

INCREASE READING FLUENCY OF 4<sup>TH</sup> AND 5<sup>TH</sup> GRADE STUDENTS  
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES USING READERS' THEATRE

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## Dedication

To my husband, whose love and support, encouragement and understanding, and whose belief in me allows me to follow my dreams.

To my children, Alex and Armando for being my cheering team.

To Dr. Suzanne Lee for all her time, supporting, and guiding me.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project was to improve the oral reading fluency of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with learning disabilities. The targeted population participating in this study consisted of a total of 10 participants of which five were 4<sup>th</sup> grade students and five were 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. The research project took place in a middle class community within a suburb of a large metropolitan area. Reading fluently is reading at a conversational pace, using punctuation, expression, and consistent phrasing. To function in today's society it is imperative to read fluently. The study began the week of January 29, 2007, starting with pre-testing, followed by 10-weeks of intervention to increase reading fluency, culminating with post-testing, the week of May 17, 2007.

When the probable cause data was analyzed it revealed, that students with learning disabilities frequently do not automatically acquire the skill to read fluently. Therefore, students with learning disabilities need to receive direct instruction on why it is important to read fluently and how to read fluently. To gather documented evidence of the problem a student survey was administered to reveal the attitudes towards reading. The results indicated that students lacked confidence and avoided reading. Another tool, a 4-point-fluency rubric indicated the participating students exhibited choppy reading, in a monotone voice, varied rates, and minimal use of punctuation. The third tool, an oral one minute timed reading revealed the participating students read below 125 to 140 words per minute, which is the average for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). The review of the literature explains that repeated reading is often overlooked as part of the reading instruction.

After a review of the solution strategies, the intervention chosen was to implement Readers' Theatre, which incorporated repeated reading in a natural format, as the students practiced their lines. During Readers' Theatre, in its traditional format, the reader does not memorize lines, and there is no scenery, nor are there any props. Instead the reader reads with expression from a script in front of an audience to convey the meaning of the story (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Corcoran, 2005; Flynn, 2005; Rasinski, 1990).

The post-test data revealed an increase of 35.2 words per minute at the culmination of the 10-week Readers' Theatre. Students' attitudes towards reading rose markedly. The results of the students' one minute timed readings increased highly markedly and the 4-point-fluency rubric indicated students were reading more fluently. The teacher researcher highly recommends repeated reading by using Readers' Theatre to increase reading fluency.

## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

#### General Statement of the Problem

The targeted students with learning disabilities in a resource special education classroom within a public elementary school in the fourth and fifth grade demonstrated difficulties in reading fluency. A student survey, a teacher survey, and a student assessment of the students' reading fluency skill were used to identify the difficulties with reading fluency.

#### Immediate Context of the Problem

The targeted school is one of nine K-5 elementary buildings in the northwest suburb. An early childhood center adjoining to one of the K-5 elementary schools serves 100 special preschool students. The nine K-5 elementary schools feed into three middle schools. Unless otherwise noted, the information in this section was retrieved from the Illinois School Report Card, 2005 and the Illinois 2005 School Profile.

Table 1 below identifies the ethnic backgrounds of the targeted school student body. Table 1, indicates there was a majority (83.8%) of students who were Caucasian.

Table 1

#### *Racial/Ethnic Background by Percentage*

	<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Native American</u>
School	83.8	11.2	2.6	2.1	0.2
District	87.7	7.9	3.0	1.4	0.0

The district enrollment was 9,150 students of which the targeted school had an enrollment of 569 students. Twenty five students received special education services in a resource environment. There were 261 (45.87%) of the students were male and 308 (54.13%) of

the students were female. The low-income rate for the targeted school was 13.7% which was proportionally higher than the 8.2% for the district, yet markedly lower than the state's 40.0%. Low-income students are defined as coming from "families receiving public aid; live in institutions for neglected or delinquent children; are supported in foster homes with public funds; or are eligible to receive free or reduced priced lunches" (p.1). At the targeted school, 13.7% of the students had been identified as being Limited English Learners which was higher than the 3.9% for the district. To qualify as Limited English Proficient, students are tested and identified for Bilingual Education. Truancy at both the targeted school and the district was 0.0% compared to the state's 2.2%. The mobility rate at the targeted school was 8.4% which was slightly higher compared to the district's 6.3%, but nearly half of the state's 16.1%. Student attendance at the targeted school was 95.3% of which there was only a slight difference compared to the district's 95.4% and slightly higher than the state's 93.9%.

There were 35 full-time certified teachers of which 34 (97.14%) of the teachers were female with one (2.86%) teacher being male. The ethnic makeup of the teachers in the district was prominently Caucasian at 99%, with 0.2% African American, 0.6% Hispanic, and no Asian/Pacific Islander nor Native American. The average teacher salary at the district level was \$49,304 which was a slightly lower than the state's average of \$55,558. The average administrator salary at the district level was \$96,855 which is an insignificant difference compared to the state's average of \$97,051. The typical teacher at the district level had 11.9 years experience compared to the state's 13.6 years. At the district level, 37.2% of the teachers had a bachelor's degree while at the state level 50.1% had a bachelor's degree. However, 62.8% of the teachers at the district level had a master's degree compared to only 49.1% of the teachers at the state level. The ratio of students to administrators at the district level was 19.4:1 while the

pupil-administrator ratio was 234.6:1. For the school year of 2005-2006, the average class size for kindergarten was 24, first grade was 23, second grade was 23.5, third grade was 22.5, fourth grade was 27, and fifth grade was 24.

Mathematics, science, English/language, and social science are the core academics taught in kindergarten through the fifth grade. According to the Illinois School Report Card the greatest amount of time spent on instruction is 125 minutes daily for English/language. The remainder of the other three core academic instructional times is 60 minutes for mathematics followed by 48 minutes for social studies, and lastly 36 minutes for science each day. However, kindergarten is the exception with 750 contact minutes devoted weekly to instructional time (Building principal, personal communication, August 18, 2006).

According to the Illinois School Report Card for the school year 2004-05, the overall performance on all state tests was 77.8% which is slightly lower than the district's 79.0%, but greater than the state's 64.9%. This pattern was continued in the overall performance on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) which was 79.1% for the targeted school, 80.1% for the district, and 68.9% for the state. Students participate in the ISAT annually with third and fifth grade students tested in reading, writing, and mathematics, while students in fourth grade are tested in science. At the third grade level, the targeted school reported 73.3% performance scores meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards for reading which was only slightly lower than the district's 73.9%, but higher than the state's 65.6%. In the area of mathematics, the school reported 82.2%, meeting or exceeding which was slightly lower than the district's 86.0%, but higher than the state's 79.2%. At the fifth grade level, the targeted school reported 71.8% performance scores meeting or exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards for reading which was virtually the same as the district's 71.9%, but notably higher than the state's 59.8%. In



mathematics, 81.6% of the students in the targeted school met or exceeded the Illinois Learning Standards which was lower than the district's 87.6%, but higher than the state's 73.1%. In addition, third and fifth grade students who were enrolled in a comprehensive English Language Learner program participate in the Illinois Measure of Annual Growth in English exam.

The targeted school was administered with one building principal and one assistant principal. The office was staffed with one full-time secretary, one health clerk and one part-time nurse. The school was staffed with a total of 24 teachers; two kindergarten teachers, four first grade teachers, three second grade teachers, four third grade teachers, four fourth grade teachers, four fifth grade teachers and three fourth/fifth grade teachers. Also, there were two inclusion aides. In the fine arts department, there was one physical education teacher, one music teacher, one art, and one health teacher. The library media center had one librarian, one paraprofessional and two technologists. Two band instructors instructed once a week to fourth and fifth graders who were interested in participating in the program. The support programs were run by three learning specialists with three paraprofessionals, an extended curriculum/gifted instructor one day per week for fourth and fifth graders, one English Language Learner instructor with one full-time and one part-time paraprofessional, two Reading Recovery teachers, a self-contained teacher, and one Title 1 Reading teacher. In addition to their positions, there was a special education coordinator who oversaw the targeted school, two other elementary schools and one of the middle schools in the district. Pupil personnel services included two social workers, one psychologist three times per week, one speech pathologist, one vision itinerant, and one mobility specialist. The physical therapist spent 20% time at the targeted school and the occupational therapist spent 40% time at the targeted school which was dependent on student requirements.

The cafeteria was run by one manager and three assistants. The school had one day time custodian and two evening custodians. There were three playground supervisors.

This targeted school had a very supportive active parent group which was an integral component to the success of this school. The Teacher Assistant Program was greatly appreciated by all teachers in which parents volunteered their time in hourly shifts by copying, cutting projects, and laminating. The publishing center provided a wonderful opportunity for students to write stories and make appointments with parent volunteers meeting one-on-one, listening to the young authors read their stories, make suggestions on making changes, and how to layout and design their book. Once the book was published, the student read their book to the principal. There were various fundraisers, a fifth grade farewell party, a fifth grade safety patrol party, field days, third, fourth, and fifth grade Fall Olympics, book fair, family night, ice cream social, a family 5K fun run/walk and running club. Also, there was a planned event for kindergarten students and their parents to meet each other prior to the first day of school. The new parents had the opportunity to get to know each other while the new students played on the playground.

The targeted school had a health classroom, where students, grades one through five were taught for one hour weekly by the health teacher. A dual language program was offered to first grade students. The language used to teach the students their academic studies alternated weekly from English to Spanish. Struggling readers in grades three through five that do not have IEPs, a Title I program had been establish to support their reading and writing skills. In addition, the targeted school had a Reading Recovery program, where students received one hour intense, one-on-one reading instruction for 20 sessions for first grade students that were struggling. Further there was a reading specialist pull out program for students struggling in first and second grade.

The Wee Deliver mail system was a program that students, staff, and parents could write letters to students, place them in the mail box, and then they were delivered by the mail people who were fourth and fifth graders during their lunch. This was seen as an important job in which the students had to interview for prior to selection.

This school had a major focus on reading which offered three reading programs. There was a Primary Thinking Skills program which was geared towards students identified as having a strong aptitude in reading and were provided with extended enrichment services in grades one through three. These students could then be identified for the extended curriculum program when they are in fourth and fifth grade. The second program was the Extended Curriculum program where students identified as excelling in reading participate in a pullout program. Students met five hours weekly in this program. Third, the Reading Recovery program provided intense individualized instruction for students in first and second grade identified as being in the lowest reading levels for their grades. The Reading Recovery program was in addition to their class instruction.

Also, this school was noted for its' summer school program, which was free and funded by Title 1. Camp Cougar started five weeks before the school year for four weeks from 8:30 a.m. until noon. The teachers wore their camp staff shirts and the students decorated their shirts. Camp Cougar helped students to review and reinforce skills before school, started with a strong emphasis on reading.

The Principal's Pride Wall was a program that students eagerly looked forward to having special work hung on this wall. Further, their exceptional accomplishment was announced on the speaker for people to take note.

This school was located in a quiet, residential community, within walking distance from its quaint downtown. The school was the oldest in the district, originally built in 1884 sitting on a quiet, peaceful block facing the town's public library. In 1906 a separate building was built to accommodate high school students. Later, in 1914 a gymnasium was added and the elementary and high school was connected. In 1924 a separate building was built for the high school students. Since then there have been several additions to the school. These additions were One in 1906, a gymnasium in 1914, new classrooms in 1977, and in 2002 a new Library Media Center, a new cafeteria and various internal renovations.

A spacious two-story brick building with large, mature oak trees gracing the front entrance, houses a variety of classrooms for the 569 students. Students and families were welcomed into the school as they entered the school through the four door middle entrance. Upon entering the school through the middle entrance, the beautifully crafted auditorium with a balcony is focused on a wooden stage. The front offices were occupied by the principal, assistant principal, school secretary, and nurses' station. Classrooms for kindergarten through third grade were located on the first floor with the gymnasium, cafeteria, and reading intervention rooms. The basement housed the music room fully equipped with a variety of instruments and had a focal point of a real fireplace. At the time this school was built, many schools were built with fireplaces. Also, an art room with ample storage space and separate teacher's office was also located in the basement. On the second floor the fourth and fifth grade classrooms. In addition the extended curriculum/gifted, self contained, resource classrooms, social worker, psychologist, and library media center were also on the second floor. Each general education classroom was equipped with four student computers and one teacher computer, and the three resource classrooms were equipped with two student computers and a teacher computer. The learning

media center had eight computers. In addition all classrooms were equipped with a television and VCR. A playground was located in the back of the school for student use during recess.

Careful analysis of the 2004-05 Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) scores for the third and fifth grade reading performance for students with disabilities, specifically those with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), yielded markedly lower scores than the state percentages. According to the Illinois School Report Card 2004-05, the third grade reading scores with IEPs indicate that at the school level, 46.2% were at the academic warning level which was markedly high compared to the district's 19.2% and the state's 21.3%. The fifth grade reading scores with IEPs indicate that at the school level, 20.0% were at the academic warning level which was notably high compared to the district's 8.4% and the state's 8.6%. As students move up through the grades, reading fluency becomes an increasingly important skill to master. Often as students get older, their confidence level dips when reading in front of others. As seen in the 2004-05, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade ISAT scores for students with IEPs, 46.2% were at the academic warning level and the 2004-05, 5<sup>th</sup> grade ISAT scores for students with IEPs, 20.0% were at the academic warning level. The teacher researcher believes that as the older student is able to read fluently, their confidence level will increase and consequently will experience an increased level of reading enjoyment.

#### Local Context of the Problem

The targeted school was located in a major suburban metro city with a small town atmosphere, approximately 50 miles northwest of Chicago. According to the US Census Bureau (2000, *Profile of selected economic characteristics*), the community's population was 42,871, which was the largest community in the county and continues to grow at a steady pace. As seen in Table 2, the majority of the population in the community was Caucasian (94%).

Table 2

*Community Ethnic Background by Percentages*

<u>Caucasian</u>	<u>Hispanic</u>	<u>Asian</u>	<u>African American</u>	<u>Native American</u>	<u>Pacific Islander</u>
94	7	2	0.56	0.16	0.02

In accordance with the City Data (n.d., *Demographic & Maps*), the median annual income for residents in this community was \$73,100. Approximately 4% of the population was below the poverty level with unemployment rate at 2.6%. The residents of this community were employed in non-manufacturing positions (68.20%), manufacturing positions (30.10%), and in agriculture (1.70%).

The median age in this community was 34 years, with the greatest age group being under the age of 18 as seen in Table 3.

Table 3

*Percentage of Population by Age Groups*

<u>Persons Under 18</u>	<u>Persons 18 to 24</u>	<u>Persons 25 to 44</u>	<u>Persons 45 to 64</u>	<u>Persons 65 and Older</u>
32	7	33	20	9

The percentage of females living in this community was 50.1% which was of course nearly the same as that for males at 49.9%. Residents of this community who were married were 64%. The average household size in this community was 2.9 and the average family size is 3.4. Nearly half of the residents of this community had a college degree. Residents who had a college degree as seen in Table 4 were 43.3% (Village, 2004).

Table 4

*Percentage of Education Levels*

<u>High School Degree</u>	<u>Some College, No Degree</u>	<u>Associate's Degree</u>	<u>Bachelor's Degree</u>	<u>Master's Degree</u>
23.1	26.1	7.4	25.1	10.8

In accordance with City Data (n.d.), the community's source of income came from a variety of sources; retail, dining, several car dealerships and light industry including landscaping and automotive repair in several industrial parks. Further, the community had maintained a quaint downtown district providing an assortment of retail shops.

