

 SCHOLASTIC

# LITERACY Fun EXPRESS

*Practical Research*

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Just as its name promises, *Literacy Fun Express* is packed with *fun*—but, in addition to its joyful approach to literacy learning, the program is based on solid research. Every lesson is informed by current research related to five key components: academic vocabulary, comprehension, small-group discussion or “text talk,” Total Physical Response (TPR), and the amount—or *volume*—of reading that kids do (defined as the number of words students read in a specific period of time). Additionally, *Literacy Fun Express* is aligned with the Common Core State Standards.



As you involve your students in these engaging lessons, you can feel confident that you’re offering them instruction that’s smart and research-informed as well as fun and action-oriented.

Let’s take each of the five components in turn and see how the *Literacy Fun Express* lessons invite you to address them.

## Academic Vocabulary

You’ll notice that every lesson includes *vital vocabulary*, key words that relate to the story. The lesson suggests that you showcase these words for your students—on a word chart, through discussion, or as you encounter them in the book during a read-aloud. Vital vocabulary comprises so-called “tier-two” words, or *academic vocabulary*. Dr. Isabel Beck organized words into three tiers based on their usefulness and frequency of use. Beck and McKeown (2002) suggest that for instructional purposes, teachers should concentrate on tier-two words because they:

- Reflect mature language use and appear frequently across a variety of contexts.
- Help students build in-depth knowledge and understand the connections of this vocabulary to other words and concepts.
- Provide precision and specificity in describing a concept for which the students already have a general understanding.

Duke and Carlisle (2011) cite the high correlation between academic vocabulary and comprehension and offer several strategies that students can use again and again to lock down the meaning of more sophisticated content words, including relating words to themes and to similar words. These word associations help build networks of meaning that support reading comprehension.

The best way to ensure that our students have the academic background knowledge to understand the content they will encounter is to teach them the meaning of the words embedded in the text at hand (Marzano & Pickering, 2005). When students understand these unique words, it is easier for them to understand the material that features the words. The Common Core is very clear about the critical importance of academic vocabulary. What's more, we have decades of research that connects students' vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension (Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988; Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010; Duke & Carlisle, 2011). And since students' success in school and beyond depends upon their ability to read with comprehension, providing instruction that equips students with the skills and strategies necessary for lifelong vocabulary development is both urgent and essential.

## Comprehension

The research demonstrates that three essential reading elements—word recognition, fluency, and comprehension—are inextricably linked (Duke & Carlisle, 2011; Hiebert & Reutzel, 2010; Allington, 2013). As *Literacy Fun Express* invites your students to read a range of engaging text, it provides a simultaneous workout with all three elements—plus, the more students read, the greater their capacity to read with accuracy, fluency, and deep comprehension. As Duke and Pearson (2002) suggest, our best insight into comprehension may come from looking closely at what good, successful readers do when they read. As you work with your students, you might want to keep this list in mind—and consider sharing and discussing it with your students. Reading should always 1) sound like language; and 2) make sense. If it doesn't, good readers have an array of strategies they use that include backtracking, reading ahead, and skipping unknown words to plunge ahead and keep going until they regain meaning.

### What Good Readers Do

#### Good readers:

- are active readers; they have clear goals in mind for their reading and constantly evaluate whether the text, and their reading of it, is meeting their goals.
- look over the text before they read, noting such things as the structure of the text and text sections that might be most relevant to their reading goals.
- make predictions about what is to come.
- read selectively, continually making decisions about their reading—what to read carefully, what to read quickly, what not to read, what to reread, and so on.
- construct, revise, and question the meanings they make as they read.
- try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text, and deal with inconsistencies or gaps as needed.
- draw from, compare, and integrate their prior knowledge with material in the text.
- think about the author of the text: his or her style, beliefs, intentions, historical milieu, and so on.

- monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary.
- evaluate the text's quality and value, and react to the text in a range of ways, both intellectually and emotionally.
- read different kinds of text differently.
- attend closely to the setting and characters, when reading narrative.
- construct and revise summaries of informational text.
- process text not only during reading, but also during short breaks taken when reading, or after the reading has ceased.
- understand that comprehension is a consuming, continuous, and complex activity, but one that they find both satisfying and productive (adapted, Pearson & Duke, 2002).

## Discussion

Reading aloud to our students is one of the absolute best things we can do (Ivey, 2002), but reading aloud and then drawing our students into a discussion about the book, as the *Literacy Fun Express* lessons make possible, is even better (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Every *Literacy Fun Express* lesson is built around an engaging text and interactive read aloud. The deep conversations about books that students enjoy during the interactive read-aloud help them understand what effective text talk feels and sounds like. They come to understand the turn-taking nature of the conversation and what it means to build on a peer's ideas and insights as they push forward as a group to make sense of the book under discussion. As Schlick Noe and Johnson (1999) note, "Collaboration is at the heart of this approach. Students reshape and add onto their understandings as they construct meaning with other readers." Drawing from the seminal work of Fountas and Pinnell (2006), we know that effective text talk follows these general guidelines.

