



REACHING RELUCTANT READERS

By Christy Ziller

This is my 25th year in education. I have worked as a paraprofessional in a first and second grade classroom. I've been a reading specialist and Language Arts teacher in middle school. Over the years, I have had readers that absolutely love books. I have had students who have absolutely hated to read. I've had students who read books because it was a requirement and I have had students who faked reading. I would be lying to you if I said I had all the answers on how to get a child to want to be a reader. However, I have some ideas that may help any educator on this journey to reach reluctant readers.

Based on my experience, a reluctant reader is, quite simply, any student who really does not show any interest in reading. His or her reading abilities may vary, but the child may have trouble connecting with books independently. Over the course of my many years in the classroom, I have found a few strategies to be very helpful: make reading fun; allow the students power of choice; let your students talk about books and make it social; try readers theater; and plan or create hands-on activities that involve movement.

Next, locate go-to book lists for reading suggestions. There are lots of books recommended for reluctant readers, especially middle school age boy readers. You can find a multitude of lists that make suggestions of books to get for your classroom. I use the online resources at Anderson's Bookstore. They have a Mock Newberry list and other suggested titles. I have found the Goodreads website is helpful for other suggested books for kids. The Illinois Library Association also has wonderful links to places that will help teachers find books for their classroom. The Illinois Reading Council has the links for Illinois Reads, newsletters and journals that contain book reviews.

In addition to knowing where to look for books, you'll need to know what to look for to help your students. Use a student interest form to see what students like to learn about or their interests. These will help you find a book for him or her.

Matching books to students can be tricky. However, I have found that many students like visual books like graphic novels. These are a great go-to source to make books approachable for students. I wouldn't worry about the readability level. First and foremost, just get them reading and enjoying books.



Besides graphic novels, I suggest oddities and factual books. This is another way to get books into the hands of reluctant readers. Titles I suggest are books like the Guinness Book of World Records, Ripley's

Believe It or Not, Weird do True about National Geographic kids. These have short paragraphs of information and lots of pictures. These books offer bursts of informational text and are very approachable for all readers but especially students who do not have the reading endurance for a full length novel.

Furthermore, connect students to books that have been made into movies. This will help them with their background knowledge of a story's plot and help them with the schema of what's happening with the characters. I always find it interesting when students talk to me about a book that has been made into a movie. They usually can not wait to tell me how much the book is different. It starts a wonderful discussion and provides additional access points to conversation with their peers.

Another strategy that works in my classroom with my middle school students is offering them a book that is the first in a series. Once a student falls in love with a book, a character, or an author, it makes it very easy for them to continue with the next book. They already like something about that series, storyline, or characters that has drawn them into reading more. Popular series in my room include Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series; John Flanagan's series The Ranger's Apprentice; RL Stine's Goosebumps books; Tom Angleberger's The Strange Case of Origami Yoda series; and J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. Sometimes, there are authors that students absolutely love. Like many adults, children enjoy the format, genre, or writing style of a particular literary author. My middle schoolers enjoy the work of Gordon Korman, James Patterson, Jerry Spinelli, Gary Paulsen, RL Stine, Margaret Peterson Haddix, Dan Gutman, Tim Green, Jason Reynolds, and Kwame Alexander. These are some of our favorites.

Additionally, another way that you can get students interested in reading books is by hosting author visits. I know during this time of the pandemic, schools are not having people in our buildings. These visits are not necessarily feasible at this time. However, this will not last forever. You may want to consider a Skype or Zoom visit for now. This can give you time to plan for future visits and get on the books! Our small school has hosted Neal Shusterman, Tim Green, Margaret Peterson Haddix, Kat Falls, Peter Kujawinski, and Joelle Charbonneau. With the help of literacy grants, your school can host some amazing writers too!



In addition to funding author visits, find ways to build your classroom library. Nothing gets students excited to read more than choices! Have a wide selection of titles for them and make it easy for them to locate different genres or collections you have by arranging them in bins that are easily recognizable with a clear precise label. With that, create book displays that are easy for students to locate choice books. One of my favorite things to do is create a display that has interesting topics for each month. I use 'Today in History' at www.history.net and www.NationalToday.com and connect book titles to events from history or daily celebrations. You may also create a bulletin board of a featured author and all the different title choices they have to pick from that may interest students. You can do book talks about each of them all at once or do one a day. Better yet, have students read these titles and create book trailers for each one with a QR code linked to a video. How fun! It may not be feasible now because of the Covid pandemic, but make a reading center where students are able to sit down and enjoy a quiet reading time in a space that's attractive and comfortable. I also have tied books to bulletin boards that students can use for setting goals and have students come up with ways that books can be turned into bulletin boards through suggestions on a Google form. Don't underestimate the power of magazines. A lot of students like to read online, but there are some who also like the paper copies too: *Cobblestone*, *Kids Discover*, *Scholastic News*, *Scholastic Scope* and *Sports Illustrated Kids* magazine. These are just a few.