According to the Chicago Tribune (2006, *Community crime data*), the overall community crime rate had actually decreased from 34% in 2003 to 30% in 2004. In all areas, offenses had decreased from 2003 to 2004 with the exception of rape as indicated by Table 5.

Table 5

*Crime Rates per Percentage per 1,000 (2004, n=1,201; 2003, n=1,345)*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Murder</u>	<u>Rape</u>	<u>Robbery</u>	<u>Assault</u>	<u>Burglary</u>	<u>Theft</u>	<u>Auto Theft</u>	<u>Arson</u>
2004	0	13	3	27	67	1,060	21	4
2003	1	19	7	28	101	1,156	34	5

The community's first European settlers arrived in 1836, at which time the United States government offered several families homestead rights. This marked the start of this community. Prior to this the Sac and Fox Indian Tribes inhabited this area. In 1840, surveyors, Abner Beardsley, Berman Crandall, and Christopher Walkup platted the village. Today a middle school is named after Abner Beardsley and streets named after Berman Crandall and Christopher Walkup. In 1856, a rail line was built to carry ice cut from the lake to Chicago and also to bring visitors from Chicago to enjoy the beaches. In 1883 the Chicago Telephone Company began

service. In 1884 wooden sidewalks were built and in 1912 a water system was built. By 1902, gas and electricity services were in place. The community was incorporated in 1874 (Village, 2004).

This community took pride in having the lowest tax rates in the county. In fact, property tax rates had been lowered by 1.7% since 1999. In addition, the property tax rates had dropped by 32% over the past nine years. There were no municipal utility tax, no local income tax (Village, 2004).

Recreational opportunities were plentiful in this community. There were 44 parks, a senior center, including a 230 acre lake that the residents enjoyed going to the beach, picnicking, boating, and swimming and hiking and biking on the many bike trails. The community's library had been ranked number 10 among libraries in Lake County. There were two public golf courses and miniature golf, snowmobiling in the winter, nine fitness and sports centers, nineteen public tennis courts, five skating and hockey rinks, and nine baseball and softball fields. This community had a total of 43 churches; 22 denominations. Two Metra Train stops served this community. Soon the community will be owners of a major recreational development where residents will enjoy 500 acres of pristine clear waters and a one of a kind recreational area (Village, 2004).

The school district was a kindergarten through eighth grade district and was the largest school district in the county. It was comprised of nine elementary schools and three middle schools which in turn fed into the high school district, which included three different high schools. The district also had an early childhood school for students at risk/special needs ages three through five. This district worked closely with the community and the families, whose



mission statement was “Educational excellence for all children is our passion and commitment” (Site Website, p 1, 2006).

According to the Illinois School Report Card, the district’s school improvement plan included improving reading fluency for third, fourth, fifth grade students and to improve reading comprehension. The district values their new teachers by providing mandatory classes to attend before the school year begins and on going classes during the school year for each academic area. In addition, there was a two day orientation including a bus tour of the town and the schools within the district. Further, each new teacher was assigned a mentor for two years, who had been trained for this position, which included several times to observe other teachers at the various schools within the district, time to spend with their mentor, and further training. Teachers were supplied with a variety of best practice materials. The district had one superintendent, and 12 principals, and assistant principals.

Five years ago, the district successfully passed a referendum to make physical improvements to each school within the district. The targeted school in particular had a separate cafeteria added.

Approximately 69% of the financial funding for the district came from residential taxpayers, 6.9% from the state, 12.8% from general state aid, 3.3% from the Federal, and 7.3% from businesses. In accordance with the 2005-06 Illinois School Report Card other financial indicators included the 2002 equalized assessed valuation per pupil at \$177,213 and the 2002 total school tax rate per \$100 is 3.13. The 2003-04 district instructional expenditures per pupil are \$4,228 which was lower than the state’s \$5,216. Lastly, the district’s 2003-04 operating expenditures per pupil are \$6,907 which was significantly lower than the state’s \$8,786.

The district operated under the philosophy that the curriculum should drive technology. Therefore, technology was taught in the classroom as a part of each academic subject, so that the students acquire their technology skills in a natural setting. In other words, as a student is studying and questions what is being taught, the student is shown and experiences how to search for the answers immediately. Students were required to participate in a variety of projects such as power point presentations in conjunction with a particular academic subject being taught to further enhance their learning. The district had established and implemented a technology skills hierarchy curriculum for each grade level. The district employed a director and assistant who helped manage the technology. In addition to the teacher's computer, there were four student computers in each classroom, two student computers in each resource classroom along with a teacher computer, and six computers in the media center. All computers were equipped with a variety of educational software and Internet access. Access to a cart with 20 laptops was available for classroom use. Every classroom was equipped with a TV and VCR including the resource rooms (Building principal, personal communication, August 18, 2006).

Careful analysis of the community demographics included the educational level of the residents which revealed nearly half of the residents had a college degree. While the community is the largest within the county, it was growing at a steady pace with only 4% below the poverty level and unemployment was at 2.6%. Given these community demographics there was no relation regarding the ISAT reading scores for students who had IEPs.

#### National Context of the Problem

To function effectively in today's society it is essential to be able to read fluently. (Olmscheid, 1999). However, the National Reading Panel has expressed that as a nation there is an increased concern that children are not reading fluently (Ebner and Miller, 2003). Further,

Hudson (2005) explains it is a common characteristic of struggling readers and students with learning disabilities. According to NetNews (2004), research points out, that disfluent readers are greatly dependent on decoding strategies that results in slow processing and consequently motivation is affected due to the laborious reading pace. Furthermore, Zuttell and Rasinski, (1991) reveal that teachers frequently do not receive instruction to teach reading fluency and the benefits, therefore, it is often over looked in the classroom.

## CHAPTER 2

### PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

#### Evidence of the Problem

The purpose of this research project was to increase reading fluency in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with learning disabilities through Readers' Theatre. The teacher researcher was concerned that the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with learning disabilities at the targeted site were performing below what would be deemed as satisfactory for reading fluency. There were five 4<sup>th</sup> grade students and five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who participated in the study for a total of 10 participants. The evidence of the problem was documented through the use of a student survey, 4-point-fluency rubric, and a one minute oral timed reading during the weeks of January 29<sup>th</sup> through February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

#### Student Survey

The Student Survey was used to document the extent of the problem of poor reading fluency. Please refer to Appendix A for the survey. This document tool provided the teacher researcher with ideas and strategies to help improve reading fluency. The survey consisted of seven questions to reveal student attitudes towards reading. The week of January 29<sup>th</sup>, during the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading class time and again for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading class time, the teacher researcher read to the students each question and the choices that each student could choose to respond to. Each student responded on their questionnaire under the instructions to take their time, give careful thought to the question and choices, and to choose the response that best fits them. This procedure was followed for the five 4<sup>th</sup> grade students, and again for the five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. When the questionnaire was completed the students placed their questionnaires in a basket located at the back of the classroom. The teacher researcher later compiled the data.

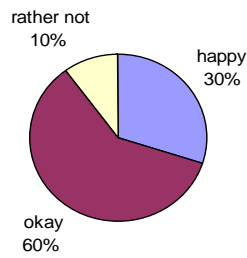


Figure 1

*Feelings about reading at home (n = 10)*

In Figure 1 above, the pre-test revealed that only 30% (n = 3) of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were happy to spend their time reading at home. The majority of the students, 60% (n = 6) only felt okay about spending time reading at home, with one or 10% who would rather not spend any time reading at home.

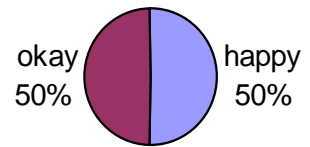


Figure 2

*Feel about getting a book for a present (n = 10)*

In Figure 2 above, the pre-test revealed the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were divided in half with 50% (n = 5) happy to receive a book as a present, while the other 50% (n = 5) felt okay to receive a book as a present.

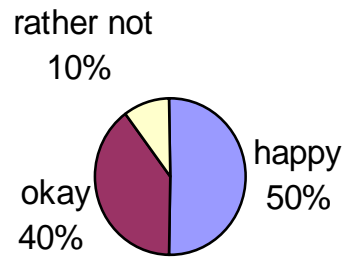


Figure 3

*Feel when time to read in class (n = 10)*

In Figure 3 above, the pre-test revealed the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were almost evenly divided on how they felt when it is time to read in class with one student or 10% (n = 1) who would rather not be in class when it is time to read. There were 50% (n = 5) of the students who were happy when it was time to attend reading, while 40% (n = 4) of the students feel just okay attending the reading class.

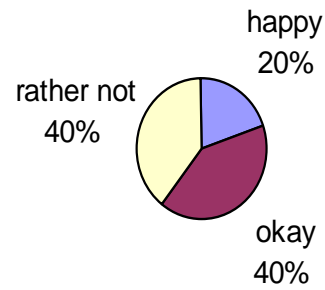


Figure 4

*Feel when reading out loud in class (n = 10)*

In Figure 4 above, the pre-test indicated only 20% (n = 2) of the students were really happy to read out loud in class, with 40% (n = 4) of the students who felt just okay and 40% (n = 4) of the students who would rather not read out loud in class.



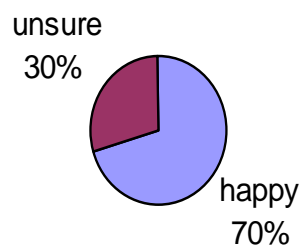


Figure 5

*Spending free time reading (n = 10)*

In Figure 5 above, the pre-test revealed most of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, 70% (n = 7) felt okay to happy to spend free time reading while 30% (n = 3) felt unsure to preferring not to spend free time reading.

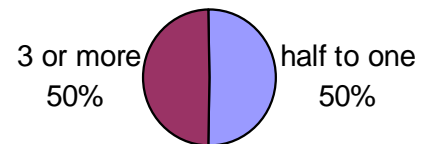


Figure 6

*Hours spent watching TV and/or playing video games (n = 10)*

In Figure 6 above, the pre-test revealed the students who spent only  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 hour watching television or playing video games a day was 50% (n = 5) and 50% (n = 5) spent 3 hours or more watching television or playing video games a day.

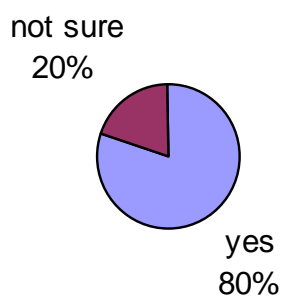


Figure 7

*End of year a better reader (n = 10)*

In Figure 7 above, the pre-test revealed most of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, 80% (n = 8) felt they would be a better reader at the end of the school year with only 20% (n = 2) who felt unsure.

### One-Minute Timing

The One-Minute Timing tool that reflected the extent of poor reading fluency was a graph indicating the number of words read orally per minute minus errors. This would indicate actual words read correctly from a passage at the student's instructional guided reading level. Please refer to Appendix B for the one-minute timing. During reading class, one student at a time was timed by the teacher researcher. At their guided reading level, the student read a passage they had not seen before. The teacher researcher instructed each student to begin reading when told to start and stop when told to stop at the time the timer went off. Each student was told if unsure of a word, to do their best, no assistance was given during the timing. After the timing, the teacher researcher counted every word read, subtracted any errors, and documented total

words read correctly. Next, the teacher researcher instructed each student to color their graph to indicate the number of words read accurately for a minute.

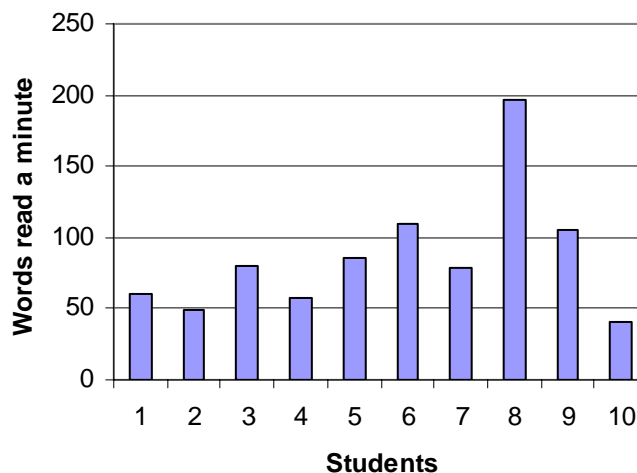


Figure 8

*One minute reading (n = 10)*

In Figure 8 above, the pre-test revealed that reading at their individual instructional guided reading level, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were administered an oral reading one-minute timing. According to Johns and Berglund (2006), the average oral words read per minute is 125 to 140 words for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. The average words read per minute for the ten students at the targeted site was 92.2 words per minute, with 60 words per minute being at the low end and 140 words at the high end.

### Fluency Rubric

The 4-point fluency rubric tool reflected the extent of poor oral reading fluency. The rubric was used to analyze the four components of fluency. The first component was the rate which a passage is read. The second component was the expression exhibited when reading orally. The third component was appropriate phrasing demonstrated when reading orally. The fourth component was the appropriate use of punctuation when reading orally. Please refer to

Appendix C for the 4-point-fluency rubric for oral reading. As each student was administered their one-minute timing, the 4-point-fluency rubric was also administered by the teacher researcher. This required the teacher researcher to listen carefully as each student read, determining the rate, expression, phrasing, use of punctuation as the student read, and giving a score of one being the lowest to four being the most fluent.

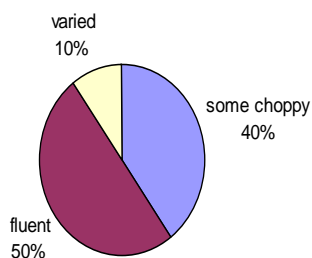


Figure 9

*Fluency Rate (n = 10)*

In Figure 9 above, the pre-test revealed that the rate at which 50% (n = 5) of the targeted 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students read was with some hesitations and varied rates. Further, the rate at which 40% (n = 4) of the students read with a general conversation voice, some smooth and some choppy, while only 10% (n = 1) read consistently, conversationally, smooth and fluent throughout the timings.

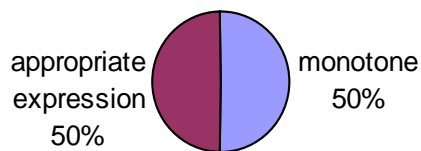


Figure 10

*Expression (n = 10)*

In Figure 10 above, the pre-test revealed that reading with expression was equally divided among the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, with 50% (n = 5) who read in a monotone voice combined with some expression, and 50% (n = 5) who read with appropriate expression for most of the time they read.

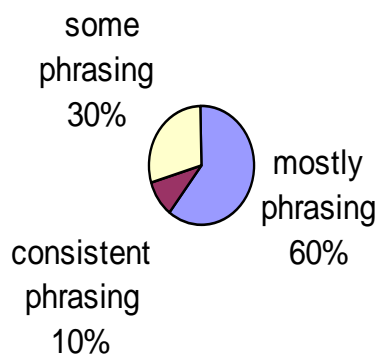


Figure 11

*Fluency phrasing (n = 10)*

In Figure 11 above, the pre-test revealed 30% (n = 3) of the students read some word-by-word and some phrases, with 60% (n = 6) who read in mostly phrases, sometimes smooth and sometimes choppy. Only 10% (n = 1) read with consistent phrasing during the oral reading timing and generally smooth and fluent.

