

Book Reviews

Tiered Fluency Instruction: Supporting Diverse Learners in Grades 2-5

By Chase Young, Timothy Rasinski. North Mankato, Minnesota: Capstone Press, 2017. 128 pages. ISBN 9781496608031

Reviewed by: Bahia Braktia
Sam Houston State University

In *Tiered Fluency Instruction*, Chase Young and Timothy Rasinski (2017) discuss and offer solutions to the reading fluency challenges that learners in grades two through five might face. As the authors point out, reading fluency has not received much attention over the past several decades, which led to its instruction to be either ignored or misinterpreted, even though much research related to reading education emphasized on fluency as a critical reading element to achieve full proficiency in reading. Many students who struggle with reading show difficulties in some areas of fluency (Valencia & Buly, 2004). According to DiSalle and Rasinski (2017), The National Reading Panel (2000) and the Common Core State Standards (2016) described reading fluency as crucial for reading growth and should be learned in the elementary grades.

The book is a collaborative work by two researchers who bring together their research experience, perspectives and key skills areas that qualify them to introduce to readers a research based strategies for resolving reading fluency challenges. Dr. Timothy Rasinski, a professor of literacy education at Kent State University and head of its award winning reading clinic, is a high-profile researcher in reading fluency. He has published more than 200 articles and has

authored, co-authored, or edited more than 50 books or curriculum programs on reading education. He is the author of the bestselling books on reading fluency *The Fluent Reader* (2003) and *The Fluent Reader in Action* (2011). Dr. Chase Young, an associate professor in the Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Populations at Sam Houston State University, has an extensive experience in the field of reading. His research was published in journals such as the Journal of Educational Research, Reading Teacher, and Literacy Research and Instruction. He was also named the 2011 Outstanding Doctoral Student in Reading Education.

This book provides teachers of grades two through five with an instruction manual of strategies they can use with their students to increase their reading fluency. This allows the teachers to improve the students' reading proficiency. The authors structured, or tiered, the strategies according to the individual and group needs of the students to enable the teachers to choose the appropriate fluency instruction.

The authors argue that reading fluency is an essential skill in learning to read, and the students' needs identify what form and tiers of fluency instruction teachers can rely on. In order to measure students' reading fluency, the book offers assessment tools for teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses. The book tiers the fluency instructions into three, each tier includes activities teachers can incorporate, the materials they can use, and how to adopt them into their classrooms. The first tier is devoted to group fluency instructions, as it offers students an effective

model of what fluent reading looks and sounds like. The second tier targets students who did not respond to tier one fluency instructions. For that, the authors suggest several research-based methods that are best delivered in a small group setting. For students still struggling after tier 1 and 2, tier 3 presents one-on-one reading fluency interventions. The book also includes technologically enhanced fluency methods.

This book is practical and well-organized. Chapter one provides elementary teachers with assessment tools to evaluate fluency development in accuracy and automaticity in word recognition. As the authors state; “reading assessment should be sensitive enough to detect changes in students' reading after relatively short periods of instruction or intervention” (p. 11). The data teachers get from the assessment instruction in this chapter allows the students to see that they are making tangible progress in their development in becoming proficient and fluent readers.

Chapters two, three and four offer straight forward and efficient fluency instructions to tier 1, tier 2 and tier 3 students consecutively. Each chapter gives a variety of detailed methods to address each tier's fluency challenges. Each method is given a background, the necessary materials and procedures, and real life experiences from lower and upper elementary grade teachers who applied the methods in their classes.

This book also includes a section that offers fun activities where teachers can integrate easy and accessible technology into reading fluency instruction. For example, Avatar for Speeches, a website where students can build avatars and record their voices, is an engaging activity to help students refine their speech performances. The authors also gathered a list of fluency resources for teachers to use in their as-

essment or instruction.

In essence, *Tiered Fluency Instruction* is a practical text that can be a useful tool for elementary teachers who would like to assess and improve their students reading fluency. Its practicality relies on the way the challenges are addressed; teachers can evaluate their students and accordingly refer to the appropriate tier fluency instruction that is detailed and simplified.

References

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Kids Deserve It: Pushing Boundaries and Challenging Conventional Thinking

Written by Todd Nesloney and Adam Welcome, Dave Burgess Consulting, INC., 2016, 222 pgs., ASIN B01GF3UM8K

Reviewed by: Matthew Panozzo
Sam Houston State University

The stretch from spring break to summer is arguably the most challenging time of the school year. Everyone is tired. Standardized tests, promotions, and graduations loom overhead. The finish line is in sight but just out of reach. Students, teachers, and administrators long for the relaxing days of summer.