Lastly, every classroom teacher and parent should look for award winning or nominated books for children. Check out the AISLE website <https://www.aisled.org/> which is the Association for Illinois School Library Educators. They have resources for the award winning finalists and information about authors, books, and upcoming events.

I am constantly investing in myself to be a better educator. I value my membership in outside organizations like the Illinois Reading Council and the International Literacy Association, to stay ahead of the research, to know the authors and their work, and to connect with other educational practitioners. Being a classroom teacher is difficult and we can not do it alone. We need our fellow educators to help build each of us up and be better versions of ourselves everyday. In turn, we will reach each one of our

students and make a difference.



"I REALLY GUESS YOU CAN'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER." REELING IN RELUCTANT READERS THROUGH LITERACY PRACTICES

By Olabisi K. Adenekan, Oakton Community College, Des Plaines, Illinois

Teachers of developmental reading and writing classes are well-aware that the majority of students placed into these classes are reluctant readers whose avoidance often stems from attitudes resulting from failures of the past in these domains (De Koning & van der Schoot, 2013; Fisher & Frey, 2012; Marinak, 2013; Morris, 2015; Wilhelm, 2016). It has therefore become imperative to find other avenues to motivate this category of students to read and to write (Alтчuler & Chai, 2019). Although read-alouds, book talks, and book clubs are relatively popular literacy activities that are traditionally confined to K-12 classes (Ciesla, 2016), various higher education developmental education instructors also utilize these strategies to draw in and engage the students. In this brief review, I share my praxis of using these literacy practices in my developmental reading and writing classes to promote reading for pleasure and to advance students' literacy skills.

Although not often emphasized in developmental reading/writing courses, I favor read-aloud as a "bellringer activity." I also book-talk books from a wide variety of genres to open students up to the possibilities that exist, often also referring them to various library-provided resources where they can check out physical or e-books. Organizing student-led book clubs is another of my favorite class activities. To formulate the clubs, each student book talks and pitches a book. The class votes on the books and based on the result of the votes, they are placed in different book clubs. These clubs not only promote leisure reading, and the autonomy to enjoy self-selected books, as attested to by one such student who titled his reflection, "*I really guess you can't judge a book by its cover,*" the clubs also help in building an effective community of learners armed with the agency needed for empowerment.

Truth be told, even though I sometimes have utmost success with a student, some individuals, or an entire class group, sometimes, as with any initiative, I get no buy-in from an entire group. I am still, however, persuaded that promoting these literacy activities opens up such possibilities for reluctant readers/writers to (1) expand their horizon, (2) sharpen their skills, and (3) be challenged to re-develop habits in which they may have formerly failed.

Furthermore, with the content-delivery interruptions and re-configurations necessitated by Covid-19, I am looking into modifying these practices, especially in fully asynchronous classes, so I can continue to harness the gains they provide for students. For the time being, starting with one practice, and adding in others, one at a time, may be the only recourse.

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STRATEGIES FOR STRUGGLING READERS

By Susan Lorey

"The man who does not read has no advantage over the man who cannot read." This saying is often credited to Mark Twain and although its origin remains unverified its truth is profound. Students who enjoy reading, read more often and consequently read well! And so, a fundamental strategy we as teachers can use to help struggling readers is to increase their opportunities and motivation to read.

Struggling readers need consistent opportunities to read—for pleasure. Like any skill, reading requires practice to breed success. Setting aside 20 minutes of uninterrupted class time for independent reading and encouraging students to read at home for 20 minutes each day affords students ample opportunities to uncover the joy and value of reading, while refining their reading skills.

Giving struggling readers opportunities to choose what they read both empowers and motivates them, as they assume ownership and agency of their own learning. In *The Book Whisperer* (2009) Donalyn Miller emphasizes, "Readers without power to make their own choices are unmotivated." (p. 23).

To ensure students find books they want and can read, access to a wide range of genres, high-quality, high-interest texts, and assorted reading formats, including picture books, print books, e-books, and audio books is critical. In addition to discount bookstores, book clubs/programs, grants, and school fundraising events, this National Education Association link provides a list of resources where teachers can access an assortment of free and low-cost books in varied formats at www.nea.org.