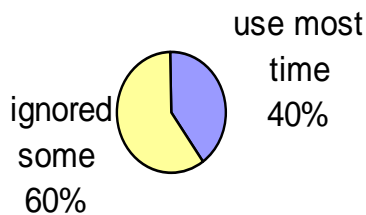


Figure 12

*Fluency use punctuation (n = 10)*

In Figure 12 above, the pre-test revealed that the students who read with some punctuation and yet ignored some were 60% (n = 6) while 40% (n = 4) used punctuation most of the time when they read.

Based upon the data collected, the targeted students were struggling to read fluently. Looking at the data collected from the student survey, the teacher researcher concluded that overall the students were not excited about reading (Figure 1). Not only the student survey, but the timed reading results (Figure 8) and the 4-point-fluency rubric (Figures 9, 10 11, and 12) seemed to indicate to the teacher researcher that student's confidence level in reading was low and is revealed in the choppiness and varied rates with hesitation when they read orally. Therefore, the students did not spend a lot of time reading, which consequently resulted in lower reading fluency rates. The teacher researcher felt the intervention that would be implemented would cause the students to increase their reading fluency skills.



### Probable Causes

Reading fluently is a necessity to function in today's society (Olmscheid, 1999). There is a growing concern that many students are not reading fluently (Ebner & Miller, 2003; Richard, 2006). Reading fluency is a common characteristic in students with learning disabilities and those that struggle with reading (Chard et al., 2002; Hudson, 2005; Richard, 2006; Therrien, 2004). According to Corcoran (2005), students who read poorly in the third grade tend to continue to struggle with reading through the ninth grade and into adulthood. The literature suggests problems regarding reading fluency can be contributed to several underlying probable causes.

Most often reading fluency is either omitted or briefly covered in both undergraduate and graduate level teacher classes (Goldstein, 1999; Hudson, 2005; Lipson & Lang, 1991; Richards, 2000; Welsch, 2006; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). As a result, teachers commonly receive very little teacher instruction regarding how to explicitly teach reading fluency and why teaching reading fluency is important. Frequently, teachers focus their class reading instruction on reading comprehension and decoding skills while neglecting reading fluency instruction (Barton, Freeman, Lewis & Thompson, 2001; Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Kuhn, 2004; Rasinski, 1990; Richards, 2006; Therrien, 2004). Furthermore, many times skills are taught in isolation rather than as a strategy (Barton et al., 2001). In addition, according to Lipson and Lang (1991), there remains to be a great deal of confusion among the research as to what are effective strategies for improving reading fluency as well as the correlation between fluency and the overall reading ability.

Fluency actually comprises of three components; word decoding automaticity, reading pace, and prosody (Richards, 2006). Prosody is reading with expression, is often overlooked.

According to Hudson, (2005), if the reader has poor prosody, emphasis may be placed on the unintended grouping of words so the author's intended meaning is lost. Students with learning disabilities often read with little expression in a monotone voice, ignoring punctuation marks, and exerting most of their energy sounding out words (Denton & Hasbouck, 2000; Hudson, 2005).

Students reading at a frustration rate are not able to read fluently and often spend their energy on decoding words (Ebner & Miller, 2003; Eldredge, 2005; Richards, 2000). When non-fluent readers read without word decoding automaticity skills, reading pace is affected. Non-fluent readers will often exhibit long pauses, word substitution errors, slow, choppy reading, and reading word by word, losing the intended meaning of the text, thus reading pace is disrupted, choppy and uneven (Allinder, 2001; Denton & Hasbouck, 2000; Frantantoni, 1999; Hudson, 2005; Lipson & Lang, 1991; Moyer, 1982; Olmscheid, 1999; Rasinski, 2003; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). In addition, reading instruction that concentrates on word perfect decoding can unwittingly lead the reader to believe that good reading is simply accurate word recognition, ignoring the true purpose of reading which is to comprehend what is being read (Rasinski, 2003).

Also, it has been found that when teachers do not incorporate timed readings, the students' reading pace may not progress, thus reading may remain laborious and monotone. This may be because when timed readings are omitted as a part of the reading program, the student may lack motivation, thus their reading pace remains at a stand still (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

Students with reading difficulties or learning disabilities often lack word recognition, reading laboriously, which greatly affects comprehension (Allinder, 2001; Chard et al., 2002; Ebner & Miller, 2003; Edredge, 2005; Frantantoni, 1999; Rasinski, 2003; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002;

Therien, 2004). In fact, non-fluent reading is a reliable predictor of reading comprehension difficulties (Hudson, 2005; Rasinski, 2003).

Another cause of comprehension deficit is being able to respond reflectively. Teachers may not have enough time to concentrate on reflection, a metacognitive strategy. This is a strategy which requires direct instruction (Barton et al., 2001). In Griffith and Rasinski's study, a fourth grade class with at risk students was extremely dependent on teacher and peer input in order to participate in class discussion after independently reading. The struggling readers appeared to require listening to the responses from other more skilled readers in order to contribute to the discussion. This may be the result of not being able to metacognitively respond after reading a passage (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004).

An additional difficulty with reading comprehension is being able to retain information. Retaining information involves semantic memory which consists of names, facts, figures, and text information. Semantic memory is considered one of the weakest of the retrieval systems (Flynn, 2005). Slower reading rates results in processing less of what the reader has read with less retrieval of what has been read and experience difficulties accessing prior background knowledge (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006). Due to laborious reading, students who struggle with reading will retain less and also take a substantial amount of time to complete assignments (Ebner & Miller, 2003).

On the other hand, a student who can decode words accurately as they are reading may not necessarily be able to read fluently (Kuhn, 2004; Rasinski, 2003). However, some struggling readers can actually have good comprehension skills, but exhibit laborious monotone reading (Ebner & Miller, 2003).

Students who are non-fluent readers tend to exhibit difficulty in developing an expanded vocabulary. Playing word games is a strategy to increase vocabulary. However, students who struggle with reading often do not engage in word games (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004). Students who do not engage in word game activities in their daily lives to increase their vocabulary, typically lag behind by approximately two years with their oral reading vocabulary (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004). In addition, sight words which are the words most often found in a reading passage can greatly impact a reader's oral reading vocabulary. Research indicates that skilled readers have an extensive sight word vocabulary. Sight words can make a substantial difference between skilled readers and struggling readers (Franttoni, 1999).

It is difficult for struggling readers to read on their own because they are frustrated and tend to read less challenging material. They frequently exhibit off task behaviors and negative attitudes (Martinez et al., 1999; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002).

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders often read 1.5 to 2 grade levels below their peers at the elementary level and the gap is even greater at the high school level. Students with emotional and behavioral disorders often fall further behind due to their behaviors which interfere with their reading performance. Consequently, students with emotional and behavioral disorders receive less instructional time and, therefore, receive increased seatwork opposed to receiving direct instruction. So, instead of additional time used for individualized instruction, large group undifferentiated instruction is most common (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006).

When students with learning disabilities and those who struggle with reading read below grade level, they do not view themselves as potentially successful readers, thus they frequently develop low self esteem (Greenberg et al., 2002; Martinez et al., 1999; Rasinski, 2003). Students with learning disabilities who watch their teacher modeling a task performed perfectly may not

experience self-efficacy when attempting to perform the task they saw modeled. In fact, students with learning disabilities frequently experience self doubt in their abilities and often do not see their progress. As a result they develop a negative belief value system (Rinehart, 1999; Schunk et al., 1989). Further, older struggling readers become acutely aware of their reading difficulties. Often they personally judge themselves when they hear their peers read fluently as they experience feelings of frustration and embarrassment about their underdeveloped reading skills (Greenberg et al., 2002). Young adolescents often experience low self esteem, which branches off to loss of self-confidence in schoolwork. Consequently, they exert less energy in their work. It is noteworthy to realize young adolescents is a very important time for building independent reading skills needed for their future (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Unfortunately the non-fluent reader often feels reluctant to read, discouraged, anxious, and typically avoids reading. This results in being deprived of the simple joy of reading (Goldstein, 1999). Since students with learning disabilities often avoid reading, they lack independent reading skills, and therefore have less exposure to words when they do read (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Ebner & Miller, 2003; Frantantoni, 1999). As students with learning disabilities tend to read less, they lose precious time developing fluency, comprehension skills, and using their imagination when reading (Ebner & Miller, 2003; Rasinski, 1990). In fact, studies suggest that skilled readers read approximately three times more per week compared to students who struggle with reading and students with learning disabilities (Ebner & Miller, 2003).

While excited about a topic, both teachers and students are discouraged when encountering content area books (Young & Vardell, 1993). Content area books are often difficult to read and understand for students with learning disabilities and those who struggle with reading

(Young & Vardell, 1993). In order to gain understanding of what is being read across the curriculum, it is essential to be able to comprehend what they read (Ebner & Miller, 2003). Student's fluency can intensify with the increased difficulty of the content area text, producing the appearance that the student is a poor reader. This is often found with science and social studies texts (Lipson & Lang, 1991). In fact, research indicates that readers who do not read fluently depend on decoding strategies, which can result in slow processing. Thus the reader's motivation declines due to the laborious reading pace. In turn, the reader experiences difficulties in acquiring academic content, and further comprehension suffers as a result (NetNews, 2004).

Silent reading is a component commonly found in reading programs implemented in classrooms. Evidence suggests that silent reading is not as beneficial as oral reading to enhance reading skills with students who have learning disabilities (Chard et al., 2002). In fact, there appears to be no evidence linking silent reading as an effective strategy to build fluency in students who have learning disabilities (Therrien, 2004).

Even so, there are a variety of problems that evolve from oral reading. Basal reading series typically mistakenly consider oral reading fluency as being the result of proficient word recognition, when in fact oral reading fluency is actually much more than word recognition (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Teachers are often challenged in finding strategies in preventing the negative effects that struggling readers experience when called on to read orally in the classroom, which can result in low self esteem (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2002). Oral reading that is not rehearsed can be difficult for students who struggle with reading (Rasinski, 2003). Finally, as the struggling reader continues to read orally in a small group or classroom, they endure the feeling of repeated failure as they strive to read in front of their peers (Greenberg et al., 2002).

Another form of oral reading is round robin reading, requiring the teacher to randomly call on students to read out aloud. Reading publicly solo, leaves struggling readers feeling uncomfortable and discouraged. Furthermore, students often try to predict when they will be called on and then calculate the passage they will be asked to read hoping to prepare themselves when they are required to read orally. In the process of looking ahead they have lost their place requiring the teacher to guide the student where to start reading, thus the student is left feeling distressed (Rasinski, 2003).

Another reading fluency strategy is repeated reading. Often, repeated reading is not included in a classroom reading program. Instead the passage is briefly discussed followed by a new passage immediately being started to read and discuss (Rasinski, 2003). Further, some teachers do not see any value in repeated reading, believing that repeated reading is an unproductive, time consuming activity (Rasinski, 2003). However, there may be possible drawbacks of repeated reading. Students could possibly become bored, lose interest, and have a lack of motivation (Rasinski, 1990). Also, sometimes a student who could most benefit from rereading, resists rereading. They do not see a real reason to engage in rereading. After all, over time, they have experienced reading to be laborious, unrewarding, and just simply not enjoyable (Tyler & Chard, 2002).

Students with learning disabilities not only struggle directly with reading text, but also writing and spelling (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2000). In general, students who struggle with reading, typically display difficulties in all aspects of fluent reading. This includes automaticity of word identification, reading at a flowing rate, and reading with natural phrasing and expression, such as at a pace similar to conversational talk (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

The research literature suggests there are many probable causes for reading disfluency. The importance of reading fluently is necessary to becoming a proficient reader. With this being noted, the teacher researcher finds it extremely important to address reading fluency, which is an issue that has become a national concern.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

#### Review of the Literature

Reading fluency refers to the ability of readers to read quickly, effortlessly, and efficiently with good, meaningful expression. It means much more than accuracy in reading. Fluent reading is reading words with automaticity, reading groups of words, and using punctuation as the passage is being read (Denton & Hasbouck, 2000). According to Rasinski (2003), fluent readers read words accurately and effortlessly. Proficient reading is significantly connected with reading fluency (Therrien, 2004). Moreover, Stecker and Sinner (2006) suggested that oral reading fluency is a strong overall indicator of a student's read proficiency. Reading fluency encompasses many components (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). Casey and Chamberlain (2006) tell us that the proficient reader recognizes words and phrases instantly on sight. Reading fluently requires maintaining meaning of what is being read (Corcoran, 2005). In addition, reading fluency is reading with appropriate pitch, pace or speed, prosody, and accurate reading with minimal consciousness to the mechanics of decoding while reading with expression that sounds like spoken language (Chard et al, 2002; Eldredge, 2005; Hudson, 2005; Kuhn, 2004; Moyer, 1982; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Al Otaiba and Rivera (2006) explain that rate or speed is the time it takes to read a passage and accuracy is being able to recognize and pronounce words accurately. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) tell us that typically by the third grade students develop fluency. According to Worthy and Prater (2002) it is imperative that students practice until reading fluently. This step is extremely important for struggling readers.

Research indicates that proficient readers read fluently and comprehend what they read (Denton & Hasbouck, 2000; Tyler & Chard, 2000). According to research, all students gain from

oral reading fluency training and especially students with learning disabilities who gain from systematic direct instruction and repetition to increase their reading skills (Frantanoni, 1999; Goldstein, 1999; NetNews, 2004). More specifically, repeated readings are a highly valuable instructional strategy, which is a very effective component of a reading program and endorsed by the National Reading Panel, 2000 (Richards, 2000; Therrien, 2004). Further, modeling and teacher monitoring has a positive impact on oral reading and comprehension (Stahl & Kuhn, 2002). Research suggests that rereading phrases and paragraphs results in greater fluency than reading the same words randomly from a list (Moyer, 1982). Furthermore, the National Reading Panel, 2000 advocates that students with reading deficits receive guided oral reading fluency instruction daily to increase their reading rate, accuracy, word recognition, and comprehension (Al Otaib & Rivera, 2006; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002; Therrien, 2004).

Overall, fluent readers develop questions through all three stages of reading; prior, during and after. This guides the reader to simplify the meaning, identify answers to questions, aides in predicting, and to determine the author's goal (Allinder, 2001; Barton et al., 2001). It is important to model all the stages of reading (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006). The reader's background knowledge can greatly influence the reader's fluency and comprehension. In addition, the more interested the student is in the topic, the chances of fluent reading increases (Lipson & Lang, 1991). Students need to activate prior knowledge and need to be taught self questioning strategies as they are reading a passage to determine their understanding of what they are reading. To access this prior knowledge story mapping, graphic organizers, sensory imaging, and journaling are strategies that can be used to guide students to metacognitively enhance their comprehension of what they are reading (Barton et al., 2001; Welsch, 2006).

As a reader continuously evaluates others as they read, they themselves progress in all areas of reading (Worthy & Prater, 2002). According to Welsch (2006), immediate teacher corrective feedback is instrumental to increase reading fluency (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Lipson & Lang, 1991). There are multiple strategies that can be incorporated to develop and increase reading fluency for students with learning disabilities and is most effective when strategies are taught simultaneously (Barton et al., 2001; Chard et al., 2002). Strategies should be easy to integrate into the reading program, using direct instruction and feedback along with having access to easy materials (Kuhn, 2004; Olmscheid, 1999; Richards, 2000).

