are playing with letters and sounds and discussing what they observe about how words work to deepen their understanding of our alphabetic system so they can read and write.



Phonics instruction involves talk. It involves observation. And it involves tons of application to authentic reading and writing experiences.

DI For Essential Phonics Instruction for Maximum Impact – Blevins [www.popey.ca](http://www.popey.ca) @POPEYBC @POPEYBC 

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 **Reflect & Share: What are your mirrors? Windows? Next steps?**

Nell Duke & Heidi Anne Mesmer

- a meaningful sentence
- a powerful phrase
- words that caught your attention

- Read the article **on your own** (20 minutes)
- Find a **partner** and discuss your **reflections, connections, and wonderings** in pairs of 2 (10 minutes)
- Join another pair to **make a quadrant** and share your **biggest takeaways** from the article (10 minutes)



Laura Stewart, The Reading League [www.popey.ca](http://www.popey.ca) @POPEYBC @POPEYBC 

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 **Patterned, Levelled Texts**

Puppies get **into** lots of silly spots.  
2 puppies are in the boots.

Puppies get **into** lots of silly spots.  
3 puppies are in the flowers.

Shifting the Balance: Burkins & Yates [www.popey.ca](http://www.popey.ca) @POPEYBC @POPEYBC 

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**Decodable Texts: letter/sound** Whole Phonics™



Is the cap on a mat?  
Nol It is not on the mat.

Is Zac's cap on a can?  
Nol It is not on the can.

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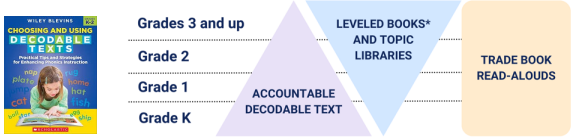
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**Decodable Texts**



Grades 3 and up

Grade 2

Grade 1

Grade K

LEVELED BOOKS\* AND TOPIC LIBRARIES

ACCOUNTABLE DECODABLE TEXT

TRADE BOOK READ-ALOUDS

Important to remember that students need access to a variety of texts for different instructional purposes

Choosing and Using Decodable Texts: Practical Tips and Strategies for Enhancing Phonics Instruction – Blewett – 2021

www.pokey.ca @pokeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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**Fluency**

Fluency is the ability to read text accurately, at an appropriate pace, with expression.

- As decoding is automatized, students increase their ability to read texts fluently, freeing cognitive resources to focus on the meaning of the texts.
- Reading fluency develops as a result of strong instruction in other core components of literacy: phonological awareness, phonics, and vocabulary.
- To read a text fluently, students must have accurate and automatic word reading skills (Hudson et al., 2009). Text-level fluency develops with extended opportunities to practice oral reading. (Zemmermann et al., 2021).

Fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension.

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**Building Fluency**

**Keep in mind**

- More than just reading fast
- Don't teach phonics in isolation
- Avoid "round robin" reading
- Be mindful of how you use independent reading time



**Ideas for instructional Strategies**

- Remember: Fluency is not an isolated skill
  - subskills: phonemic awareness, sound-symbol knowledge, automaticity at letter or word level
- Small Group instruction affords specific, immediate feedback
- Model, model, model!!!
- Whole Group Reading including:
  - Read aloud, cloze reading, choral reading, echo reading
- Partner Reading
- Reader's Theatre
- Beat the Clock Timed Reading
- Repeated Reading

7 Mighty Moves – Kennedy, 2023  
 www.popecy.ca @POPEYBC #POPEYBC POPEY

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**Reading as Meaning Making**

For students to become efficient meaning makers, they need to

- **build knowledge of text type and content**
- **undertake practice with decoding texts**
- **develop and use vocabulary**
- **make links between prior knowledge and the texts they are reading**



Reading As Meaning Making – Victoria State Government, Department of Education (Australia)  
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Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years

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