Struggling readers need to learn how to choose "the right" books and what factors need to be considered, such as their interest, background knowledge, and the readability of a text. It is important to remember, as Irene Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell note on their blog, "a level is a teacher's tool, NOT a child's label" at fountasandpinnell.com. For that reason, struggling readers should consider an assortment of factors. Reading levels alone should not define nor restrict their choices.

Finally, struggling readers need opportunities to reflect on their reading experiences. They need opportunities to share authentic responses to/about the books they read. They need opportunities to evaluate and talk about their reading experiences. Discussions about the merit of a book's topic, illustrations, characters, and messages require critical thinking. What a glorious way to showcase and celebrate the progress of all readers, particularly those who formerly struggled!

UNDERSTAND AND PLAN: STRATEGIES FOR STRUGGLING READERS

By Kari Pawl and Annette VanAken

Reading is a multifaceted process requiring individuals to build meaning from text. This process is more difficult for struggling readers for reasons such as lower-level word-recognition and fluency skills, as well as higher order integration skills for comprehension (Perfetti, 2007). Critical to supporting the struggling reader is identifying whether their difficulties are related to specific word reading difficulties (SWRD), specific reading comprehension difficulties (SRCD), or mixed reading difficulties (MRD) (Spear-Swerling, 2016). Once identified, implementing strategies for effective growth is necessary.

Specific Word Reading Difficulties (SWRD)

- explicit, systematic phonics interventions
- phonological awareness and fluency support

- phonological awareness and fluency support
- ample opportunities to apply decoding skills in oral text reading, with teacher feedback

Emergent Readers	Beginning Readers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select books for repeated readings that strategically focus on a specific phoneme to point to or mask with highlight tape. • Alphabet Song: Step 1: Sing and teach the song. Step 2: Student points to large alphabet letter cards as the song is sung. Step 3: Pass out cards to children, slowly sing song, children line up or put cards in order with the correct letter they are holding. • Go Fish: sounds and picture cards: http://fcrr.fsu.acsitefactory.com/sites/g/files/upcbnu2836/files/media/PDFs/student_center_activities/k1_phonological_awareness/k1_phoneme_matching/k1_pa029_phoneme_go_fish.pdf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-books with record feature. Students record their reading of digital texts at home, or school. Have them play back the recording to listen to themselves, and/or the teacher can listen to the recording. PM eCollection is one example of a resource that provides this feature. • Create Hink Pinks book (rhyming book: e.g. bony pony, tall wall) and have children illustrate it.

Practices to Support All Early Readers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Picture puzzles” for segmenting and blending. Transform pictures into puzzles according to syllables, initial sounds and individual phonemes. Students can construct the puzzle while segmenting and blending word segments. Letters can be added for a spelling connection (Paulson, 2018). • Shared reading: Use key words from the book and have students connect to the story line and play with the words (find a rhyme, segment and blend, count syllables). Book suggestion: Llama Llama Red Pajama by Anna Dewdney (2005) • Online resources: http://www.preschoolu.com https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/27-beloved-rhyming-books-for-kids
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Specific Reading Comprehension Difficulties (SRCD)

- explicit, systematic intervention targeting specific comprehension weaknesses (e.g., vocabulary, inferencing)
- oral vocabulary and language in intervention

Emergent Readers	Beginning Readers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop vocabulary through songs, finger plays, and actions. Use repetition. Repeat key words at least three times to support comprehension. • Shared reading allows a safe environment where students are engaged, immersed, and can make mistakes without being singled out. Copy a familiar song, poem or text on chart. Teach the children to read it as a shared reading experience, pointing to the text and repeating several times over multiple days. Then, use a cloze procedure to ascertain whether the text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model good questioning before, during and after the reading. Set the purpose for the reading before the experience. Three types of questions: Literal: require directly stated text information, Inferential: students need to utilize information from more than one section to construct response, Open-ended: students need to draw on prior knowledge and experience in addition to the context of the story to respond. • Readers think of their own questions as they read. Prepare handheld individual posters to get the question started

has been memorized. At this point, move into a partner read with individual copies of the text. Not only is this a key way to model what fluent readers do, but an opportunity to assess students' concepts of print.

(Who, What, Where, When, How, I wonder). Make classroom posters to match as well.