Continually observing the student can provide insight for individual direct instruction and provides immediate correction (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Hudson, 2005). In addition, flexible grouping offers opportunities to place students in small groups to provide explicit direct instruction on strategies they may need (Kuhn, 2004).

There are many strategies that can be used to incorporate fluency into a reading program. Some of these strategies are echo reading, paired reading, modeling, audio recordings, repeated readings, book buddies, choral reading recorded books, poetry coffeehouses, goal setting, and Readers' Theatre (Denton & Hasbouck, 2000; Martinez et al., 1999; Rasinski, 2003; Richards, 2000; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991).

Phonics is a component included in a good reading program which enables students to improve reading fluency (Allinder, 2001; Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Eldredge, 2005; Hudson, 2005; Richards, 2000). As decoding becomes automatic, the student devotes their time to comprehend what they are reading which results in fluent reading (Allinder, 2001). Wordplay is a strategy that builds metacognitive knowledge of how words work. Various materials, resources

and engaging activities making it fun to learn words and sparks an interest in students desire to explore words (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004).

A strategy that fluent readers use is reading text in ‘chunks’, or phrases, which is helpful for students with learning disabilities to increase fluency and comprehension (Chard et al, 2002; NetNews, 2004; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Welsch, 2006). It guides the reader to read in phrases instead of word by word and also when to pause as they read. By spending a few minutes daily, students reap major benefits (Goldstein, 1999; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002).

Since slow reading results in lost comprehension, fluency interventions are essential (Hudson, 2005). According to Lipson and Lang (1991) and Therrien (2004), fluency is considered a prerequisite skill for comprehension. Research suggests that there is a reciprocal relationship between reading fluency and reading comprehension (Allinder, 2001; Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Hudson, 2005; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Worthy & Prater, 2002). In fact, according to Ebner and Miller (2003), as students’ fluency increases along with comprehension, it is reflected across all curricula. As the reader reads more fluently, the reader is able to concentrate on the meaning of the text, thus comprehension is increased (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Chard et al., 2002; Rasinski, 2003; Richards, 2002). Further, metacognition is what proficient readers do when comprehending what they read. It is thinking about thinking, which is really the learner’s awareness of their own thinking. Teaching students metacognitive strategies carries over to other academic areas (Barton et al., 2001). Wordplay is an example of using metacognition. This is an opportunity to build metacognitive knowledge of how words work. Various materials, resources and engaging activities making it fun to learn words and sparks an interest in students desire to explore words (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004).

Allinder (2001) suggests that an effective way of teaching fluency is to stress vocabulary within a balanced reading curriculum. According to Meffler and Pettegrew (1997) as cited by Frantantoni (1991) fluency and sight vocabulary through direct instruction is an effective way to develop reading strategies for learning disabled students. Moreover, Blachowicz and Fisher (2004), explain that introducing students to a vast array of books exposes the reader to a greater array of vocabulary, thus expanding their vocabulary. Further, by rereading familiar passages, sight word vocabulary also increases (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004; Ebner & Miller, 2003; Young & Vardell, 1993). In fact, according to Blum and Koskinen (1991) as cited by Goldstein (1999), students who had the opportunity to participate as readers and listeners, gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own reading improvement. When a student monitors and guides a partner, the listener develops a metacognitive awareness of the critical features of fluent reading, which also increases student motivation.

Other strategies that benefit students with learning disabilities are flash card word training and word drill. By practicing misread words as a flashcard drill can increase word recognition proficiency (Welsch, 2006; Young & Vardel, 1993). Also, teaching students to use root words and affixes as they read, using ending punctuation to pause and to use semantic and syntactic cues to read with expression is precious to reading fluently (Allinder, 2001). Still another effective strategy is visualization to create meaning. It also assists the reader to make predictions and inferences as it encourages using prior knowledge and can even aide with retention (Barton et al, 2001).

Reading fluency involves automaticity of word recognition and reading with prosody (Kuhn, 2004). Prosody is reading with expression, which is the result of reading with automaticity (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Goldstein, 1999; Kuhn & Rasinski, 2004; Rasinski,

2003). Hudson (2005) explains that when reading rate, accuracy, pitch, and comprehension improve, prosodic reading also improves (Richards, 2000). According to Kuhn (2004), reading with prosody is an indication of comprehension. If a reader understands what they are reading, they will read with appropriate expression (Casey et al., 2006). Hudson (2005) describes a strategy to explicitly teach intonation, in which students are instructed to read a short sentence. Each time they read the sentence they place emphasis on a different word which teaches the reader the significance of inflection. Another strategy Allinder (2001) explains is specific cueing. An example is to explicitly instruct the student when to pause while reading at periods or commas as they read rather than telling a student to do a good job reading. This is a valuable strategy to teach fluency. In addition, to develop prosody is to listen and read with skilled models while they read with expression. Hudson (2005) explains that measuring prosody is conducted through observing the reader during oral reading. Using a multidimensional fluency scale or rubric is a means to score a reader's accuracy, phrasing, reading pace, and smoothness. This provides valuable information for the teacher to identify the student's reading fluency strengths and weaknesses (Stahl & Kuhn, 2002; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). Another effective strategy promoting prosody is Readers' Theatre which students find very motivating (Hudson, 2005; Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Research indicates that the more students interact with literature at their appropriate level, the more they excel (Stahl and Kuhn, 2002). Appropriate reading material includes poetry, Readers' Theatre, trade books, and literature based reading series and should be material that is familiar to them (Goldstein, 1999; & NetNews, 2004). The reading material should not be too easy and not too difficult. Also, the passages should be short and varied genres when practicing fluency (Goldstein, 1999; & Hudson, 2005). Ideally, reading material should be at least at the

reader's instructional guided reading level or between 90% to 95% accuracy or even more preferable, at the student's independent read level which is 95% to 100% accuracy (Allinder, 2001; Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Denton & Hasbouck, 2000; Ebner & Miller, 2003; Hudson, 2005; Lipson & Lang, 1991; Moyer, 1982; NetNews, 2004; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002; & Welsch, 2006). The teacher should monitor the text level and adjust as the student progresses (Chard et al., 2002; Therrien, 2004). While becoming a more fluent reader, student's confidence in reading improves when reading at an easier text level (Zutell & Rasinski, 1991). As the student reads at appropriate text level, providing immediate corrective feedback is a highly effective strategy (Chard et al., 2002).

Students with learning disabilities require explicit direct instruction (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Hudson, 2005). Rasinski (2003) tells us that by analyzing students' oral reading errors, the teacher can determine strategies to explicitly teach the student what they need to develop into a more proficient reader. Teachers need to teach strategies that are used by proficient readers through modeling and using direct and explicit methods for long periods of time (Barton et al., 2001; Stecker & Sinner, 2006). According to Allinder (2001) when using specific fluency strategies, student's reading fluency can improve dramatically (Hudson, 2005).

According to Zutell and Rasinski (1991) and Hudson (2005), a successful reading program includes modeling fluent reading. Modeling allows the reader to hear fluent reading, which is extremely important for students with learning disabilities (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Barton et al., 2001; Chard & Tyler, 2002; Ebner & Miller, 2003; Goldstein, 1999; Hudson, 2005; NetNews, 2004; Rasinski, 2003; Richards, 2000; Schunk & Hanson, 1989; Therrien, 2004; Welsch, 2006). Modeling prior to the student reading helps the reader to preview the passage before reading and to concentrate on the content (Chard & Tyler, 2002; Welsch, 2006). Choral

reading is a strategy that can be effective for modeling reading fluently. As the teacher reads, the students see and hear the teacher modeling fluent reading and then the students read as the teacher continues to read (Greenberg et al, 2002). When fluency is modeled by the teacher, great results are achieved, although good results have been achieved through modeling books on tape or computer (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004; Rasinski, 1990; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002; Therrien, 2004).

Technology can be instrumental in developing reading fluency. According to Welsch (2006), computer software can help with reading fluency if immediate feedback is provided while simultaneously working on reading comprehension and word recognition. However, students tend to read more words accurately with teacher assistance than with computer assistance (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006). Another technology strategy is video feedforward. Video feedforward has been proven to be an effective motivational strategy to increase self confidence and reading fluency. Students become their own model when they view themselves on videotape successfully reading fluently. They then view themselves as fluent readers, mentally rehearsing the skills being viewed, thus reading more fluently (Greenberg et al, 2002; Rasinski, 1990; Schunk & Hanson, 1989; Welsch, 2006). In fact, Schunk and Hanson (1989) suggested that students with learning disabilities who participate in videotape feedback show promising results in self-efficacy and increased proficiency in their skills. Concoran (2005) suggests this strategy improves students' critical thinking skills.

Choral reading is another strategy to increase fluency which is similar to read along with the exception that several children read in unison (Goldstein, 1999; Richards, 2000; Welsch, 2006). Choral reading is flexible in that the whole class or a small group of students can participate (Greenberg et al., 2002).



There are various forms of partner reading. Paired reading is another effective strategy to promote reading fluency. Students actually model and provide support for each other as they read the same passage concurrently. This positive strategy is excellent for students with learning disabilities who are paired with students who read slightly above their level and have commonalities such as gender, mood, race, and personality (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Greenberg et al., 2002; Richards, 2000). Paired reading can also be implemented with the teacher and student reading together, which provides increased opportunity for the student to engage in oral reading (Welsch, 2006). Shared reading requires the teacher to introduce and read the text to the student followed by the student reading the text to the teacher. Next the student reads to others, providing an opportunity to engage in repeated reading (Welsch, 2006).

Read aloud is helpful for not only fluency, but also for comprehension and for increasing vocabulary (Allinder, 2001; Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004; Rasinski, 2003). According to Rasinski (2003), students should be read aloud to daily and Stahl and Kuhn (2002) tell us that as little as 10 minutes a day can reap substantial benefits. Further, Rasinski, (2003), explains that because the student hears expressive fluent reading and how it sounds as the teacher models it through reading aloud, fluency increases. The student feels more motivated to read as they hear and see their teacher model expressive reading (Rasinski, 2003). Rasinski (2003) suggests, following read aloud there is a time for response through drawing, discussion, or acting out.

Repeated reading is an effective strategy to improve reading fluency for students with learning disabilities (Hudson, 2005; Rasinski, 1990; Therrien, 2004). Repeated reading is defined as guided repeated oral reading. Typically the student rereads a passage orally approximately three to five times to reach an establish criteria (Allinder, 2001; Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Chard et al., 2002; Concoran, 2005; Goldstein, 1999; Moyer, 1982; Rasinski, 2003; Richards, 2000;

Stahl & Kuhn, 2002; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Welsch, 2006). Repeated reading is a strategy that also improves vocabulary and comprehension (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2004; Chard et al., 2002; Goldstein, 1999; Lipson & Lang, 1991; Rasinski, 2003; Richards, 2000). In addition, repeated reading improves word recognition, speed, accuracy, and is instrumental in recalling facts from what was read (Concoran, 2005; Rasinski, 2003). By implementing repeated readings daily, the results carry over to text not previously read (Moyer, 1982; Rasinski, 1990; Rasinski, 2003; Tyler & Chard, 2000). Repeated reading can be incorporated into Readers' Theatre. Students may reread as many as fifteen times before performing (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). Comprehension can be improved by reading with expression of how the character is saying it (Martinez et al., 1999; Rasinski, 2003).

There are several strategy interventions of repeated reading. One is fluency-oriented oral reading (FOOR). According to Kuhn (2004) this is an effective strategy to improve reading fluency. It involves repetition reading that is helpful for struggling readers and also results in improved comprehension. Students increased their fluency greatly compared to students in a listening only group. Kuhn (2004) suggests that students need to be actively involved in the treatment to become skilled readers connecting with the text. Another strategy is Fluency Oriented Reading Instruction (FORI). It involves repeated reading, reading at a "comfort level", and partner reading which increases the amount of time spent reading (Stahl & Kuhn, 2002). Still, another form of oral reading is an Oral Recitation Lesson in which the teacher first models fluent reading of the passage. This is followed by direct instruction of a particular comprehension strategy. Next, students practice the passage as a group and individually. This is followed by the student reading a portion of the passage to an audience (Richards, 2000).

As students engage in repeated readings they become highly motivated when they are timed and graph how many words a minute they read. They should also be encouraged to set their own goals (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Denton & Hasbouck, 2000; Ebner & Miller, 2003; Hudson, 2005; Moyer, 1982). Timings should be charted frequently to determine that the student is progressing satisfactorily (Hudson, 2005; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002; Stecker & Sinner, 2006; Therrien, 2004). A baseline needs to be established to accurately see the progress or to be able to provide insight for direct instruction to increase accuracy of the students' reading skills (Stecker & Sinner, 2006; Hudson, 2005). According to Al Otaiba and Rivera (2006) the measurement results of students' progress over time correlates with high stakes testing and reading comprehension measurements. The typical growth for students with learning disabilities is two words per week for the first week and one word per week for older students (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006). By the time students are in fourth and fifth grade they should be able to read accurately 118 to 128 words a minute (Denton & Hasbouck, 2000). Readers' Theatre has been known to greatly enhance reading fluency (Greenberg et al., 2002; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). According to Allinder (2001) when students with learning disabilities participated in Readers' Theatre, their reading fluency dramatically improved by 14 words to as much as 41 words or more read correctly per minute.

Allinder (2001) suggests that reading instruction and the time devoted to reading should be scheduled on a regular weekly basis. It is suggested that practice should be approximately three to five times weekly for 10 to 15 minutes daily (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Rinehart, 1999). Cunningham and Stanovich (1998) as cited by Blachowicz and Fisher (2004) estimate that fifth grade students engaging in just ten minutes of independent reading a day read 622,000 more words each year than students who do no independent reading. Simply increasing reading to 20

minutes daily widens the gap to almost two million more words read annually. Stahl and Kuhn (2002) recommend that students should read at home a minimum of 15 minutes.

The difference between Readers' Theatre and a play is it does not require memorizing lines, props, stage acting, but reading directly from scripts, and does not always require performing in front of an audience (Corcoran, 2005; Flynn, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Rasinski, 1990; Young & Vardell, 1993). Readers' Theatre provides an authentic purpose for students to participate in repeated readings to increase reading fluency (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Welsch, 2006). As the student "becomes the character," comprehension is enhanced as the reader reads with expression stemming from understanding the character's feelings (Martinez & et al., 1999; Rasinski, 1990). Ebner and Miller (2003) explain that in addition to reading fluency, students work on other elements such as character study, setting, plot, events, resolution and solution, summarizing, making connections, author's point of view, vocabulary development, and cause and effect to improve comprehension. Tyler and Chard (2000) explain that students with learning disabilities do not feel as overwhelmed when participating in Readers' Theatre because they share in the reading of the text by reading certain parts, thus reading is more enjoyable. Readers' Theatre is first modeled by the teacher, followed by a discussion of the character's feelings. Next, students practice and are assigned parts, rehearse and perform the script while working on accuracy, rate, and prosody (Flynn, 2005; Hudson, 2005). Since there are various reading parts in a script, Readers' Theatre provides the opportunity for readers at various levels to participate, which is extremely important for students who struggle with reading for it provides equal footing to that of proficient readers (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Rinehart, 1999; Worthy & Prater, 2002). The level of the text material needs to be carefully chosen. It should be at the student's instructional level (Martinez et

al., 1999; Young & Vardell, 1993). Even student's listening skills improve through Readers' Theatre (Young & Vardell, 1993). According to Griffith and Rasinski (2004) adding Readers' Theatre to increase reading fluency to the reading program seems to really enhance reading fluency and comprehension. Students enjoy interacting with their peers as they participate in Readers' Theatre (Tyler & Chard, 2000). Readers' Theatre is an excellent way for students to experiment and explore with words and language (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006). Students reluctant to read, embrace participating in Readers' Theatre (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Corcoran, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez et al., 1999; Rinehart, 1999; Tyler & Chard, 2000; Worthy & Prater, 2002; Young & Vardell, 1993).

