



# Marshalling the Full Force of Language!

By SARA HOLBROOK and MICHAEL SALINGER

*We are advocates for empowering students' voices so that they may be precise, concise, and confident communicators in writing, speaking, and listening.*



## LITERACY CHAMPIONS: SARA HOLBROOK AND MICHAEL SALINGER

**Sara Holbrook** is an educator, author/poet, and literary consultant with over 30 years experience as a writer in the fields of education, law, public housing, and drug prevention. She has been teaching in classrooms around the U.S. and in over 50 other countries for more than 20 years. She is the author of more than 15 books for children, adults, and teachers and she is an award-winning performance poet and frequent keynote speaker. Her middle grade historical fiction novel, *The Enemy, Detroit 1954*, won the 2018 Jane Addams Peace Award.

**Michael Salinger** is an educator, author/poet, and playwright, and has been writing and performing poetry and fiction for over 30 years. He has written books for elementary to adult readers and has co-authored four professional books for teachers. His book, *Well Defined, Vocabulary in Rhyme*, won a VOYA Top Shelf award. As a literacy consultant, Michael has visited over 200 cities across more than 50 countries, developing an expertise in working with English language learners.

Together, Sara and Michael are the authors of five professional books, including their most recent publication, *From Striving to Thriving Writers: Strategies to Jump-Start Writing* (Scholastic), a collaboration with Stephanie Harvey, and the digital curriculum supplement *Read Write Speak it! Empowering Student Voices*.



## One to Know: Read Write Speak it! (RWS)

Read Write Speak it! Is built around a predictable instructional template: students read a short text, engage in repeated reading, then share their writing via a sheltered instructional model that supports holistic and integrated literacy. By using concise, targeted mentor texts to teach multiple literacy lessons: content, vocabulary, literary elements, social-emotional connections, and oral presentation, we set students on a path for success. This success builds confidence along with capability. Rather than supplying mentor texts and hoping the students infer enough to create, we walk them through the creation process step by step, embedding language and presentation strategies along the way.

This proven lesson process empowers students to grow confident in articulating their ideas, increasing their vocabulary, and speaking for themselves. Each lesson is broken into five 15-minute-long mini-lessons that may be spread throughout a school week.

## What to Know and Do

The lessons comprise five instructional blocks:

**1 RWS uses poetry as the kickoff of each lesson because it is distilled language that invites rereading.** The short, poetic text for each lesson is geared toward specific standards-based literary and literacy goals. Many have been purposely written to fill these specific instructional needs and others were selected because they naturally fit a needed niche. Teachers read the pieces aloud with students several times. Naturally conducive to repeated reading, these short poetic texts not only invite rereading, but spark curiosity about word meaning, growing fluency, and academic vocabulary at the same time. Teachers are encouraged to discuss the meaning of the piece, inviting conversation and building comprehension skills, but mostly to enjoy the poem without making too much of a fuss over literary elements or inferred meanings just yet.

**2 The second 15-minute instructional block focuses on vocabulary.** The poem is read aloud again focusing on the highlighted challenge words in the text, and students are invited to add to the list. Vocabulary study is handled through conversation—asking students to find ways to describe the words rather than to simply define them, including illustrations, acting out the words, and examining roots and prefixes and suffixes. Often, students are paired to research one or two of the challenge words with the knowledge that the real learning is taking place in the conversation between the partners who then report back, sharing their learning and teaching themselves and others.

**3 In the third instructional block, students are asked to make a personal connection to the poem.** Rather than ask the students to stare at the ceiling and wait for inspiration, a couple of prompts are offered to prime the pump. The suggestions are not the only options! Coming up with their own interpretation is not only fine but encouraged. The prompts are a stepping stone but by no means prescriptive. RWS lays down a path for success for all students, including those who may need a little extra support.

**4 The fourth instructional block explores a literary element or grammar convention that is contained in the poem and an accompanying prose mentor text.** The prose mentor text utilizes the same featured literary element as the poem, showing that these elements of good writing are applicable across genres. Teachers then co-construct a new prose piece of text with students, using the targeted element. Finally, students are paired to write a short prose text evidencing their understanding of the literary element. By the time the students get into writing on their own, they have seen three mentor texts, including the one they co-constructed with their teacher. This gives kids an “I can do that” attitude toward writing. Again, this ensures a likelihood of success, and with the accumulation of these small victories, confidence grows.

**5 In the fifth and final segment of the RWS lesson, kids record themselves reading aloud one of the texts from the week.** It could be the original poem, the SEL journal entry, or their text exhibiting the literary lesson. It’s all fair game. By now the students have become so familiar with the original text and the accompanying lessons that they are chomping at the bit to show off their new learning and read aloud.

## More to Know and Do

Explore the joy and efficiency of teaching essential elements of reading, writing, and speaking through short text. Students of all abilities find success and confidence as we practice these components of communication within a culture of conversation and curiosity. We invite you to take this framework strategy and adopt and adapt it to your classroom, library, or home. Happy learning! We’d love to hear from you!

### You can reach Sara and Michael here:

Outspoken Literacy Consultants

[www.outspokenlit.com](http://www.outspokenlit.com)

[www.readwritespeakit.com](http://www.readwritespeakit.com)