

Teaching Fluency with Poetry: A Weekly Routine

Laura Stam

A few years ago, Dr. Rasinski gave an interview discussing his work with fluency. My fluency data wasn't great at the time. I taught second grade and only 50% of my students were proficient in fluency. My class averaged 55 words correct per minute (wcpm) on the beginning of year Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) screener, scoring below the benchmark. I understood the importance of fluency for reading comprehension, but I was unsure how to help my students build their fluency.

FastBridge CBM Reading Screener (wcpm: words correct per minute)	
Fluency	Fall
Benchmark Percentiles	40th: 56 wcpm 70th: 87 wcpm
Class average	55 wcpm
Students Proficient	
above the 40th percentile	50%
above the 70th percentile	22%

In the interview, Dr. Rasinski emphasized the importance of not only accuracy and automaticity, but also **prosody** (expression) in building fluency. I decided to try explicitly teaching prosody using poetry. Based on Dr. Rasinski's Fluency Development Lesson, I developed the following routines for a 10-15 minute daily fluency lesson:

Day 1 Introduce Poem	Day 2 Vocabulary	Day 3 Partner Practice	Day 4 Prosody & Performance
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Watch the fluency routine [here](#).

Day 1: Introduce the Poem

- Model prosody. Read the poem to the class modeling prosody while students listen.
- Explain any tricky language or phrases.
- Discuss the poem - what is happening in the poem and what it is about.
- Discuss the feelings or mood of the poem.
- Begin practicing the poem stanza by stanza.

Day 2: Vocabulary

- Read poem once through as a class, emphasizing prosody.
- Choose two or three words or phrases to explicitly teach.
- Connect to skills or content from phonics, morphology, or knowledge-building lessons.
- Practice poem as a class with the time remaining.

Day 3: Partner Practice

- Read poem once through as a class, emphasizing prosody.
- Pair up students to practice the poem; focus on building accuracy and automaticity.
- Circulate and support striving readers.

A booklet of poems is made for each student.

Day 4: Prosody and Performance

- Read poem once through as a class, emphasizing prosody.
- Explicitly teach prosody. Choose specific lines or stanzas and ask students how they could express the mood or feelings of the poem. Let the students play around with different voices.
- Practice prosody as a whole class, then have students practice prosody with their partners.
- Have partners perform the poem for the class.

Additional practice and performance days can be added to the routine. Three or four poems are taught at a time using this routine. Students then pick their favorite poem and perform it for their family and friends at a poetry recital.

Why Poetry

Dr. Rasinski highly recommends using poetry to develop fluency for the following reasons:

- **Prosody.** Poems have rhyme, rhythm, and prose, making them ideal for practicing prosody. Prosody is important for fluency because it shows understanding of the content.
- **Performance.** Repeated reading has also been shown to develop fluency. Poems can be performed, giving a purpose for repeated readings. Bonus: students love being able to perform their poems for the class and their families.

Reader's theater and songs also work well.

- **Knowledge-building.** Poems can support knowledge-building in other content areas including literature, history, math, and science.

The Results

A few months after introducing explicit prosody instruction, I administered the mid-year ORF screener. The results were remarkable. Fluency grew from 50% proficient to 71% proficient. My students' average words correct per minute grew from 55 to 101. In addition, 100% of my students grew with an average growth of 46 wcpm.

FastBridge CBM Reading Screener (wcpm: words correct per minute)				
Fluency	Fall	Winter	Growth	
Benchmark Percentiles	40th: 56 wcpm 70th: 87 wcpm	40th: 84 wcpm 70th: 114 wcpm	Students who made growth	100%
Class average	55 wcpm	101 wcpm	Average growth fall to mid-winter	46 wcpm
Students Proficient				
above the 40th percentile	50%	71%		
above the 70th percentile	22%	29%		

Explicit fluency instruction is now an absolute must in my literacy instruction.

Laura Stam is an elementary teacher in Wyoming. She is a 2024-2025 Goyen Fellow and a founding board member of the Wyoming Chapter of The Reading League. She

has interviewed on the podcasts Melissa and Lori Love Literacy and The Road to Reading Podcast.

Email: lstam@hotsprings1.org

X: @StamStam193

Facebook: Mrs. Stam @mrs.stam.2021