Curriculum based Readers' Theatre involves reading, writing, and oral communication (Flynn, 2005). Content areas are easily incorporated into the Readers' Theatre format. Through this format, students retain important information and gain deeper comprehension when covering such academic areas as mathematics, social studies, and science (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Flynn, 2005; Young & Vardell, 1993).

After reviewing the literature to improve reading fluency, the intervention the teacher researcher has chosen is repeated readings. The repeated readings will be implemented through Readers' Theatre and one-minute timed readings along with providing explicit direct instruction and modeling reading fluency. The literature review strongly suggests that repeated reading is a highly effective strategy to increase reading fluency in students with learning disabilities. Further, the literature has indicated that Readers' Theatre provides a meaningful format for repeated reading. Also, students are highly motivated to participate in repeated reading in the guise of Readers' Theatre. The teacher researcher will implement partner reading for practicing Readers' Theatre. Moreover, the research has indicated that graphing one-minute timed readings

have been shown to be extremely motivational for students and also provides valuable information informing the teacher where the student's strengths and weaknesses are to develop ongoing instructional lessons to further the student's progress.

#### Project Objective and Processing Statements

As a result of implementing Readers' Theatre during the period of January through May of 2007, the targeted fourth and fifth grade students with learning disabilities were to show an increase in reading fluency as measured by student survey, a one-minute reading fluency graph, and a 4-point fluency rubric.

In order to implement the Readers' Theatre intervention, the teacher researcher collected Readers' Theatre scripts. The scripts were procured from internet sites and professional books. After reviewing and selecting the scripts for the Readers' Theatre intervention, the teacher researcher planned how to introduce each script and activities during, and after activities. Next, the teacher researcher collected all materials for the activities to be implemented with each script. Lastly, the teacher researcher arranged the Monday class schedule to accommodate introducing the week's Readers' Theatre script, along with Tuesday through Thursday to practice the script, culminating with arranging the time to perform for an audience on Fridays, which also included the before, during, and after guided reading activities

#### Project Action Plan

The action plan is presented in outline format by week which allowed for the interruptions commonly encountered in an elementary school such as standardized testing, assemblies, field trips, and IEP annual reviews. The time frame of the weekly schedule included the weeks of January 22, 2007 and ended the week of May 17, 2007 due to the interruptions previously mentioned.

Pre Documentation (January 22, 2007 – January 26, 2007):

- Copy Pre-Documentation Tools: Graph, Rubric, student survey.
- Send out and collect parental consent letters to parents
- Tape and Administer one minute reading fluency graph to all students to establish baseline data on each student
- Score all fluency graphs
- Administer a 4-Point fluency rubric to each student to obtain baseline data
- Score rubrics
- Compile data from student surveys
- Distribute student survey to each student and collect anonymously in designated basket
- Gather Readers' Theatre scripts for each week, placing them in order per week
- Copy each weekly Readers' Theatre script for each student
- Identify audiences for each week

Intervention (January 29, 2007 – May 17, 2007)

Week 1:

Monday:

- Explain to students that we will be doing weekly Readers' Theatre and perform on Fridays for various audiences
- Guide students through the format of the intervention phases that will be followed weekly
- Read aloud script, modeling fluency
- Guided reading of script by having students read script, go over vocabulary and comprehension of script
- Take anecdotal notes as students read and respond to vocabulary and comprehension questions

Tuesday:

- Students will participate in repeated readings through partner readings and phone readings while teacher researcher observes taking anecdotal notes on each student

Wednesday:

- Teacher researcher assigns script parts to students and provides students with script to practice at home
- Students rehearse entire script together
- Teacher Researcher models for students how to give positive feedback how they are doing.
- Students rehearse script again
- Teacher Researcher encourages students to provide positive feedback on how they are doing
- Rehearse again, and provide positive feedback again

Thursday:

- Students rehearse at least two times together, with students offering positive feedback after each rehearsal along with teacher input

Friday:

- Students rehearse twice, students and teachers collaboratively offer positive feedback
- Students perform for audience

Week 2-8:

Monday:

- Read aloud script, model fluency
- Guided reading of script by having students read script, go over vocabulary and comprehension of script
- Take anecdotal notes as students read and respond to vocabulary and comprehension

Tuesday:

- Students will participate in repeated readings through partner readings and/or phone readings while teacher researcher takes anecdotal notes on each student

Wednesday:

- Teacher researcher assigns script parts to students and provides students with scripts to take home and practice at home.
- Students rehearse entire script together
- Teacher researcher and students collaboratively offer positive feedback on how the rehearsal is progressing
- Repeat rehearsal at least two more times

Thursday:

- Students rehearse at least two times together, with teacher and students collaboratively offering positive feedback on rehearsal progress

Friday:

- Students rehearse at least two more times, each time students and teacher researcher collaboratively offer positive feedback on progress
- Students perform for audience

Post Documentation (May 7, 2007 – May 25, 2007)

- Tape and administer one minute fluency timing
- Graph and compare fluency graphs with pre-documentation
- Administer 4-Point fluency rubric
- Score and compare rubrics with pre-documentation
- Administer student post survey
- Check and compare student survey with pre documentation, noting changes
- Analyze data

#### Methods of Assessment

Readers' Theatre was the intervention chosen by the teacher researcher to increase reading fluency. To assess the effectiveness of the Readers' Theatre intervention, pre-test and



post-test intervention documentation assessment was used to analyze the data. The pre-test and post-test assessments include the student survey (Appendix A), the 4-point-fluency rubric (Appendix C), and the one-minute timing (Appendix B) which is used to document student progress in assessing reading fluency.

### Student Survey

The student survey (Appendix A) was administered by the teacher researcher in the resource classroom to a total of 10 students with learning disabilities. The survey was administered to the five 4<sup>th</sup> grade students during their reading class time and to the five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students during their reading class time. The survey which consisted of seven questions was administered as a pre-test to determine students' attitudes prior to the implementation of the Readers' Theatre intervention and then again as a post-test to assess if the students' attitudes had changed as a result of the Readers' Theatre intervention.

### 4-Point-Fluency Rubric

A 4-point-fluency rubric (Appendix C) was administered by the teacher researcher in the resource classroom to a total of 10 students with learning disabilities. The survey was administered to five 4<sup>th</sup> grade students during their reading class time and to the five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students during their reading class time. The rubric was administered by the teacher researcher on a one-on-one with each student during pre-testing to determine student oral reading fluency prior to implementation of the Readers' Theatre intervention and then again as a post-test to assess student oral reading fluency as a result of the Readers' Theatre intervention. The 4-point-fluency rubric consists of four components. The first component was to assess the conversational reading rate. The second component was to assess the usage of appropriate expression maintained throughout the passage. The third component was to assess consistent fluent phrasing

throughout the passage and the fourth component was to assess consistent usage of punctuation throughout the passage.

### One-Minute Timing

The one-minute timed reading graph (Appendix B) assessment tool was administered by the teacher researcher in the resource classroom to a total of 10 students with learning disabilities. The survey was administered to the five 4<sup>th</sup> grade students during their reading class time and to the five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students during their reading class time. The oral one minute timed reading was administered by the teacher researcher on a one-on-one with each student as a pre-test for one minute to determine words read accurately for one minute at the student's instructional guided reading level and again as a post test to assess if there is an increase in words accurately read for one minute as a result of the Readers' Theatre intervention. The teacher researcher instructed the student to start reading when told to and to stop when the teacher researcher told them to stop. The student was told that no assistance would be given during the timing if there was difficulty reading a word. The words were then counted minus errors. The student was then instructed to color their graph to indicate the number of words read accurately.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT RESULTS

The objective of this project was to increase oral reading fluency in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with learning disabilities at the targeted site who demonstrated reading fluency rates deemed below the satisfactory level for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade fluency reading rates. A total of 10 students of which there were five 4<sup>th</sup> grade and five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who participated in the intervention. Three tools were administered to document the evidence of the problem. A student survey (Appendix A) was administered to determine the students' feelings about reading. A 4-point-fluency rubric (Appendix C) which was broken into four components was administered to determine oral reading fluency. Finally, a one-minute oral timed reading (Appendix B) was administered along with the 4-point-fluency rubric. The reading required the student to read for one minute to determine words read accurately in a minute.

The intervention, Readers' Theatre, was chosen by the teacher researcher to increase the oral reading fluency of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. The intervention occurred during the weeks of January 29, 2007 through May 17, 2007. During the first phase, the teacher researcher modeled for the students how to read the script with expression and volume, phrasing and intonation, smoothness, and pace (Hudson, 2005; Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). In the second phase, guided reading was implemented in which the teacher researcher guided the students through reading the story, vocabulary, and comprehension (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). This helped the students understand the vocabulary and elements of the story which included setting, characters, plot, and resolution. The final, and third phase of the intervention, was repeated readings implemented in various forms (Johns & Berglund 2006; Rasinski, 2005). At this phase, students had opportunities to rehearse the script and eventually assigned a part that

they practiced through repeated readings. Finally, at the end of each week, the students performed in front of an audience (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999).

### Historical Description of the Intervention

In order to prepare for the implementation of the intervention, the teacher researcher developed and administered a student survey pre-test (Appendix A) to the five 4<sup>th</sup> grade students and to the five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students during their reading class time to reveal student attitudes about reading. In addition, prior to the intervention, to establish baseline data on each student's oral reading fluency and words read accurately per minute, a 4-point-fluency rubric pre-test (Appendix C) and a one-minute oral timed reading pre-test (Appendix B) was administered to each student individually by the teacher researcher.

During the first week of the teacher researcher's project action plan as outlined in Chapter 3, the pre-testing was administered and completed during the week of January 29<sup>th</sup>. Next, the teacher researcher compiled the pre-test results as seen in Figures 1 through 12.

When administering the student survey, the teacher researcher observed the students took their time, giving a great deal of thought when responding to all questions as the questions were read to them. The students were eager to have their one-on-one time with the teacher researcher during the one-minute oral timed reading. To obtain words accurately read for a minute, the words read were counted and errors were subtracted from the total words. Using a color pencil of their choice, the student then graphed the accurate words read per minute. The teacher researcher noted the students enthusiastically participated in this activity and spontaneously began to set their own goals as they colored their graph.

The Readers' Theatre intervention began on Monday during week one with the teacher researcher reading the script to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading class and again to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading class

during their class time. The script for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade class was *Frog and Toad; Cookies*. The teacher researcher introduced vocabulary prior to reading the script followed by a discussion on all the elements of the story. The second day, students read the script twice trying out non-assigned parts. The third day, parts were assigned and students read their parts twice. Each time the students read their parts, the teacher researcher led a discussion on how they felt they were doing. The students stated they felt they needed to practice their expression. On the fourth day, the students practiced their parts twice and took their scripts home to practice. The fifth day, the students performed for a first grade class. The teacher researcher explained to the first grade audience that the class will perform the Readers' Theatre in the traditional format, which means they are not in costume and they will be reading from their scripts, using lots of expression to help them understand the story. Next, the teacher researcher introduced the students by saying, "Our cast today is..." with each student in the cast stating their name, followed by the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students reading the script expressively. After thanking the class for allowing us to perform for them and positive feedback from the audience, the teacher researcher and the class returned to the resource classroom to debrief. During debriefing the class had an opportunity to talk about what went well, what could be improved, and anything they thought was interesting. Each student then completed their PMI (positive, minus, interesting) organizer (Appendix H). To discuss how they could improve, the students were instructed under M or minus of the PMI, they could write about themselves or the class as a whole, but not about an individual student. However, under positive, they could write about themselves or someone else. Students felt they could improve on their expression. They felt they did great when a student forgot to read their line and the next student picked up on it. As a result, the audience was unaware of this omission. This was indicative of the teamwork the students developed as they engaged in Readers' Theatre.

It was apparent at the debriefing that the students were excited and proud of their performance in front of an audience.

The fifth grade script was *Yankee Doodle Hits the Road* in honor of George Washington. The teacher researcher reviewed vocabulary with the class and read the script to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading class as a read aloud to model reading the script with expression, followed by a discussion on all elements of the story. The next day, the students read the script twice, trying out non-assigned parts. The third day, parts were assigned and students read their parts twice. A discussion modeled by the teacher researcher ensued about how they felt they were doing. The students felt they needed to continue to work on their expression. On the fourth day, the students practiced their parts twice and took the scripts home to practice. On the fifth day, the students performed for students in a third grade classroom. The teacher researcher explained to the audience that the class will perform in the traditional Readers' Theatre format which means they will not be in costume and will read from their scripts using lots of expression to help them understand the story. Next, the teacher researcher introduced the students by, "Today's cast is..." and each student stated their name followed by the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students reading the script. After thanking the audience for allowing us to perform for them, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students returned to the resource classroom for debriefing. During debriefing the class discussed what went good, what they could improve on, and what they thought was interesting. Next, students wrote their own PMI (Appendix H) organizer with the instructions that under M for minus or improvement, they could write about the whole class or how they themselves could improve, but not on an individual student. However, under positive, they could write about themselves or someone else. Students wrote they could improve on their expression. They felt the audience liked their script and that they did a good job.

The second week, both the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading classes performed *Honest Abe* in honor of Abraham Lincoln's birthday. Prior to the teacher researcher reading the script, each class worked together on a KWL chart to see what they already knew about Abraham Lincoln and what they would like to know. After the script was read, the students as a class completed the column what they learned as well as determining if they found interesting information on what they wanted to learn. The same format was followed as week one for the remainder of the week. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade students performed for a second grade class and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students performed for an intermediate self-contained class. Each class upon debriefing eagerly inquired what the next script was. In comparison from the first week, the teacher researcher noticed a definite improvement with both classes.

During the third week, in honor of Women's History Month, the script was *Helen Keller, A Remarkable Women* (Appendix D) for both the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading classes. First the teacher researcher asked the students to complete an "Activities I Like to Do" organizer (Appendix E). As a class the students completed a KWL chart. The teacher researcher was surprised that the students did not know very much about Helen Keller, however, it provided an opportunity for the students to learn about this "remarkable woman." Now that the students were all aware that she was deaf and blind, they were instructed to write next to each of their three favorite activities on the "Activities I Like to Do" organizer if they felt being blind and deaf they could still engage in their favorite activities and why/why not. Next, each student, individually was blindfolded, turned three times and told to walk to an individual specific spot in the room. This was to experience movement in every day life being blind. The same format as week one was followed. After learning all that Helen Keller accomplished with her disabilities, the students revisited the "Activities I Like to Do" organizer to see if they now felt they could

actually engage in their favorite activities if they were both blind and deaf. Students discovered that they underestimated what they could do. The students also took a tour of Helen Keller's home on the internet, which deepened their understanding of the script and Helen Keller's life. In addition, the teacher researcher arranged for the hearing iterant to explain how blind students learn. She brought her Braille machine to demonstrate how blind books are typed. Each student then had an opportunity to try the Braille machine. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were feeling so good about how they were practicing reading their script they asked if they could perform for their 4<sup>th</sup> grade general education class. Following performing for their general education class, the teacher researcher asked the audience if they had any questions or comments. A student commented that she could hear her classmate read loud and clear. This 4<sup>th</sup> grade student typically read in a soft voice which made it difficult for her classmates to hear her. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade student was really proud of herself. After debriefing and completing the PMI, the students wrote about why they felt Helen Keller was called the wonder girl in the script.

