A Structured Literacy Approach to Support Striving Readers in Secondary Grades: Meaningful Transactions through Morphological Awareness and Fluency Building

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Abstract
A high school English teacher and a university literacy professor provide secondary teachers with structured literacy strategies to support striving readers in the middle and high school grades. The authors present strategies that can be utilized with diverse texts across learning contexts. As a structured literacy approach, morphological awareness and prosodic fluency are emphasized to foster deeper, more meaningful transactions between students and texts. An example of a full structured literacy lesson is also provided that includes multiple strategies and is based on a gradual release model with guided and independent reading cycles. Applicable strategies for delivery of these skills for in-person, digital, or concurrent teaching are also discussed.

Keywords: striving readers, structured literacy, transactional theory of reading, morphological awareness, fluency, prosody, comprehension

Introduction

Teachers are responsible for addressing the learning needs of diverse students who possess a gamut of abilities, and teachers work to the best of their abilities to meet the needs of every learner. However, a sizable subset of students are falling behind their peers in reading achievement. Students with documented learning disabilities make up 14% of students nationwide (Hussar et al., 2020), a small percentage compared to the over 60% of students in grades 8 and 12 in 2019 who read below grade level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). These statistics show most secondary students who are not reading on grade level are best identified as *striving* readers—students who need extra support and scaffolding within the general education setting. To compound the problem, curricular standards do not explicitly reference foundational literacy skills after elementary school, leaving strivers without opportunities to acquire or practice critical reading competencies needed for grade-proficient comprehension (T. Rasinski, personal communication, September 27, 2020). Moreover, high school teachers are also often at a loss when it comes to supporting striving readers, as many secondary educators, to include English language arts teachers, have not received explicit training in teaching foundational reading skills.

Recognizing students as strivers is not new. Secondary educators have long worked to support these students through careful planning of skills-focused, highly engaging lessons. High school teachers know striving readers need targeted support, but such differentiation can prove challenging for even the most effective teachers (Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019; Zehr, 2019). Teacher burnout has been a cause for concern, but in the era of COVID-19, teacher exhaustion is at an all-time high (El Helou et al., 2016). Teachers are

now expected to utilize new and unfamiliar methods of teaching, including fully online, hybrid, and concurrent instruction. In effect, what was already more than a full-time job has become unsustainable, even for our most committed colleagues. When survival takes front stage, seeking out differentiation techniques is simply not a top priority, and effective implementation is more challenging than ever (Singer, 2020).

Not unexpectedly, the students who were below grade level in reading before the pandemic are falling further behind (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020). Targeted and intentional support is needed now more than ever. This paper, therefore, explores literacy best practices across learning contexts for secondary teachers, including how strategies can be adapted for online learning. As such, this paper highlights the importance of basic morphological knowledge and the impact of prosodic fluency on comprehension, which foster deeper, more meaningful transactions between students and texts. Applicable strategies for delivery of these skills for in-person, digital, or concurrent teaching are also explored.

Collaborative Context

The authors, a high school English teacher and a university literacy professor and former high school English and ESOL teacher, embarked on this timely collaborative project for several reasons. First, both authors are keenly aware of the pressure classroom teachers face nationwide to ensure success for *all* their students, including those who enter secondary classrooms without the prerequisite reading skills necessary to succeed. One of us currently feels this pressure, while the other has felt this pressure himself and now works daily with pre-service and in-service teachers who feel this pressure.

Second, the first author was a student of the second author, and because she felt inspired by the strategies covered in several of the courses she took with him, she began to immediately implement the techniques in her classroom and to evaluate their impact on her students' engagement and comprehension. The two courses, *Literacy Theory Development and Practice* and *Language and Literacy Assessment and Intervention*, were brimming with methods which readers could use to boost their independence. As a teacher, the transfer of course discussion to classroom implication was obvious.

Lastly, and most importantly, the current situation globally with the COVID pandemic exacerbates the need for a collaborative support system among educators to support striving readers. Growing inequalities and inequities, widening achievement gaps, and what has been described as the "COVID-19 slide" (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020, p. 2) all underscore the importance of supporting teachers helping striving readers. Creating support networks for striving teachers who are working to support striving students—what this piece attempts to do in some small way—is a matter of social justice and more urgent now than ever before (Cochran-Smith, 2020).