It was our second week back from spring break, and all my energy was zapped after a series of failed lessons, student misconduct, and ineffective meetings. I needed some support and motivation, but I had no one to turn to for this consolation as my coworkers and I were all in the same boat. Then I found it: Nesloney and Welcome (2016) *Kids Deserve It: Pushing Boundaries and Challenging Conventional Thinking*. Instead of answering emails or grading assignments, I sat down and immersed myself in my reading. Immediately, I found solace in the first paragraph of Chapter 1: “What would happen if a teacher or principal came up with an idea, grabbed their students and--boom--tried something new? Just like that--without fear of failure” (Nesloney & Welcome, 2016, location 172). I had become aware that I allowed myself to become entrenched in the fear of failure, allowing the systemic pressures to extinguish my passion. I had not realized that I needed a simple rhe-

torical question to reignite my passion for teaching and taking risks in my classroom.

Parents, teachers, and administrators all have something to learn from Nesloney and Welcome. Their descriptions of the importance of empathy and understanding, and how these two qualities empower students, are relevant to a range of student interactions. To illustrate these values, Nesloney and Welcome remind the reader of the shared belief that “growing every part of a child is truly what’s best for education” (Nesloney & Welcome, 2016, Location 166). In doing what’s best for the students, they also advise educators to “remember our sense of childlike wonder, the immense human need to be valued and noticed and our ability to be creatively inspired and, in turn, inspire others” (Location 167-168). They emphasize that, beyond simply creating assignments that test mastery, teachers must be willing to take instructional risks and approach lessons with creativity and fresh eyes. Additionally, they stress that these ventures in outside-the-box thinking are further enriched in a collaborative setting involving all the stakeholders of a school.

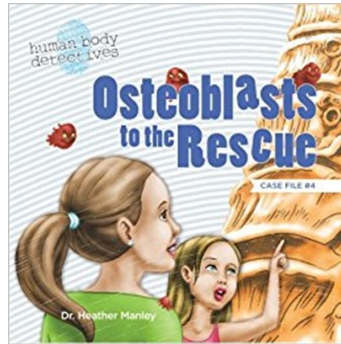
Rhetorically, the narrative style of Nesloney and Welcome builds trust with the reader. Both authors took a risk to make themselves vulnerable by opening their leadership style up to criticism. In turn, their story allows the reader to hear what they have to say, reflect on their advice, and find small ways to implement the “kids deserve it” mindset into their classroom. The novel also features challenges to educators to get involved in online spaces as a form of professional development. In doing so, Nesloney and Welcome reinforce to educators that they are not alone in this profession. Online spaces allow people to connect in different classrooms, different schools, and even in different places around the world. Ultimately,

they want the reader to remember that what we do is for the kids in our classroom, with implications that manifest on a local, national, and global level.

Upon finishing the book, I realized that I not only had the motivation to continue to take risks this school year, but also found the motivation to keep pushing my practice. I've taken Nesloney and Welcome up on their Twitter challenges. I've tried to reshape my remaining units. Their challenge to think differently feels urgent and valuable for both teachers and students. This is a book to read with your team to spur creativity and breathe new life into your school.

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- Nesloney, T., Welcome, A. (2016). *Kids deserve it: Pushing boundaries and challenging conventional thinking*. [E-Reader version; Kindle] retrieved from https://www.amazon.com/Kids-Deserve-Boundaries-Challenging-Conventional-ebook/dp/B01GF3UM8K/ref=tmm_kin_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1492019318&sr=8-1

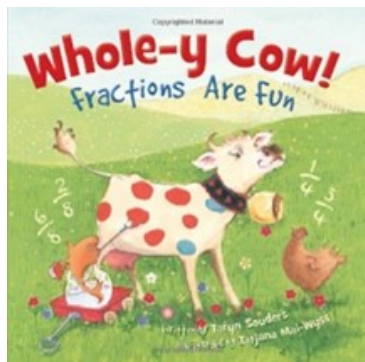


Osteoblasts to the rescue: case file #4.

Written by: Manley H. (2013). Place of publication not identified: Heather Manley.