Practices to Support All Early Readers

- Make a Reading Center: include literacy props, variety of books, and opportunities for children to use the area beyond center time.
- Create a print rich environment: utilize the lists, signs, other written materials. Do not just hang them and leave them.
- Multiple Meaning Bugs: Use the bugs individually or in small groups. Include a physical action to increase the sensory learning experience.
http://fcr.fsu.acsitefactory.com/sites/g/files/upcbnu2836/files/media/PDFs/student_center_activities/k1_vocabulary/k1_words_that_describe_word_meanings/k1_v012_multiple_meaning_bugs.pdf

Mixed Reading Difficulties (MRD)

- combination of SWRD and SRCD interventions

Emergent Readers

- Following shared reading, the teacher plans a *CROWD* prompt experience focused on the text. *C*: complete incomplete sentences, *R*: recall questions, *O*: Open-ended questions, *W*: Wh-question, *D*: Distancing questions (teacher relates pictures and words in the book to reader's experiences)
- Build background knowledge by reading books with rich vocabulary and content along with audiovisual supports and an interactive discussion.

Beginning Readers

- Create a chart with familiar rhymes, or poems focusing on sound, or onset or rime similarities to read together. After repeated readings, share individual copies for students to read.
- Following a guided or shared reading experience, engage in a semantic mapping activity to build vocabulary.

Practices to Support All Early Readers

- Build vocabulary through multisensory experiences.
- Create rich oral language classroom environments:
- Morning Meeting - Use a range of feelings word wall with visual supports. Students choose one word that best reflects their feelings (happy, elated, sad, gloomy, dismal, angry, upset, infuriated, bitter, etc.)
- Use a wide range of vocabulary with students. Example, "Let's amble, strut or march" to lunch. Use visual cues (movements) for added support. (Hennessy, 2018)

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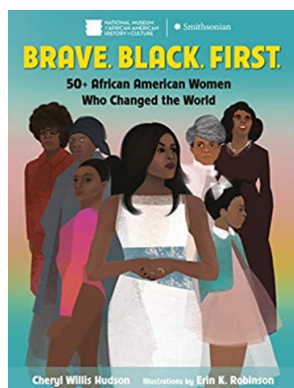
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FAMILY LITERACY BOOKSHELF

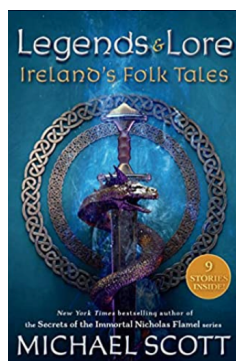
By Barb Ashton, IRC Family Literacy Committee Chair

March is slowly making its appearance after what seemed like a long cold winter. During March we observe Women in History month, celebrate St. Patrick's Day, and Ag in the Classroom. March Madness is upon us and spring training of our favorite baseball teams will start soon.

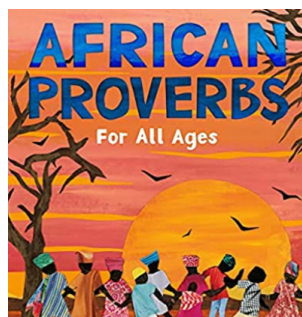


March is Women in History Month. This is a good time to honor the many African American women who've played a role in America's history. **Brave. Black. First.: 50+ African American Who Changed the World** by Cheryl Willis Hudson is a book that profiles 50 women who not only had unique skills but made contributions to America in the past and in the present. The featured women such as Marian Anderson, Ruby Bridges, Ruby Dee, Fannie Lou Hammer, Loretta Lynch, Michele Obama, Faith Ringgold, Wilma Rudolph have altered the world in sports, politics, science, education, social justice, literature, music, and many other fields. Each woman is given a full page of written text that describes her life and major accomplishments within her lifespan. A personal quote or saying is also given. The opposite page is a full page illustration of the featured woman. *Brave. Black. First.: 50+ African American Who Changed the World* is also published in partnership with the Smithsonian National Museum of African

American History. The back of the book provides additional information about each woman along with personal artifacts, materials, etc., that are on display at the museum. This book belongs in all classrooms and libraries.



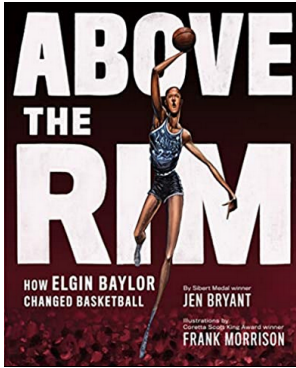
St. Patrick's Day is just around the corner. To enjoy some nice Irish folk tales that are part of the culture of Ireland, read **Legends and Lore: Ireland's Folk Tales** by Michael Scott. This is a collection of nine Irish legends and short stories that are part of Ireland's history. Enjoy reading about the competition between leprechauns to become "King of the Leprechauns," or the trick that was used to fool the "Queen of the Fairies," or perhaps the tale of the "Terrifying Lake Monster who was confronted by the unlikely of heroes." This quick and enjoyable read with mythological characters, mermaids, and epic heroes will intrigue and engage your middle grade students who enjoy reading stories about magic, legends, and lore such as Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson and the Olympians series. This book gives a bit of Irish folklore, and makes a nice addition to your St. Patrick's book collection.