Starting with a Theoretical Foundation: Transactional Theory

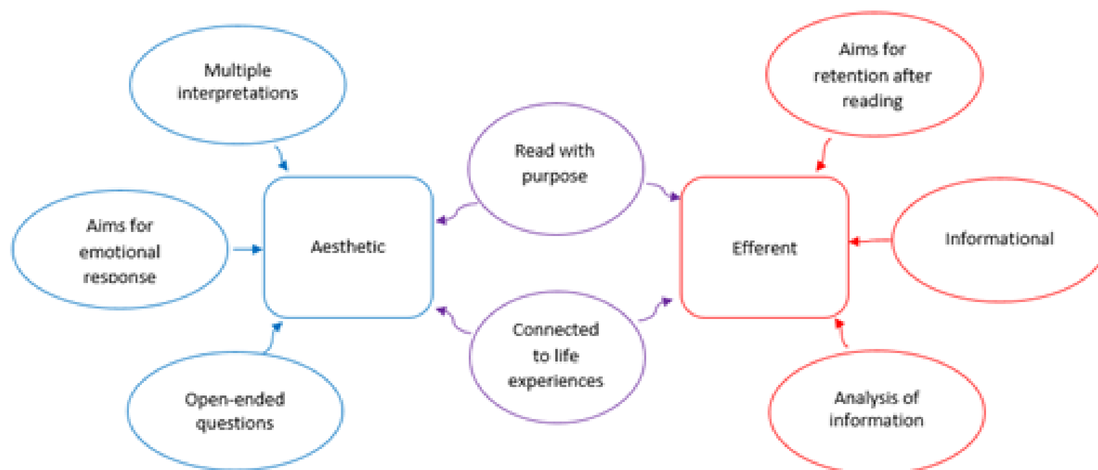
The strategies and tools presented here are all given with the ultimate goal of fostering meaningful transactions between striving readers and texts. Therefore, the theory that ultimately frames this exploration is reader response theory, though in this article the name Louise Rosenblatt (1978, 1993) first applied to it is used: transactional theory. Although Rosenblatt studied the works of John Dewey—perhaps the theorist who most influenced her thinking—she also incorporated her own knowledge of languages, anthropology, and

philosophy to develop the basis for her most notable concept of reader-text transactions (Connell, 2005; Rosenblatt, 1978, 1993).

Rosenblatt (1993) believed individuals' perceptions drove their unique interpretations of literature, which meant accurate understanding of a text varied from person to person. She welcomed the probability people would hold such different opinions because her conviction in the uniqueness of literature was paramount to her reading beliefs (Connell, 2005). Put differently, textual interpretation is the product of a *transaction*, a give-and-take process, between the reader and the text.

Rosenblatt defined two types of reading for meaning: efferent and aesthetic (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Efferent reading is reserved for facts found in texts where correct answers could be definitively located. Aesthetic reading, however, is not as clear-cut because literary interpretations are rooted in a reader's beliefs, opinions, and feelings. Rosenblatt (1993) stressed these two reading purposes do not exist in isolation of each other but rather are in fluctuation from one text to another (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Similarities and Differences between Aesthetic and Efferent Readings



Put differently, the act of reading elicits a transaction between a reader's schema or background knowledge to the information presented in the text. Rosenblatt (1993) acknowledged while basic transactions between reader and text may happen naturally, the teacher plays an integral role in promoting its growth. Connell (2005) also maintained the transaction was merely the first step in true understanding and that a reading-guide—a teacher—was necessary.

Framing a Pedagogical Approach for Structured Literacy

Due to its emphasis on connecting meaningfully with texts, transactional theory in P–12 settings has largely been associated with whole language or constructivist approaches to literacy instruction (Woodruff & Griffin, 2017). However, the pendulum regarding what constitutes effective reading instruction has largely swung in the opposite direction; there is renewed focus on foundational reading skills, such as phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, morphological awareness, etc.—an approach that has recently come to be referred

to as "the science of reading" (SOR; Shanahan, 2020, p. S235) or structured literacy (Spear-Swerling, 2019).

In secondary settings, most striving readers need explicit instruction in fluency and morphological awareness, as most enter these grades having already acquired phonological awareness and a basic understanding of phonics. Of course, secondary teachers should be on the lookout for students who exhibit trouble with phonics; however, ongoing research with striving readers at the secondary level determines the key areas needing emphasis are morphological awareness and fluency building (James et al., 2020; Lovett et al., 2020). This is where this article offers a unique contribution. Instead of viewing morphological awareness, fluency, and student-to-text transactions as separate, isolated components, educators are encouraged to see how the three blend together; such a holistic approach that emphasizes both skills-based reading instruction and meaningful transactions can lead to stronger, more confident readers.