To follow up after the script on Helen Keller, the script for the fourth week was *Alexander Graham Bell* who helped Helen Keller's parents find Anne Sullivan to be Helen's teacher. Once again, the teacher researcher presented the KWL chart for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class to complete as a class during their respective class times. The teacher researcher was surprised that none of the students knew anything about Alexander Graham Bell. For this script, an exception was made for props, which was an old fashion antique dial telephone. The students were amazed and fascinated that you have to dial the phone and that it could actually work. Both the 4<sup>th</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students had an enjoyable time performing the script for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classes. After a discussion about what life would be like without a telephone and how Alexander Graham Bell had improved life because of the invention of the telephone, all students then wrote



about it. One 5<sup>th</sup> grade student included in their PMI a compliment for a fellow classmate on how well they read with expression. The teacher researcher encouraged this student to share what they wrote with the student they complimented. It was becoming more apparent to the teacher researcher that all students were improving in their fluency and expression.

During the fifth week, the script for the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students was *The Old Lady Who Was Not Afraid of Anything*. They performed for a first grade class. The format for the week was followed as week one. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students performed *The Librarian from the Black Lagoon* for the school librarian. At the last minute, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students had a surprise audience. As a first grade class was leaving the library they noticed the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class arriving at the library to perform their script. So they asked if they could stay and watch. The first grade teacher wrote an e-mail after the performance expressing the obvious improvement they have made from the first time they performed for them.

For the sixth week, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students performed for a second grade class, the script, *No Problem* which is about teamwork. The format for the week was followed as week one. Since the script was about teamwork, a class discussion on teamwork was pursued. Many of the students wrote on their PMI organizer about how they used teamwork when they perform their Reader's Theatre. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students' script was *Ace Spelling, Spelling Ace*. This script was about a student under a spell preparing for a spelling bee. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students performed for the intermediate self-contained classroom. The teacher of this classroom praised the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, telling them she had seen great improvement in their reading.

The 4<sup>th</sup> grade students' script for the seventh week was *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*. They performed for their 4<sup>th</sup> grade general education class as the students had requested. The format was followed as week one. After debriefing and completing their PMI organizers,

using a venn diagram, the students compared and contrasted the script with *The Story of the Three Little Pigs*. The confidence level of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students appeared to the teacher researcher to be improving as they eagerly looked forward to performing their script. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students' script was *Writer's Block* performed for a third grade class. It was about a student having difficulty deciding what to write about when the characters come to life. The format was followed as week one. At the end of the debriefing and completing the PMI organizer, students wrote about strategies to use when brainstorming what to write. The teacher researcher observed that the students have increased their compliments to each other on reading with expression and the teacher researcher encouraged the students to share their written compliments with the student they complimented.

For the eighth week, the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students' script *Stellaluna* was performed for a first grade class. The format was followed as week one. To enhance vocabulary study, the students also completed a four-dimensional vocabulary study organizer using a vocabulary word which they were required to write the dictionary definition, a sentence, a connection, and draw a picture representing the vocabulary word (Appendix F). The speech pathologist happened to walk by the classroom while the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were reading their script. She was amazed at the improvement she saw in the students performing. Some of these same students she also sees. She had positive comments on their smooth fluency and strong volume. The 4<sup>th</sup> grade students read the parts requiring to be read in unison on cue with good volume and expression. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students' script was *Mystery Code* which they asked to read to their high school pen pals. At the end of the script there was a mystery code to decipher. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students worked on solving the mystery code collaboratively with their pen pals. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were proud of how fluent and expressive they read their scripts and received positive feedback from their pen pals.

For the ninth week, both the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students read the script, *Amelia Bedelia*. The format from week one was followed. To demonstrate an understanding of idioms, the students wrote an idiom of their choice and drew a picture of it. Below it they wrote what the idiom really meant and drew a picture of it (Appendix G). After the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students performed for a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class, they shared their idiom pictures with the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class, explaining what the idiom they drew meant. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade class performed for the intermediate self-contained classroom and for the principal. After performing their script, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students shared their drawings of their idioms with the audience. The principal praised the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students on reading fluently and with great expression. Upon returning to the resource classroom, during debriefing, the students had an opportunity to try a slice of lemon meringue pie, which was frequently talked about in the script. Many of the students commented, it was not what they expected the pie to look like and all enjoyed the lemon meringue pie. This experience brought greater meaning to the students of what a lemon meringue pie was which also was one of their vocabulary words. One of the student's wrote in their PMI organizer that they were happy that the principal heard them read. All of the students have become increasingly proud of themselves as they read.

For the tenth week of the intervention, together the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes performed the script *Charlotte's Web* on stage in the school's auditorium. This was a result of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students feeling they were doing so well with their scripts during the weekly intervention, that they asked the teacher researcher if they could perform for the whole school on the stage. The first and second grade classes, one 5<sup>th</sup> grade class, the principal, assistant principal, and their parents attended the performance. The format followed week one with the exception that the students practiced their scripts with their own grade and only once did the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade

students practice their script together prior to performing on stage together on Friday, the fifth day. In addition, the students were informed on the day they performed on stage how the mikes would work and where they would stand. The students stood in groups of three around a mike with the narrator holding his own mike. All the students performed with clarity, appropriate volume, highly expressive, and read their script in unison where appropriate. All students remained attentive through out the duration of the six scenes of the script. After the performance, many positive comments were received from the principal, teachers, classmates, and their parents; great expression, good volume, and did a great job. The students wrote many positive comments about each other in their PMI organizer. Under the interesting portion of the PMI organizer, many students commented that they got to perform on stage. This was very important to the students; students who had prior to the intervention felt uncomfortable to read out loud in front of others. Other comments; “We were awesome,” and “It was fun” was expressed by both of the participating 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students.

After 10 weeks of the Readers’ Theatre intervention, post-testing was implemented. The post-testing application was conducted as the pre-testing, which included the student survey (see Appendix A), the 4-point-fluency rubric (Appendix C), and the one-minute timed oral reading (Appendix B) in which the students participated in coloring in their graph. The students were administered their one-minute timed reading at their most current instructional guided reading level to determine how many words a minute they could read accurately on a passage they have not seen before. The pre- and post-test results were compared and analyzed.

There were two weeks that the intervention was not implemented due to the interruptions that are commonly encountered in an elementary school. Specifically during this timeframe, the first week interruption was due to standardized testing. The second time interruptions occurred

was the week of annual reviews and fourth grade assemblies. The students by this time were enthusiastically looking forward to the next script and highly engaged in the Readers' Theatre process that they voiced disappointment during these interruptions.

During week five, one 5<sup>th</sup> grade student, who developed great expression, strongly voiced that he did not feel comfortable to perform in front of his friends in his general education class. The other 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in the resource classroom equally strongly voiced their feelings of wanting to perform in front of their friends in their general education class. The teacher researcher earnestly listened and considered the feelings of all the students. First the teacher researcher assured the student who voiced being uncomfortable reading in front of his peers that he would not be asked to do so. Next, the teacher researcher arranged for the remaining 5<sup>th</sup> grade students to perform in another 5<sup>th</sup> grade general education class that these students requested to perform for. This arrangement took place during the week that an interruption of the intervention occurred due to 4<sup>th</sup> grade field trips and annual reviews. The teacher researcher asked the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students which Readers' Theatre script they have already performed that they would like to perform for this 5<sup>th</sup> grade general education class. The students unanimously chose *Ace Spelling*, *Spelling Ace*. The students practiced once together and took the scripts home to practice. The next day they performed for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade general education class. The class audience enjoyed the performance and the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students were proud of their performance; "We were awesome and they liked us." The 5<sup>th</sup> grade student that chose not to participate observed and stated later that he found it was to be not as bad as he thought it would be. As a result of this, when the students performed for the school on stage, the general education 5<sup>th</sup> grade class they performed for also attended the performance of *Charlotte's Web*.

Research has indicated that repeated reading is necessary to provide opportunities for readers to become fluent and increase their comprehension (Al Otaiba & Rivera, 2006; Corcoran, 2005; Lipson & Lang, 1991; Rasinski, 1990). The intervention, Readers' Theatre provides a means to engage students in repeated readings in a meaningful, motivating way, by providing a purpose for repeated reading, an audience (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Martinez et al., 1999). The emphasis is on the fluency to convey meaning through expression, and intonation, with little movement while reading the script opposed to memorizing lines as is typical in a play and does not require scenery, props, or costumes. The traditional Readers' Theatre format provides a natural opportunity to increase reading fluency through repeated readings (Casey & Chamberlain, 2006; Corcoran, 2005; Flynn, 2005; Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). Further, according to Casey and Chamberlain (2006) practicing the script through repeated readings increases the reader's confidence level as they improve. Each week the teacher researcher first presented the script as a read aloud for according to Chard et al., (2002), Ebner and Miller (2003), Greenberg et al., (2002), Hudson (2005), and Rasinkski (2003), modeling by reading aloud can increase a reader's comprehension while providing an opportunity for the reader to hear the passage read fluently.

To further enhance comprehension, the teacher researcher used a variety of graphic organizers such as the venn diagram in *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* and KWL charts with such scripts as *Helen Keller, A Remarkable Woman* (see Appendix D) and *Alexander Graham Bell*. In addition, the script, *Helen Keller, A Remarkable Woman* the teacher researcher provided the graphic organizer, "Activities I Enjoy" (Appendix E) to enhance the understanding of living as a blind individual. According to Barton et al (2001) and Lipson and Lang (1991), graphic organizers guide students metacognitively to enhance their comprehension skills.

Further, to deepen the understanding of the vocabulary in the script *Stellulna*, students used the four-dimensional study vocabulary organizer (Appendix F) which as Blachowicz and Fisher (2004) explains, there is a strong correlation between a readers' vocabulary base and their comprehension.

In addition, students explored other content areas while engaging in Readers' Theatre as they learned about such people as Helen Keller (Appendix D), Alexander Graham Bell, and Abraham Lincoln (Flynn, 2005).

The teacher researcher observed a continued improvement in all students over the 10 week intervention, in fluency, volume, expression, and confidence. As time went on, the students exuded an eagerness to read aloud for others, overflowing confidence, and the students discovered that reading with expression made reading more enjoyable and what they read come alive. The teacher researcher was amazed at the teamwork effort that naturally evolved among the students. It was truly apparent to the teacher researcher of the teamwork ensuing, when a student omitted a line and the other students continued on with the script when performing for an audience. Another moment that emerging teamwork was evident, was when the students spontaneously wanted to compliment their peers on their PMI organizer. The teacher researcher encouraged the student to share their PMI organizer with the student they complimented. Further, the teacher researcher was surprised at the extent student confidence rose. It became evident when the students pleaded to perform a script for the school on the school auditorium stage, which is something the teacher researcher would not have considered because of the discomfort it would bring prior to the intervention. However, the teacher researcher took the lead and the students' confidence rose further as a result of performing on stage. It was also seen when the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students asked to perform in their 4<sup>th</sup> grade general education classroom and

the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who wanted to perform for their 5<sup>th</sup> grade general education class and for their pen pals. Parents spontaneously brought up the Readers' Theatre during the student's annual review meeting, commenting on what a difference Readers' Theatre had made for their child. The teacher researcher fully agrees with this.

### Presentation and Analysis of Results

The purpose of this research project was to increase oral reading fluency in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with learning disabilities using the intervention Readers' Theatre. The teacher researcher was concerned that the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with learning disabilities at the targeted site were experiencing difficulties with oral reading fluency. A total of 10 students of which there were five 4<sup>th</sup> grade and five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students at this targeted site participated in the study. Through the use of a student survey (Appendix A), 4-point-fluency rubric (Appendix C), and a one-minute oral timed reading (Appendix B), the problem was revealed and the evidence of the problem documented during the weeks of January 29<sup>th</sup> through February 5<sup>th</sup> 2007.

#### Student Survey

The same five 4<sup>th</sup> grade students and five 5<sup>th</sup> grade students who participated in the pre-test were given a post-test following the ten week Readers' Theatre intervention. The student survey was implemented as a post-documentation which consisted of seven questions (Appendix A) to determine if the participating students had altered how they felt about reading. The teacher researcher conducted this post-test during the week of May 17<sup>th</sup> at the time the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students attended their reading classes. The teacher researcher read each question and choices for students to respond to that best fit them. When the questionnaires were completed, the students placed their questionnaire in a basket at the back of the room. The teacher researcher later compiled the data.



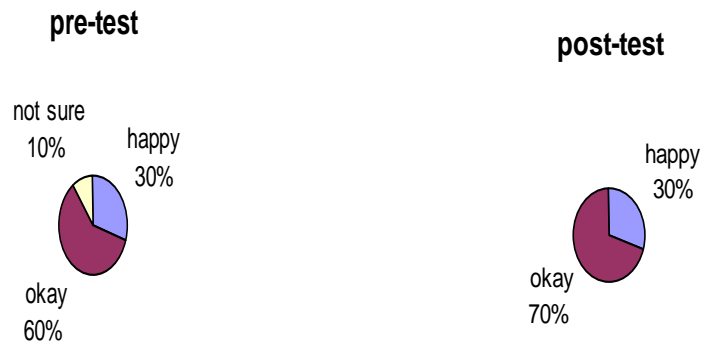


Figure 13

*Feel about reading at home (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 13 above, reveals the majority of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, 70% (n = 7) felt okay to spend their time reading at home and 30% (n = 3) felt happy to spend their time reading at home. Compared to the pre-test, students feeling okay increased by 10%. Also, compared to the pre-test, the post-test notably indicates no students felt unsure.



Figure 14

*Feel about getting a book for a present (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 14 above reveals the majority of the students, 90% (n = 9) felt happy to get a book for a present and 10% (n = 1) felt okay. It is markedly noted in the post-test, 40% (n = 4) more students felt happy to receive a book for a present compared to the pre-test.

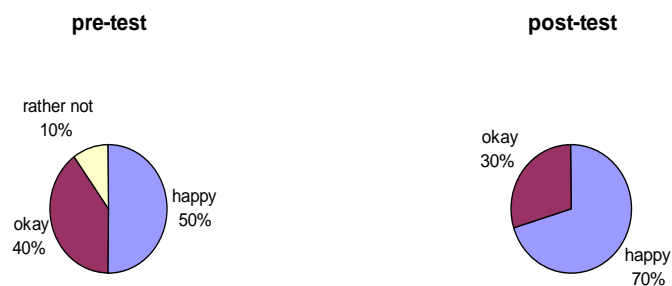


Figure 15

*Feel when time to read in class (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 15 above reveals the majority of the students, 70% (n = 7) felt happy when it was time to read in class and only 30% (n = 3) of the students felt okay. It is markedly noted in the post-test, all students are happy or okay when reading in class compared to the pre-test where 10% (n = 1) of the students would rather not. In addition, it is noted 20% more students felt happy to read in class compared to the pre-test.

