



# The Power of Fluent Readers

by TIMOTHY V. RASINSKI and MELISSA CHEESMAN SMITH

“When we give children the gift of fluent reading—reading well, reading with ease, reading with meaning, and reading with interest—we give them a gift that will imprint into every aspect of their lives and help shape who they become.”

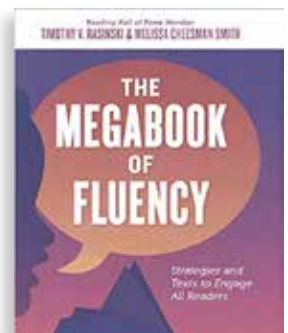
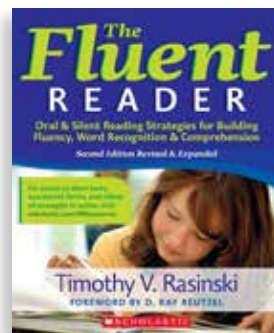
—Melissa Cheesman Smith and Timothy V. Rasinski



## LITERACY CHAMPION: TIMOTHY V. RASINSKI

Timothy V. Rasinski is a professor of literacy education and holds the Rebecca Tolle and Burton W. Gorman Chair in Educational Leadership at Kent State University. He has written more than 200 articles and has authored, co-authored, or edited more than 30 books or curriculum programs on reading education. Timothy served a three-year term on the Board of

Directors of the International Reading Association and is past-president of the College Reading Association. He also served as co-editor of the *Journal of Literacy Research*. In 2010, Tim was elected into the International Reading Hall of Fame, and in 2020, he was awarded the *William S. Gray Citation of Merit* by the International Literacy Association. Tim is the author of many Scholastic professional books including *The Fluent Reader (2nd edition)* and *The Megabook of Fluency*.



## LITERACY CHAMPION: MELISSA CHEESMAN SMITH

Melissa Cheesman Smith holds a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction. She is a full-time fifth grade teacher, and adjunct faculty member for Arizona State University where she teaches courses in literacy education and child development. She is the author of several educational books, including co-author of *The Megabook of Fluency*.

## One to Know: Supporting Proficient Fluent Readers

Fluency is a scientifically validated reading competency that is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension. When we teach any concept, we know that we cannot practice this one time and students will understand. Reading is a complex process—it's easier for students to comprehend the text when their word recognition is automatic and fluent. As with most of life's endeavors, we get better the more we repeat the activity. Reading is no different! This is why repeated reading is at the heart of fluency.

However, reading the same text over and over can be monotonous. For this reason, we recommend that you always couple the repeated reading with real purpose and engaging texts that captivate students' attention and imagination—and then, watch the repeated readings come alive! Authentic and purposeful repeated reading instruction should include materials that are meant to be read orally with expression and performed. Prosody, or expressiveness in oral reading, is a pivotal aspect of fluency. Research has demonstrated that students who read orally with good expression tend to read silently with good comprehension as well. We think of rehearsal in anticipation of a performance for an audience as authentic and purposeful repeated reading. Poetry, songs, lively theatrical scripts, and more offer wonderful opportunities to improve reading fluency— both automatic word recognition and prosody, and thus, improve comprehension.

By making a read-aloud routine part of every school day, we can model fluent expressive reading. When reading out loud to your students, be sure to occasionally talk with them about how you regulated your voice and read with expression to heighten their pleasure and deepen their understanding of what you read. Of course, the overarching message to your students is clear. They need to read with good expression when they read on their own in order to improve their own comprehension.

## What to Know and Do

Students' fluency can also be improved by reading while simultaneously listening to a fluent reading of the same text. We call this assisted reading, and it can take the form of choral reading with a group, reading with a partner (parent, teacher, volunteer), or even listening to a prerecorded and fluent and expressive reading of the same text. Eventually, students will be able to read that text on their own without the need for assistance. (By the way, even captioned television can act as a form of assisted reading—go figure!)

It's important to note that reading fluency is not about reading fast. We assess the word recognition automaticity component of fluency by measuring students' reading rate (words read correctly per minute) but we do not nurture fluent reading by encouraging students to read fast.

Use engaging texts that students can read repeatedly (rehearse) and perform. Your children will enjoy these engaging text ideas for repeated reading:

- **Silly Songs to Familiar Tunes:** Singing is reading! We never think, “Oh, I’ve heard this song before, so I don’t want to hear it again” The more we hear a song and love it, the more we like to hear it. There are great children’s poets that have written silly songs to familiar tunes, making this an easy-to-implement repeated reading activity
  - \* “Are You Quite Polite” by Alan Katz
  - \* “Take Me Out of the Bathtub” by Alan Katz
  - \* “I’m Still Here in the Bathtub” by Alan Katz
  - \* “I’m Allergic to School” by Robert Pottle
- **Poems for Many Voices:** Reciting poetry is reading! Not only is it beneficial to analyze poems and song lyrics in a close reading format, but performing them with a group is especially impactful. Poems that are written for two, three, or four voices create a choral reading experience for children. Some of our favorites are:
  - \* *Partner Poems for Building Fluency* by Timothy V. Rasinski, David Harrison & Gay Fawcett
  - \* *Big Talk: Poems for Four Voices* by Paul Fleischmann
  - \* *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices* by Paul Fleischmann
  - \* *You Read to Me, I’ll Read to You* by Mary Ann Hoberman
- **Choral Reading:** Chanting is reading! There are many pieces of literature that are beneficial for students to not only promote cultural awareness, but to recite collectively as a group, to perform for another class, or record for a classroom YouTube video. There are many ways to enjoy choral reading such as in unison, cumulative, call-and-response, echo-reading, etc. (see various examples of choral reading in *The Megabook of Fluency*). Some great texts to use with choral reading are:
  - \* “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus
  - \* “The Preamble to the Constitution of the United States”
  - \* “The Gettysburg Address” by Abraham Lincoln
  - \* “I Have a Dream” by Martin Luther King
  - \* “Ain’t I a Woman” by Sojourner Truth
  - \* “O Captain! My Captain!” by Walt Whitman
  - \* “Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou
  - \* “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost
  - \* “You’re a Grand Old Flag” by George M. Cohan

## More to Know and Do

Our book *The Megabook of Fluency* <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/teaching-tools/articles/the-megabook-of-fluency.html> has both theory and practice to get you going. It has easy-to-implement ideas, and accompanying texts to work on the “EARS” of Fluency:

**E**xpression

**A**utomatic Word Recognition

**R**hythm and Phrasing

**S**moothness

In 2019, *The Megabook of Fluency* won the Teachers Choice Award for the classroom.

Dr. Timothy V. Rasinski is available for professional development presentations on foundational reading (phonics, vocabulary, fluency). He can be reached at [trasinsk@kent.edu](mailto:trasinsk@kent.edu). Also, please visit his website [www.timrasinski.com](http://www.timrasinski.com) for access to many of his professional articles, his blog, and additional materials.

Melissa Cheesman Smith is available for virtual Professional Development in fluency and vocabulary. She can be reached at [melissacheesmansmith@gmail.com](mailto:melissacheesmansmith@gmail.com).