Morphological Awareness

Many educators assume students at the middle and high school level have already mastered basic morphological awareness; breaking down words is often associated with younger grades when students are first learning to read (Collins et al., 2020). Because of this misguided assumption about student skill, educators do not recognize they should provide direct instruction in morphology. However, striving readers need reinforcement of word-level skills so they can apply word analysis skills to texts quickly and easily (Catts & Kamhi, 2004; Hendrix & Griffin, 2017).

Decoding is not enough. While many secondary students may be able to decode words, if they do not know how to break apart words and analyze word parts for meaning, comprehension is impeded (Catts & Kamhi, 2004). Collins et al. (2020) found morphological practice strengthened reading skills overall for adolescents and therefore should be part of secondary instruction across content areas. Morphological awareness and word analysis skills allow students to make sense of unknown words (James et al., 2020). By incorporating morphology instruction into everyday reading lessons, teachers can maximize the likelihood of their students understanding words in context (Collins et al., 2020). Along with decoding, easily recognizing the meanings of unfamiliar words leads to enhanced fluency.

Fluency Building

Fluency is more than reading words accurately through speed reading or word calling (Scholastic, 2014). True fluency is achieved with prosody—reading with contextual expression and purposeful inflection (Rasinski, 2017). A prosodic read aloud sounds like a conversation among people or the ordinary flow of thoughts in one's head. It is not theatre, so it is not meant to be overly pronounced or dramatic; rather, prosodic fluency is meant to be natural. Prosodic reading demonstrates comprehension because the reader is fully connected with a text, so much so that the reader has the ability to determine the emotions of characters and the emphases of the author, enabling a read aloud with proper expression. In order to achieve this deep connection, striving readers may need to read through a text several times to achieve understanding.

Repeated reading is the best way to achieve this highest level of fluency (Cypert & Petro, 2019; Rasinski, 2017). Multiple readings allow for striving readers to overcome

obstacles to comprehension by paring down what draws their "internal attention" (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 201). Reading through a text only once forces the student to focus on pronunciation and unfamiliar word meanings. Multiple readings allows for clarification of these difficulties, so instead of solely concentrating on decoding, students can focus on meaning through interpreting dialect, inflection, and rhythm of the text (Paige et al., 2017).

Striving readers will find increased confidence and strengthened comprehension if these repeated readings are done aloud and together as a chorus (Cypert & Petro, 2019). Choral reading reinforces the correct pronunciation and emphasis of the sentences in a safe environment where no single student's voice is heard above others. After several readings, students will read independently with such fluency and begin to build the skill on their own. Even though this practice is a group read aloud, the skill translates to increased comprehension during silent reading (Cypert & Petro, 2019; Rasinski, 2014).

Prosodic fluency, therefore, bridges the divide between decoding and comprehension. Moreover, prosody cultivates a reader's "inner conversation" (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017, p. 88), through the necessary analysis and decision-making of how to speak the word. As such, prosodic fluency engenders meaningful transactions and connections with texts (Cypert & Petro, 2019).

Meaningful Transactions

Readers approach texts with inimitable experiences, biases, and background knowledge, all of which influence their interactions with texts (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Teachers should encourage students to use that individuality when reading. Asking dialogic questions to promote reflection on the text's information based on a student's experience will develop the desired reader-text relationship. Feeling part of a text, as if immersed in its words, allows readers to gain a sense of fulfillment from the reading experience (Beers & Probst, 2017). However, an objection Rosenblatt (1993) raised regarding classroom application of her philosophy involved educators placing so much emphasis on students' actions that they lost a balanced focus on the role of the text and reading guide (i.e., teacher) in the informational exchange (Connell, 2005). Therefore, it is important that conversation and engagement also include what the text offers to the reader, not solely the reader's reactions to it.

Teachers can model immersive reading by asking their students for efferent and aesthetic responses to texts. Think alouds are also effective strategies for modeling how to connect with texts (Warner et al., 2015). Like with morphological study and fluency building, a reader response framework requires modeling and guidance from a teacher or reading guide to demonstrate how to call upon background knowledge to willingly extract new information from the text. As such, the teacher guides readers to recognize their inner dialogue and how to communicate that text-to-self conversation with others (Warner et al. 2015). Dialogic teaching is a natural expression of transactional theory as applied to classroom practice. As reading-guides, teachers should practice asking dialogic questions, which help students become more aware of their own ideas in conjunction with information presented in the text so they can become better critical thinkers (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019).