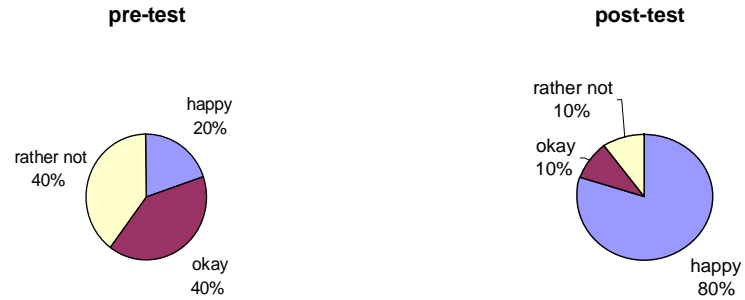


Figure 16

*Feel when reading out loud in class (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 16 above reveals the majority of the students, 80% (n = 8) felt happy when it was time to read aloud in class, 10% (n = 1) felt okay, with only 10% (n = 1) who would rather not. It is markedly noted 90% (n = 9) were happy or okay to read out loud in class with only 10% (n = 1) that would rather not, this being a 30% increase compared to the pre-test.

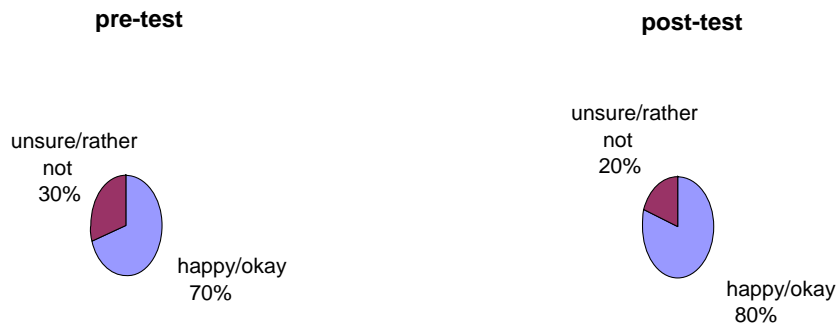


Figure 17

*Spending free time reading (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 17 above reveals the majority of students, 80% (n = 8) felt happy or okay to spend their free time reading and only 20% (n = 2) felt unsure or would rather not. It is noted compared to the pre-test, 10% (n = 1) more students were happy or okay spending their free time reading with 10% (n = 1).

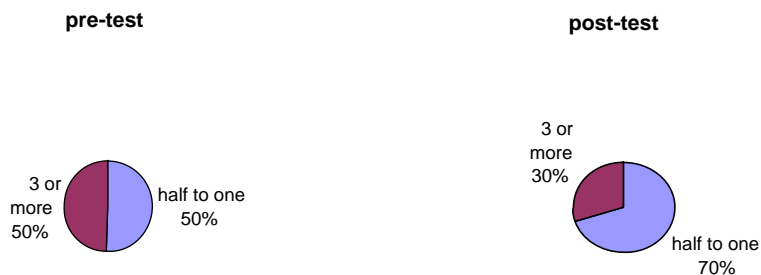


Figure 18

*Hours spent watching TV and/or playing video games (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 18 above, reveals the majority of the students, 70% (n = 7) watched television or played video games only  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 hour a day with only 30% (n = 3) who watched television or played video games three or more hours a day. Compared to the pre-test, it is noted 20% (n = 2) more students watched television or played video games only  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 1 hour per day, with 20% (n = 2) less students who watched television or played video games 3 or more hours a day.

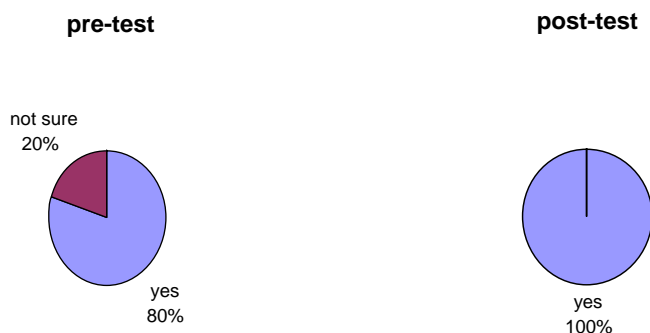


Figure 19

*End of year a better reader (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 19 above reveals all students, 100% (n = 10) felt they would be a better reader at the end of the year. It is markedly noted this is a 20% increase compared to the pre-test.

### One-Minute Reading Graph

To determine if there was an increase in words accurately read per minute compared to the pre-test following the 10 week Readers' Theatre intervention, an one-minute timing (Appendix B) was administered to each student individually. The one-minute timed reading graph (Appendix B) indicated the number of words read orally per minute minus errors, which determines actual words accurately read per minute from a passage at the student's current instructional guided reading level. This one-minute timed reading was administered to determine if the student had increased their fluency with a passage never read before at their current guided instructional reading level compared to the pre-test guided instructional reading level after implementing the ten week Readers' Theatre intervention. The post-test was administered during the students' reading class time. One student at a time was timed by the teacher researcher. The teacher researcher instructed each student when to begin reading and when to stop reading when

the timer went off. Each student was told if unsure of a word to do their best, no assistance will be given during the timing. After the timing, the teacher researcher counted every word read, subtracting errors and documenting total words read accurately. Next, the teacher researcher instructed each student to color their graph with a color pencil of their choice to indicate number of words read accurately in one minute. The students were administered two warm up timings and the third timing is recorded on the graph below.

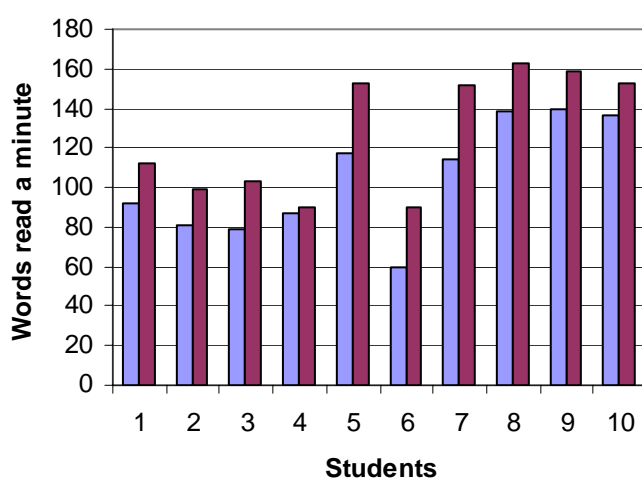


Figure 20

*One minute reading (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 20 above reveals students at the targeted site averaged 127.4 words read per minute, with 90 words per minute at the low end and 159 words read per minute at the high end. This compared to the pre-test average was 92.2 words read per minute with 60 words read per minute at the low end and 140 words read per minute at the high end. It is highly markedly noted there was an average increase of 35.2 words read per minute.

#### 4-Point-Fluency Graph

After implementing the ten week Readers' Theatre intervention, the third post-test tool, the 4-point-fluency rubric (Appendix C) was administered to each student individually to



determine if there was an increase in oral reading fluency compared to the pre-test in the four components of fluency. The first component was the rate which a passage is read. The second component was the expression demonstrated when reading orally. The third component was demonstration of phrasing when reading orally. The fourth component was appropriate usage of punctuation when reading orally. The 4-point-fluency rubric was administered at the time the one-minute timed reading was administered. The teacher researcher was required to listen carefully as each student read to determine the rate, expression, phrasing, and use of punctuation as the student read, giving a score of one being the lowest to four being the most fluent.

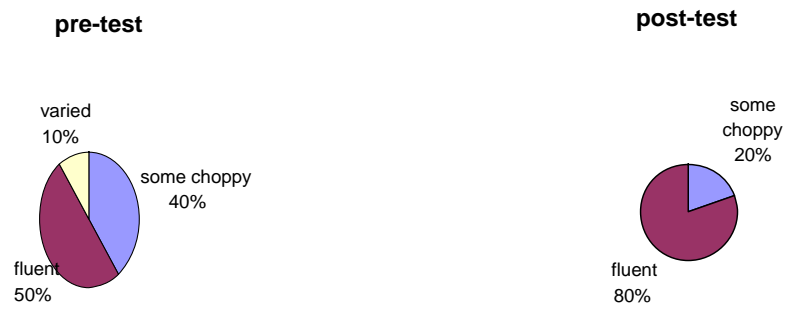


Figure 21

*Fluency rate (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 21 above reveals 80% (n = 8) of the students at the targeted site during the one-minute timed reading, read consistently, conversationally, smoothly, and fluently. Only 20% (n=2) of the students read with general conversation voice, some smooth and some choppy. It is markedly noted compared to the pre-test, a 30% increase in fluent reading occurred. In addition, no students read with some hesitations and varied rates.

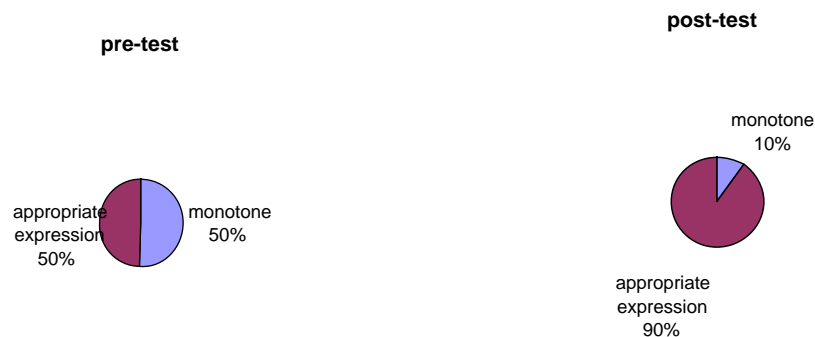


Figure 22

*Expression (n = 10)*

The post-test Figure 22 above reveals 90% (n = 9) of the students at the targeted site during the one-minute timed reading, read with appropriate expression for most of the time and only 10% (n = 1) of the students read in a monotone voice combined with some expression which decreased by 40% (n = 4) from the pre-test. It is highly markedly noted the post-test indicates an increase in appropriate expression by 40% (n = 4).

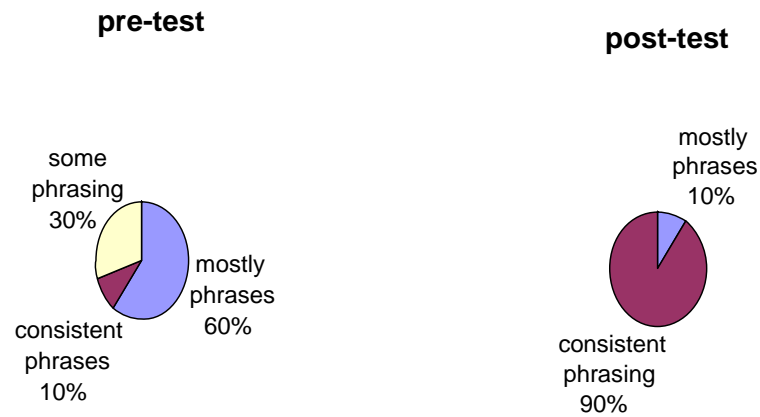


Figure 23

*Phrasing (n = 10)*

The post-test, Figure 23 above reveals 90% (n = 9) of the students at the targeted site during the one-minute timed reading, read with consistent phrasing and only 10% (n = 1) read mostly phrases, sometimes smooth and sometimes choppy. It is highly markedly noted there was an 80% (n = 8) increase in consistent phrasing compared to the pre-test.

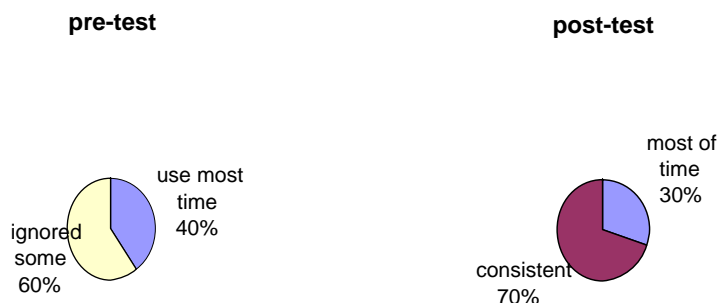


Figure 24

*Fluency use of punctuation (n = 10)*

The post-test, Figure 24 above reveals 70% (n = 7) of the students at the targeted site during the one-minute timed reading, read with appropriate punctuation consistently throughout the timing, and 30% (n = 3) read with appropriate punctuation most of the time. It is highly markedly noted 70% (n = 7) of the students read consistently with appropriate punctuation compared to 0% in the pre-test. Further, it is highly markedly noted no students ignored appropriate punctuation in the post-test compared to the pre-test of 60% (n = 6).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the data from the pre-test and post-test documentation showing the effects of Readers' Theatre on reading fluency, the participating students showed a marked improvement. According to the student survey, the students experienced an increased feeling of happiness to receive a book for a present (Figure 14), which the teacher researcher interpreted that after the Readers' Theatre intervention the students had a more positive attitude about reading and an increased desire to read. The student survey also revealed that students had experienced an increase in happiness when it comes time to reading in class (Figure 15) and to reading out loud in class (Figure 16). This confirmed what the teacher researcher had observed during the 10

week intervention of Readers' Theatre, which was the enthusiasm students exhibited about reading, with such statements as "What's our next script?," and voicing their positive interest in the scripts. Further, students indicated a more positive attitude in spending their free time reading (Figure 17). The teacher researcher felt this was indicative of their increased positive attitude towards reading. As students exhibited an increased positive attitude towards reading, they decreased their time on the computer and watching television (Figure 18). It appears to be correlated to the increased positive attitude towards spending free time reading along with the increased positive attitude toward reading at home (Figure 13). The last question on the student survey indicated an increased belief they would be a better reader at the end of the year (Figure 19). This revealed their growing increased confidence that the teacher researcher observed throughout the 10 week intervention of Readers' Theatre. In all, it appeared to the teacher researcher, the intervention, Readers' Theatre was a highly motivational vehicle for students to increase their interest to read.

The one-minute oral timed reading results indicated a positive growth for all participating students. According to Casey and Chamberlain (2006), who conducted a similar intervention for a span of 12 weeks, the students' reading rate improved by 68%. The teacher researcher found after a 10 week span of a similar intervention plan, the students' average reading rate improved by 72%, being 4% greater increase in a two weeks lesser span of time. Also, according to Al Otaiba and Rivera (2006), students with learning disabilities typically have a growth of two words per week. The teacher researcher's study revealed a 3.5 word increase per week. The teacher researcher feels the results reveal the meaningful purpose of rereading through the intervention of Readers' Theatre and entertaining their audience through this intervention increased the motivation to read, resulting in an increased reading rate. In addition, the students

became highly motivated to graph their timed reading results. They began to spontaneously set goals for themselves to beat their previous reading rate. The students having had the choice of color pencil to color in their graph was an additional motivation. Often the students would proudly explain to the teacher researcher their plan of their color scheme for their graph and why they choose the colors they chose. The participating students strongly voiced their enthusiasm in partaking in the graphed one-minute timed reading. The teacher researcher feels the interest to read ensued from the intervention of Readers' Theatre and the one-on-one time with the teacher was highly motivating for the students.

