



# The Reading Principle: Three Types of Reading

by EVAN ROBB

*“I have a passion for teaching kids to become readers, to become comfortable with a book, not daunted. Books shouldn’t be daunting, they should be funny, exciting and wonderful; and learning to be a reader gives a terrific advantage.”*

—Roald Dahl



## LITERACY CHAMPION: EVAN ROBB

Evan Robb is presently a middle school principal in Virginia. He has over twenty years of experience serving as a building-level principal and literacy champion. Prior to being a school principal, he was an English teacher, department chair, and assistant principal. Evan is a recipient of the Horace Mann Educator of the Year Award. In addition, the NCTE Commission on Reading selected him to serve on its national board.

A TEDx Speaker, Evan gives inspirational keynotes, workshops, webinars, and on-going professional learning opportunities on leadership, mindset, culture, impactful change, and how to improve literacy in schools. Evan has shared his ideas with thousands of educators at dozens of workshops across the United States and in other countries.

His first book titled, *The Principal's Leadership Sourcebook: Practices, Tools, and Strategies for Building a Thriving School Community* was published by Scholastic in the fall of 2007. His next book, *The Ten-Minute Principal*, was published by Corwin in May 2019. Evan Robb and Laura Robb collaborated with Burgess Publishing to write, *Team Makers*, published in August of 2019. In addition, Evan partnered with Laura Robb to write, *A School Full of Readers*, with Benchmark Education, published in January 2020.



Evan has been named one of the top 25 educational leaders to follow on Twitter. Scholastic EDU named Evan one of the 10 educators to follow on Twitter. Evan was recently named one of the 10 most inspiring global thought leaders for 2020.

## One to Know: Three Types of Reading

As a middle school principal, I am often asked what types of reading should occur in a middle school English classroom? What is a balanced literacy program? My answer is not that complex: “Reading can and should be taught.” In addition to the teacher reading aloud for students’ enjoyment, every middle school classroom should have three types of reading:

- Instructional Interactive Read Aloud
- Instructional Reading
- Independent Reading

An interactive read-aloud allows the teacher to model in a think-aloud how to react to and think about a text as well as applying a reading strategy. This modeling during a read-aloud builds and/or enlarges students’ mental model of how a strategy works and different ways readers respond to texts. For this aspect of instruction, I suggest that the teacher models with a short text that matches the genre and/or theme that ties a reading unit together. Short texts can include a picture book, an excerpt from a longer text, a folk or fairy tale, myth or legend, a short, short story, or an article from a magazine or newsletter. In addition to linking literary elements to texts, here are seven strategies and responses you can model in interactive read-aloud lessons:

- Emotional responses
- Posing questions the text raises
- Making inferences
- Identifying big ideas and themes
- Locating important details
- Visualizing
- Comparing and contrasting

### Instructional Reading

Instructional reading occurs during class. Students need to read materials at their instructional reading level, which is about 90 % to 95% reading accuracy and about 90% comprehension. Organizing instructional reading around a genre and theme—for example biography with a theme of obstacles—permits students to read different texts and discuss their reading around the genre and theme. One book for all does not work. Based on a false assumption, one-book-for-all assumes that no one has already read the book and everyone is on the same reading level.

Here’s an example of the rhythm of an ELA class: the class opens with an interactive read-aloud lesson that lasts about ten minutes. Next, transition to instructional reading. Find books for students in your school library, your community public library, in your class library, and the school’s book room (if you have one). Instructional reading books stay in the classroom, as students from different sections may be using the same materials each day. Instructional reading asks students to apply specific skills and strategies to texts that can improve comprehension, vocabulary, and skill because these texts stretch students’ thinking with the teacher, the expert, as a supportive guide.

## Independent Reading

Students should always have a self-selected book they are reading independently with them. By encouraging them to read accessible books on topics they love and want to know more about, you develop their motivation to read!

Have students keep a Book Log list of the titles they've read, reread, and abandoned. Do not ask students to do a project for each completed book; that will turn them away from reading. Reflecting on the value of independent reading is important. Getting hung up on how you will hold students accountable is not valuable. Remember, enthusiastic readers of any age do not summarize every chapter they read in a journal. Neither do you!

Students should complete twenty to thirty minutes of independent reading a night, and that should be their main homework assignment. If you're on a block schedule, set aside two days a week for students to complete independent reading at school. If you have 90 to 120 minutes for reading and writing daily, then independent reading should occur for 15-20-minutes every day. Not only does independent reading offer students the practice that builds background knowledge and vocabulary, but it also develops their reading identities and pleasure in reading. When students read, the teacher can read part of the time, communicating a great message: adults read independently, too! Equally important during this time, teachers also have short conferences with a few students about their reading, making sure, however, that everyone has time to read.

## What to Do

Including the three types of reading in a middle school curriculum brings balance, engagement, and motivation to the curriculum and holds the potential of improving reading for all students.

- We must be better than popcorn reading as a go-to-method for a teacher to use with students!
- We must be better than reading out loud for an entire class!
- We need a balanced framework, a balanced literacy program!

Encourage your teachers to give the three types of reading a try and consider working alongside your teachers to learn, question, affirm, and if necessary, change. The goal is to increase students' reading skills and help students become lifelong readers. But the goal is also to reclaim the professionalism language arts teachers and students deserve.

## More to Know and Do

There is no quick fix for the reading challenges faced by many schools; we live in a time when the allure of a quick fix can be very strong. Many educators look for a new program to create a pathway to improvement—a canned program; I have never seen a “reading” program instill a love of reading for any student, but I have observed how books can transform students into readers!

## How to Reach Evan Robb

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