### Students should...

- develop a shared, continually growing language they use to talk about text.
- use talk anchored to the particular texts they are discussing.
- connect the text to other texts they have read.
- "piggyback" their comments on those their peers make.
- listen actively and carefully to one another and ask questions to clarify or extend the meaning they are sharing.
- stay on a topic long enough to gain depth of understanding and explore different perspectives.
- build relationships and develop a sense of community among members of the class.
- learn how to disagree respectfully; constructive disagreement is valued rather than avoided.
- change opinions and understandings during the course of a discussion; text talk promotes fluid discussion and a flexible search for meaning.

With every interactive read-aloud, your students become more adept at holding deep conversations about books. It takes time and experience to learn how to analyze texts and share your analysis with others through rich, multi-faceted text talk. Think of interactive read-alouds as shared inquiry (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Text talk doesn't center on finding the one right answer; it's about investigating and analyzing the text and, to this end, the benefits are great as readers come together to share their own perspectives, insights, and understandings.

## **Total Physical Response**

James Asher, the founder of Total Physical Response (TPR), defines it like this:

*TPR is a method of teaching language using physical movement to react to verbal input in order to reduce student inhibitions and lower their affective filter. It allows students to react to language without thinking too much, facilitates long term retention, and reduces student anxiety and stress (Asher, 2000).*

While you won't find specific references to TPR in *Literacy Fun Express*, every lesson is action-oriented; students are invited to participate in drama, movement, song, and art activities—all of which encourage learners who may be new to English to use their new target language without being too self-conscious. Asher's results mirror the way in which all children learn their mother tongue—not through skill and drill but through active engagement. Asher's research results never fail to astonish and convince. For example, one study centered on American public school students who were studying Spanish as a foreign language: a group of sixth graders received 20 hours of TPR; a group of ninth graders participated in one hundred hours of traditional formal instruction that emphasized reading and writing and Spanish grammar. The results were profoundly significant. Sixth graders with only twenty hours of TPR Spanish outperformed ninth graders with five times as much exposure to Spanish (Asher, 2000). It's clear that students' engagement with fun activities takes their mind off the hard work of language learning and enables them to use their new language freely, taking the necessary risks that are always an essential part of all language learning—in both first and second language acquisition.

## Volume of Reading

*Literacy Fun Express* expands the volume of reading your students do—and there’s no more potent offering than that. The volume of reading in which students engage—*volume* defined as the number of words read across a specific time span—is the key to reading achievement and academic success in general, and even to a productive life beyond school. Reading volume is pivotal to overarching success in school, so it’s alarming to discover that reading volume begins to decline in middle school (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001). And given the “slow growth of reading proficiency in grades 5–12” (Allington, 2012) upping the volume of reading in which students engage should become an instructional focus. Look at the difference reading volume makes: In a study of the out-of-school activities of fifth graders, Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) found that time spent reading books was the best predictor of a student’s reading proficiency. They also noted that many of the students in the study rarely read books on their own; indeed, around 20% of the students devoted less than a minute per day to book reading—a sad fact reflected in their low levels of achievement.

Percentile Rank	Minutes of Reading Per Day	Baseline - Words Read Per Year	Plus 10 Minutes - Words Read Per Year	Percent Increase in Word Exposure
98	65	4,358,000	5,028,462	15%
90	21.1	1,823,000	2,686,981	47%
80	14.2	1,146,000	1,953,042	70%
70	9.6	622,000	1,269,917	104%
60	6.5	432,000	1,096,615	154%
50	4.6	282,000	895,043	217%
40	3.2	200,000	825,000	313%
30	1.8	106,000	694,889	556%
20	0.7	21,000	321,000	1429%
10	0.1	8,000	Based on reading level ~300,000 words	
2	0	0		

The chart reflects distribution of time spent reading books outside of school, with estimated words read per year and projection of increased words per year if each child’s average daily time spent reading were increased by ten minutes. [Adapted from Adams (2006), with baseline data from Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding (1988).] Here are some research highlights that demonstrate the importance of the volume of reading:

- Increased frequency, amount, and diversity of reading activity increases background knowledge and reading achievement (Worthy & Roser, 2010; Guthrie, 2008).
- The volume of independent silent reading students do in school is significantly related to gains in reading achievement (Swan, Coddington, & Guthrie, 2010; Garan & DeVoogd, 2008; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).
- Adolescent and young adults' engagement in reading, including the amount of time they spend on reading and the diversity of materials they read, is closely associated with test performance and reading ability (Krisch et al., 2002).
- Reading volume...significantly affects...general knowledge of the world, overall verbal ability, and academic achievement (Shefelbine, 2000).

So, while *Literacy Fun Express* lives up to its name, don't let all the fun fool you. Your students are getting an academic workout beyond compare every time they open and enter a book!

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