The 4-point-fluency rubric that was administered during the oral one-minute timed reading correlated with the results of the timed readings. The first component was the fluency rate, which increased by 40%. To read fluently, the reader needs to read conversationally, which is naturally achievable via the rereading encountered through the intervention, Readers' Theatre. During Readers' Theatre, the teacher researcher observed the students' enjoyment in playing with expression, of which the students in this study had increased their expression by 40% within the 10 week span of the Readers' Theatre intervention. The teacher researcher felt that the 80% increase in phrasing, naturally increased as students' interest in reading to entertain increased their motivation to read. The teacher researcher observed as the students practiced their scripts they would frequently stop in the middle of reading and reread their lines as they played with how it sounded to make their lines more exciting and entertaining. This carried over to the one-minute timing. Lastly, the component, punctuation had increased by 70%, which the teacher researcher felt was a natural result from the students' enjoyment and experimenting with how their lines would sound depending on how it was delivered.

As a result of implementing the intervention, Readers' Theatre, I believe I have grown as a professional educator, positively making a difference in the lives of students I teach.

Throughout this experience I have learned from my students that given the strategies and guidance anything is possible. In addition, my belief to maintain high achievable expectations and the students will strive for them and attain them was confirmed to me. Early on in the beginning of the school year, the students would tell me that they could not read big words. However, through this intervention, the students proudly told me that after Readers' Theatre they now can read big words. I feel I am an effective teacher. This project was truly a rewarding experience.

After the 10 week intervention of Readers' Theater, the teacher researcher asked the students what they felt Readers' Theatre did for them. The students articulated they felt better about reading in front of others; "I know I can do it," "I'm not nervous any more," "I'm not afraid to read out loud any more," "I feel brave to read in front of others," and "I now like to read out loud." Many of the students expressed that Readers' Theatre helped them improve their expression and to be a better reader; "Read with more enthusiasm" and "Now it's easy to read because of using expression when being one of the characters." Students explained they felt they could now read big, more difficult words and that they know more words because "We go over them a lot" as a result of Readers' Theatre. The teacher researcher felt that Readers' Theatre was an excellent platform to incorporate other content areas and various aspects of writing. The participating students voiced what they learned from the scripts; regarding the Alexander Graham Bell script, "I had no idea who invented the telephone", "I learned Lincoln was a lawyer," "I learned about Helen Keller," and through the Amelia Bedelia script they learned idioms. From the moment the students were introduced to idioms through this script, they were



constantly pointing out idioms and explaining them. The students spoke of visualizing as a result of Readers' Theatre "because they did not use props or costumes so they had to imagine it to make their voice change to match the character" and that "you have to picture the script in your mind." Student teamwork grew strong resulting from Readers' Theatre; "People will help you," and compliments grew as they shared with one another "You did a great job" and "Awesome job." Student confidence soared with "You can get up to higher levels of reading," "Teachers and other kids said we did good," and "Kids look up to you." One student summed it up with "I learned never to give up, because you can do it."

All students stated Readers' Theatre was fun and we should do it again. The teacher researcher agrees with this. However, when implementing the Readers' Theatre intervention in the future she will implement the intervention every two weeks opposed to the weekly sessions and will implement Readers' Theatre in October and continue through out the remainder of the school year. By implementing the intervention with a new script every two weeks there will be more time to incorporate other elements, such as with the Helen Keller script the teacher researcher would have incorporated more activities relating to her disabilities and to more easily accommodate for fitting in other aspects of the reading program. The teacher researcher feels that the longevity of incorporating the Readers' Theatre intervention, the greater results and the increased motivation to read will be realized. In addition, the teacher researcher will consider as a class project, to write a Readers' Theatre script. This can increase the students' confidence and writing skills.

In conclusion, the teacher researcher recommends Readers' Theatre as a worthwhile strategy for improving reading fluency. The teacher researcher will continue to use Readers' Theatre in her resource classroom.

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## Appendix

## Appendix A

**STUDENT SURVEY**

1. How do you feel about reading for fun at home?

Happy

Okay

Rather not

2. How do you feel about getting a book for a present?

Happy

Okay

Rather not

3. How do you feel when it's time for reading class?

Happy

Okay

Rather not

4. How do you feel when you read out loud in class?

Happy

Okay

Rather not

5. How do you feel about spending your free time reading?

Happy

Okay

Not Sure

Rather not

6. I watch television or play video games about \_\_\_\_ a day.

½ hour

1 hour

3 hours

4 hours or more

7. Do you think you will be a better reader by the end of the year?

No

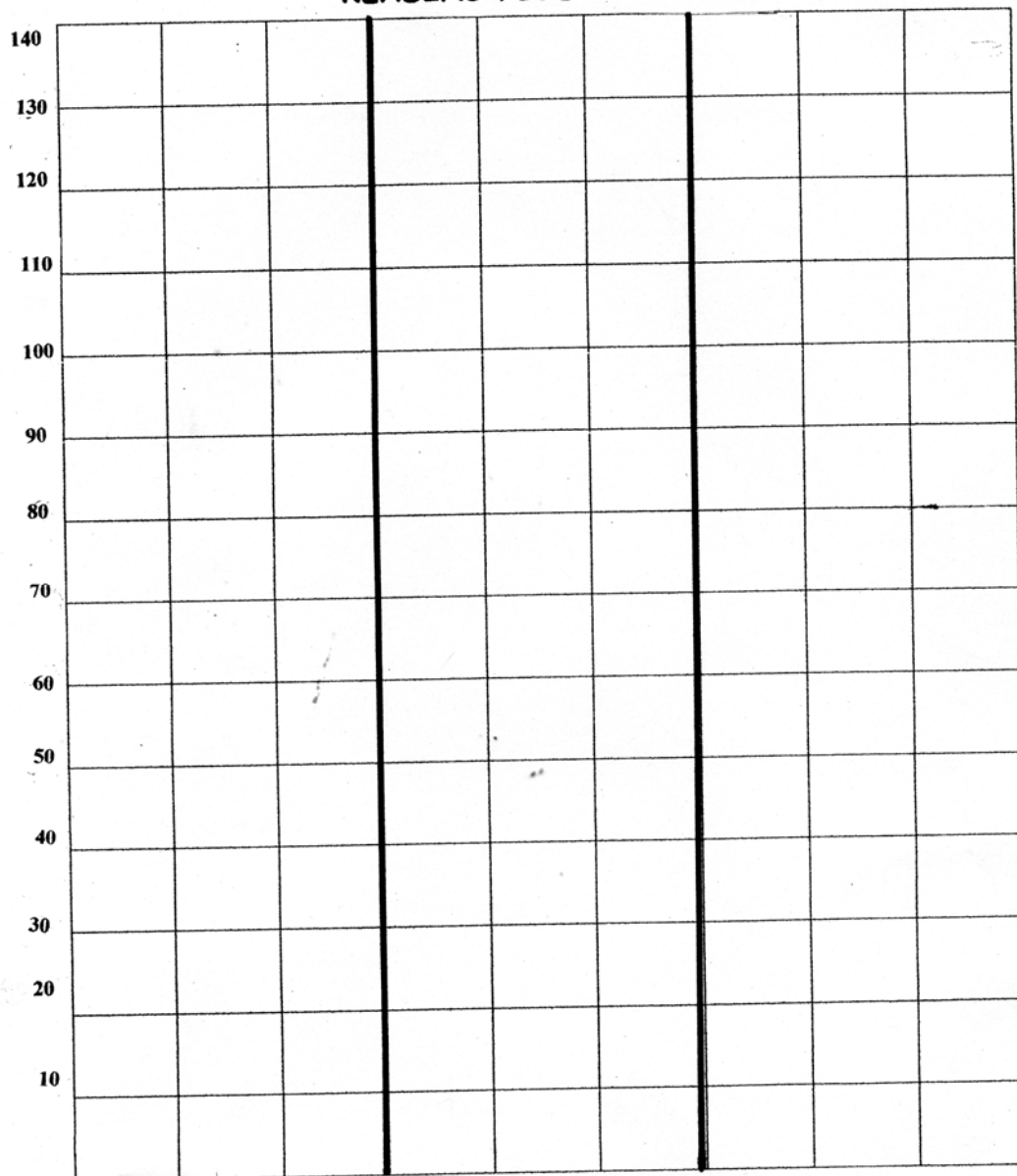
I'm not sure

Yes

# Appendix B

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## READING FLUENCY GRAPH



#Words \_\_\_\_\_

errors \_\_\_\_\_



**MULTIDIMENSIONAL FLUENCY SCALE**

Rating Circle one →	Expression & Volume				Phrasing and Intonation				Smoothness				Pace			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<b>1</b>	Reads words as if simply to get them out. Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language. Tends to read in a quiet voice.				Reads in monotone with little sense of phrase boundaries; frequently reads word-by-word.				Makes frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts.				Reads slowly and laboriously.			
<b>2</b>	Begins to use voice to make text sound like natural language in some areas but not in others. Focus remains largely on pronouncing the words. Still reads in a quiet voice.				Frequently reads in two- and three-word phrases, giving the impression of choppy reading; improper stress and intonation fail to mark ends of sentences and clauses.				Experiences several "rough spots" in text where extended pauses or hesitations are more frequent and disruptive.				Reads moderately slowly or too quickly.			
<b>3</b>	Makes text sound like natural language throughout the better part of the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text.				Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness; reasonable stress and intonation.				Occasionally breaks smooth rhythm because of difficulties with specific words and/or structures.				Reads with an uneven mixture of fast and slow pace.			
<b>4</b>	Reads with good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text. Varies expression and volume to match his or her interpretation of the passage.				Generally reads with good phrasing, mostly in clause and sentence units.				Generally reads smoothly with some breaks, but resolves word and structure difficulties quickly, usually through self-correction.				Consistently reads at conversational pace; appropriate rate throughout reading.			
<p>* This scale is an adaptation of one developed by Zutell &amp; Rasinski, 1991. Kimberly Monfort, a third-grade teacher at Bon View School in Ontario, California developed the format above for the scale.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><b>Total Score:</b> _____</p>																

# Helen Keller – A Remarkable Woman

## A Reader's Theatre Script by *Lisa Blau*

**Reader #1**  
**Reader #4**

**Reader #**  
**Annie Sullivan**

**Reader #3**  
**Polly Thomson**

- Reader #1:** Helen Keller was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama on June 27, 1880.
- Reader #3**  
A When Helen was a year old she had a very high fever. She was very sick.
- Reader #3:** The illness left Helen blind and deaf. She could not see. She could not hear.
- Reader #3** Helen Keller lived in a dark and silent world.
- Reader #3:** Helen could not hear other people speak, so she could not talk.
- Reader #3** Helen touched things to find out about the world around her.
- Reader #4:**  
A Helen could not let others know what she wanted or how she felt. She would cry and scream in her silent, dark world.

- Reader #3:** Helen's parents took Helen to many doctors. No one could help them. One day they learned of a special teacher.
- Reader #1:** Helen's teacher was Annie Sullivan. She came to teach Helen when Helen was seven years old.
- Annie Sullivan:** I had to find a way to reach Helen. I needed to find a way to help Helen communicate.
- Reader #3:** Annie taught Helen a special alphabet.
- Annie Sullivan:** I would give Helen a doll. Then I would spell the word into Helen's hand.
- Reader #4:** At first Helen did not understand.
- Annie Sullivan:** Then one day we passed by a water pump. I put Helen's hand in the water. I spelled the word "water" into Helen's hand over and over again.
- Reader #3:** At last Helen understood what Annie was trying to teach her!
- Annie:** Helen learned very fast. She learned words for "mother", "father" and "teacher".
- Reader #4:** In later years Helen Keller wrote, "the day I learned the word "water" was the day I discovered light, hope, and joy."

- Annie:** I taught Helen thousands of words. I taught her to read by feeling a series of raised dots on a page.
- Reader #4:** This system of reading is called Braille. Helen learned to read very fast.
- Reader #3:** Helen Keller became famous around the world. Everyone called her “the wonder girl”.
- Annie:** When Helen was ten years old, she decided that she wanted to learn how to speak.
- Reader #1:** Helen could not hear any speech sounds. She could not hear the sounds that she was making.
- Reader #3:** Helen did learn to speak, but she could not always speak clearly.
- Reader #4:** When Helen Keller was twenty years old, she went to college.
- Annie:** I sat next to Helen and spelled everything that was said in each class into Helen’s hand.
- Reader #3:** Helen was an excellent student. She studied many long, long hours.
- Annie:** While Helen was in college, she wrote her autobiography entitled, *The Story of My Life*. Once Helen wrote, “Knowledge is happiness.”

- Reader #3**            **Helen Keller graduated from college in 1904. By then she was even more famous. People wanted to meet this remarkable woman.**
- Annie:**            **Helen and I traveled around the world. Helen lectured before large audiences. She told people about her life.**
- Reader #3:**        **Helen Keller wrote many books and magazine articles about her life.**
- Reader #4:**        **She worked hard to help other blind people. She worked for the American Federation for the Blind for many years.**
- Reader #1:**        **In 1936, Annie Sullivan died. She had been Helen's teacher for more than fifty years.**
- Reader #3**            **Polly Thomson, Annie's secretary, became Helen's constant companion.**
- Polly Thomson:**    **During World War II, Helen visited injured soldiers in the hospital.**
- Reader #4:**        **Helen tried to help soldiers who had lost their sight. She gave them hope.**
- Reader #1:**        **Helen Keller wrote that helping the wounded soldiers was the "crowning experience" of her life.**
- Polly:**            **Helen Keller met many important people. She met kings, queens, and Presidents.**

- Reader #3:** Helen Keller won many special awards. In 1964 President Lyndon Johnson gave Helen the Presidential Medal of Freedom.
- Polly:** Helen Keller died on June 1, 1968. She was eighty-eight years old. She had lived a full and rich life.
- Reader #1:** Helen Keller could not see or hear. She did not let this stop her. She wrote many books and she even learned to ride a bicycle!
- Reader #3:** Helen Keller loved to read. She enjoyed learning. She also enjoyed swimming.
- Reader #4:** Helen Keller brought love and hope to millions of handicapped people around the world.
- Reader #1:** This remarkable woman was admired and loved throughout the world.
- All:** The end.

.....  
: If you enjoyed sharing this script with your students, be :  
: sure to check out Lisa's selection of :  
: Reader's Theatre resource books. :  
: (NEED LINK TO THE "PRODUCTS" SCREEN) :  
:.....

## Appendix E

<b>ACTIVITIES I LIKE TO DO</b>	<b>CAN? HOW?</b>

Appendix F

APRIL-17-01  
**Four-Dimensional Study**

**Directions:** Copy a sentence from the text that contains the vocabulary word. Underline the target word. Determine the meaning of the word through context clues or dictionary or glossary use, and write it on the space provided. Then, write a personal knowledge or experience example of the word. Draw a picture or a symbol related to the word in the box.

**1. Sentence from the text**  
 In a warm and sultry forest far far away there once lived a mother stout but and her a baby. oh how much she loved her soft tiny baby.

**2. From the dictionary**  
 The weather is sultry it is hot and humid.

**3. From my life**  
 I go to Florida it is really hot and humid when I am up there so it feels so sultry.

**4. Symbol/picture to represent word**  
 Sun humid

My picture is the word sultry and the picture under is where it was so humid and very hot outside.



Appendix G



## Appendix H

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>P</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>I</b>