A proverb is "a short well known saying containing a wise thought." For example: "Don't judge a book by its cover." **African Proverbs For All Ages** by Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Nelda LaTeef invites readers of all ages to engage in using their imagination and visual skills while discussing each African proverb. Each beautifully illustrated two-page spread contains four proverbs. The reader(s) then try to match the proverb to the illustration. However, the detailed illustration makes for a lively discussion because it is possible that more than one proverb could match the illustrated picture. The back of the book contains a list of the featured proverbs and the African country each comes from and the various



cultures that make up the continent of Africa. To see if your chosen proverb matches the illustration, you'll need to read *African Proverbs For All Ages*. As a familiar proverb states "A picture is worth a thousand words." This is one book that illustrates this saying.



March Madness is upon us once again. For your basketball fans, ***Above the Rim: How Elgin Baylor Changed Basketball*** by Jen Bryant is the story to read during this season. This is the biographical story of former NBA star Elgin Baylor. The story begins with young Elgin growing up in segregated Washington, D. C., unable to play at the local park as it was for "whites only." When Elgin was 14 a basketball hoop was installed at a park where he and his friends could play. Elgin was a star player in high school and wanted to go to college. However, no colleges asked him to come and play on their teams due to his skin color. A friend who went to the College of Idaho suggested that he go west and play for their team. Elgin transferred to Seattle University and led the team to the NCAA finals. Elgin was the number #1 draft pick of the Minneapolis Lakers (now LA Lakers) and helped them become a winning team, eventually reaching the NBA

Finals six times. To learn how Elgin quietly brought change to the NBA, you can read *Above the Rim*. Beautiful illustrations also enhance the story. *Above the Rim* is a fine addition to all libraries as it provides a door for discussion on timely topics experienced by today's students.

Looking Ahead

March 1: Mardi Gras

March 2: Read Across America Day – Formerly Dr. Seuss Day. Read books and spread the message of the joys of reading.

March 14: Pi Day – Albert Einstein Birthday

March 15: Ides of March

March 17: St. Patrick's Day

March 20: Spring Equinox

March 22: National Ag Day – Theme is Growing a Climate for Tomorrow

LITERACY LINKS

By the IRC Educational Media Committee

Take a moment to review some of the Literacy Links provided by the IRC Educational Media Committee to help Illinois educators in today's classrooms.

Reading Passage Resources

[Storybird](#)

This online tool lets anyone make visual stories in seconds. Artwork from illustrators and animators around the world inspires writers of any age to turn these images into fresh stories. These stories are then posted online for others to read and make comments in a safe environment.

Assessment Resources

[Quizizz](#)

This online questioning tool can be used with any device with a web browser. There are quizzes already made or you can create your own.

Interactive Resources

[News In Levels](#)

This online resource has news articles available in three reading levels. There are also online learning games and opportunities to chat and Skype with others.

UPCOMING PD EVENTS

By the Illinois Reading Council

Don't forget to take advantage of some upcoming PD opportunities planned throughout Illinois.

- **March 2, 2022: IRC Webinar** on Common Mistakes Writing Teachers and Students Make and How Tapping Them Can Transform Student Writing with M. Colleen Cruz from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom Webinar.
- **March 10-11, 2022: Illinois Reading Council** will host the Annual IRC Conference, Literacy in Bloom: Growing Readers and Ideas in Springfield, Illinois.
- **March 10-11, 2022: Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education (ICARE)** will host the ICARE Strand at the IRC Conference.
- **March 10-11, 2022: Secondary Reading League (SRL)** will host an IRC Strand at the IRC Conference.
- **March 10, 2022: College Instructors of Reading Professionals (CIRP)** will host the CIRP Reception and Board Meeting at the IRC Conference.
- **March 15, 2022: IRC Book Club** registrations are due..
- **March 15, 2022: South Eastern Reading Council** will host a Literacy Spring Meeting at 6:00 pm via Zoom.
- **March 16, 2022: Central Illinois Reading Council** will host the monthly CIRP Book Chats on alternating professional books and literature topics from 7:00 to 8:00 pm via Zoom.

To view the full **IRC Events Calendar**, please visit the [IRC Website](#).

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Questions? Please feel free to reach out to the Illinois Reading Council by email at irc@illinoisreadingcouncil.org or by phone at 309-454-1341.

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