Reviewed by: Elizabeth Stokes

“Pearl suddenly got an idea...” This catch phrase never bode well for Pearl and her friends the “Human Body Detectives.” In this installment of the Human Body Detective series, Pearl and her friend Merrin go inside Lily’s body so that they may learn about Lily’s fractured arm. Throughout their adventure, Pearl and Merrin encounter and learn about different bones in the human body, what makes up a bone, and eventually land on Lily’s fracture. Upon arriving at Lily’s fracture, Pearl and Merrin encounter osteoblasts (cells that turn the callus into new bone). Having accomplished their mission, Pearl and Merrin leave Lily’s body in just enough time to watch the rest of the game. In addition to the intriguing story, the book *Osteoblasts to the Rescue* also includes reference materials at the end so that the reader can further explore the bones that make up the human body. While the moving story line will keep readers engaged in the story, older readers might find the story a bit derivative, but the information useful. Despite this fact, readers will still walk away having learned something new about how our bones work. For the reasons stated above, this story receives a four out of five star rating.

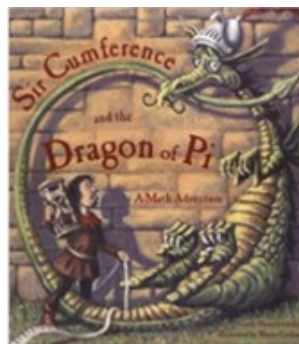


Whole-y cow! Fractions are Fun

Written by: Souders, T., & Mai-Wyss, T. (2010). New York: Scholastic.

Reviewed by: Monica Castaneda

“One whole cow” decides to be different for a day, that’s what the story line of the book *Whole-y cow! Fractions are fun* is about. Written by a graduate with a specialization in mathematics, Taryn Souders, creates a female cow character who did what no other cow should do on the average cow day life. From having a fish pet painting different color dots on her to playing the cello while eating a daisy of different color petals. After each crazy activity the “One whole cow” does the author asks the reader to find several fractions based on that particular activity. This gives the readers the opportunity to practice their identifying fractions skills while reading the funny story of a cow’s out of norm day. Even though the “One whole cow” is doing things no other cow does, she is doing somethings a human being would do, which helps to show the reader that there is fractions everywhere you look. Therefore, children will not only be learning to identify fractions from Souders first published book but they will also be giggling about what “One whole cow” does when she “decides to be different on this particular day”.

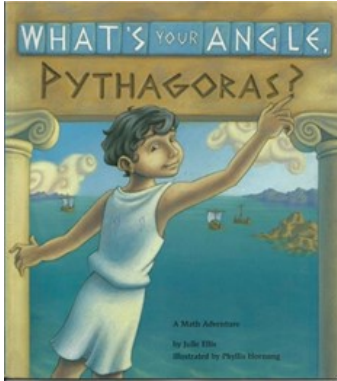


Sir Cumference and the Dragon of Pi

Written by: C. Neuschwander (1999). Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

Reviewed by: Syed Shah

In the race against time, one child must find the cure to turn his father from a dragon back into the body of a man! Cindy Neuschwander finds an enjoyable way to teach pi to a young audience through this medieval themed book. When Sir Cumference accidentally gets turned into a dragon, his son Radius finds a cure but to use it he must decipher a riddle. Radius sets out on a quest to find the answer where he learns about pi. Just before Sir Cumference is vanquished in his dragon form, Radius come to the rescue by delivering $22/7$ ths of the cure thus returning Sir Cumference back to his human body! This story is quite entertaining and helps bring the number pi to life. The use of a medieval setting with interesting characters like Radius, Geo of Metry, and Lady Dia of Ameter keep the mathematical theme remain prevalent while engaging the reader. The quest Radius goes on also helps students learn how to find pi themselves. If used as text in the classroom though, the educator should be aware the book simplifies pi with the approximation of $22/7$ rather than explaining pi’s irrationality. Nevertheless, this text is a definite read when it comes to teaching pi in the classroom.

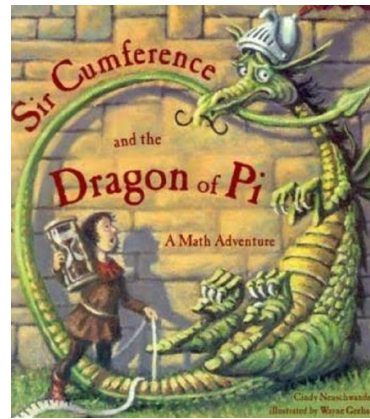


What's your angle Pythagoras?: A math adventure.

Written by: Ellis, J., & Peacock, P. H. (2004). Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

Reviewed by: Riyn Williams

“Angle, angle, angle. Side, side, side. All you have to do is tri-, tri-. Tri!” In this fictional picture book, Julie Ellis takes readers on an adventure on how the Pythagorean theorem was discovered by the young and curious Pythagoras. Ellis’ illustrations and catchy puns help the reader understand the theorem. Ellis allows readers to be involved in the book by displaying the process Pythagoras went through with his discoveries with temples and shipping routes. Throughout the book, readers are able to see how to build bases to support columns, tie knots in ropes to make triangles with different angles, experimenting the formula of a right angle through Pythagoras. Even though it is a great explanation of math, the picture book fails to apply the theorem. However, readers will remember practical applications and might possibly open their minds up to more exploration within mathematics. If readers know the Pythagorean theorem already, then this picture book will resonate well with them. Readers who are more math orientated may not like the use of dialogue or learning math through a narrative. This picture book is intended to introduce readers to the Pythagorean theorem in its simplicity and how it came about.



Sir Cumference and the Dragon of Pi

Written by: Neuschwander, C. & Geehan, W. (1999). Charlesbridge.

Reviewed by: Cassandra Wight

“Sois Chevalier, au nom de dieu, Avancez Chevallier,” the infamous saying the Knights of the Round Table used upon acceptance into King Arthur’s most elite force, catches the eye and begins the phenomenal children’s book “Sir Cumference and the Dragon of Pi.” Written by Cindy Neuschwander, this book receives a 5 out of 5 stars for its relatable, historical, and educational content. By reading this, the educator not only introduces fundamental mathematics such as pi and radius, but it also accommodates their explanation in a fun way. The length and vocabulary of the story creatively designed by Neuschwander makes this educational masterpiece suitable for a wide range of students starting from 6th to 8th grade. For mathematics educators, it is often problematic to find a new stimulating method of teaching concepts to students.

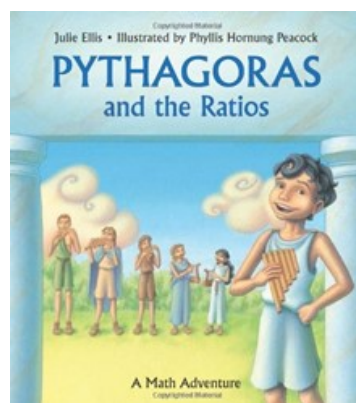
However, Neuschwander does an astonishing job at fusing together historical information, literature, and details about mathematical vocabulary by using cleverly named characters such as “Sir Cumference” and “Lady Di Amater.” Constructivism is a huge educational advantage in this book because it makes mathematic foundations relat-

able to students in an enticing way by mixing math and the middle ages. By using constructivism, Neuschwander is developing a plot that is retainable to students. This book is highly recommended for any educator who wants to create an enjoyable time with their class while keeping the lesson educational and influential. Will Radius solve the mathematical riddle to save his father Sir Cumference from remaining a dragon forever? Read to find out.

TEK

(7.9) Expressions, equations, and relationships. The student applies mathematical process standards to solve geometric problems. The student is expected to:

B. Determine the circumference and area of circles;



Pythagoras and the Ratios: A Math Adventure

Written by: Ellis, J. & Peacock, P.
(2010). *Pythagoras and the Ratios: A Math Adventure*. Watertown, MA: Random House Publishing Group.

Reviewed by: Renee Kelley

What is wrong with the ratios instruments? In this non-fiction picture book, Pythagoras and his five cousins set out to win a music contest in their town. But there is one huge problem. Their instruments aren't in tune. So, the Ratios, who are Pythagoras' five cousins, depend on him to fix their instruments before the contest commences. Pythagoras uses his sharp brain to figure out the ratio between his instrument and his cousins to tune them, all whilst managing the chores that his parents has assigned to him. This is a fantastic book that teaches more than one lesson. Not only does it teach about ratios between similar figures, but it teaches about the importance of responsibilities, which I think will really resonate with seventh graders. The illustrations were great and it showed all the calculations Pythagoras used to tune the instruments, throughout the story. This book deserves five stars and is a wonderful book to be added to your educational library.