Moving from Theoretical and Pedagogical Knowledge to Practice

Recognizing the necessity for a multidimensional structured literacy pedagogical approach that emphasizes morphological study and fluency building as tools to elicit meaningful

transactions with texts is only the first step toward independent reading success. Teachers need practical strategies for applying this pedagogical knowledge in their classrooms to encourage and foster authentic student engagement with texts. The strategies that follow teach or review a single skill in only a few minutes. It is important, however, for students to see the connection of one skill to the next and how comprehension is dependent upon various skills working in lockstep. Therefore, what follows in this section are suggestions for structured literacy strategies and an example of a full literacy lesson, all of which are easily implemented in order to make the most of instructional time. Reiteration of skills through strategy-based minilessons and application of skills in tandem during full lessons can together help striving readers become thriving readers (Harvey & Ward, 2017).

Structured Literacy Strategies

Morphological Awareness: Anchor Charts and Word Walls

Word parts anchor charts posted in the classroom can provide students with constant reminders of reviewed word parts and their definitions (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017). To reinforce this skill, challenge students to find morphemes in words they encounter in their day-to-day lives—from, for example, a billboard, television commercial, tweet, or Instagram post. Students can capture these words in their original context and add them to a word wall (Hiebert, 2020). For digital classrooms, word walls can be maintained through Padlet or Google's Jamboard, which both allow live widgets on a classroom webpage, so students can add words at their leisure.

For each word added, the contributing student will identify and define the morpheme, then define the word in the context of the example. The possibility for repetitiveness is one reason this strategy is so powerful. If students find the same morpheme multiple times, the instructional impact is only strengthened as the various applications of morphological awareness become more apparent. Additionally, with this strategy, striving readers have autonomy over their learning while acquiring new vocabulary from authentic, real-life settings.

Fluency Building: Choral Reading of Poetry

Conversations with middle and high school English language arts (ELA) teachers will reveal that many of these educators chose the secondary level because of an intrinsic love of literature and the desire to impart that love to their students. That passion for literacy easily blends with the fluency strategy of choral reading a poem a week (Cypert & Petro, 2019; Rasinski, 2017). A prosody lesson in a secondary ELA classroom might include exposing students to copious poems with a variety of themes from diverse authors; while students exercise general comprehension techniques, teachers share their favorite poems.

Beginning on Monday, the class spends a minute reading through a poem, which should be projected on the screen and given to the students on paper in order to meet diverse visual learning needs (Figure 2). Teachers should allow students to read through silently so they feel prepared to read aloud expressively. As a class, the students read through the poem, only once. The teacher asks students for initial thoughts and reactions, including emotions, questions, or opinions. Students are not expected to discuss or analyze, and the teacher should not ask any comprehension questions about the poem; all verbal discussion

should be voluntary from students. Before moving on, students should rate the poem on a linear scale in the corner of the poem.

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday move through the same choral reading process, but instead of asking for student reactions, the teacher focuses on one literary element each day—analyzing a metaphor's meaning and contribution to the theme, discussing the function of the speaker, understanding the necessity for the poem's shift, etc. Each day the students are practicing fluency and increasing comprehension, and they are able to focus on one deep-level literary analysis at a time; striving readers need to chunk this process in order to master the many skills required for higher thinking (Cypert & Petro, 2019).

By Friday, the students feel more confident in their reading, evidenced by their volume and articulation. As a culminating activity and to provide a sense of purpose and foster community, teachers should offer opportunities for small groups of students to embellish the poem's recitation and "perform [for] classmates" (T. Rasinski, personal communication, September 27, 2020).

Figure 2

Choral Reading Daily Lesson Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
• Choral reading of the poem • Students ask questions or share thoughts	• Choral reading of the poem • Analysis of one literary element (ex. metaphors)	• Choral reading of the poem • Analysis of one literary element (ex. shift)	• Choral reading of the poem • Analysis of one literary element (ex. role of the speaker)	• Students voluntarily perform poem for classmates

Many secondary teachers have lamented that their online students do not speak during class or do not turn on their cameras; this prosodic practice using poetry may help these students become more active participants in class as they join in with the others online or in person. For their Friday performance, digital students can share Instagram or TikTok videos or simply upload a video in Google Classroom. Giving students freedom to express their interpretations will increase digital participation.

Teachers may be surprised by the active participation of their students; it does not require much coercion to have the students read aloud. Of course, once a routine for choral reading has been established, students have no hesitation to read as one voice. When one of the authors implemented this strategy in her tenth-grade ELA classroom, a student reported, "I read with more enthusiasm and not bland." In fact, several reluctant readers in the class said they enjoyed reading poetry as a large group. One student responded, "My favorite class activity was when we found poems and presented them. I found it fun to read new poems." Another celebrated, "I feel more comfortable reading out loud, and I feel like I have more of an understanding of what I am reading." Happily, this exercise only takes a few minutes from each class period, but it can enhance fluency and overall comprehension.

Meaningful Transactions: Delayed Discussion Strategy

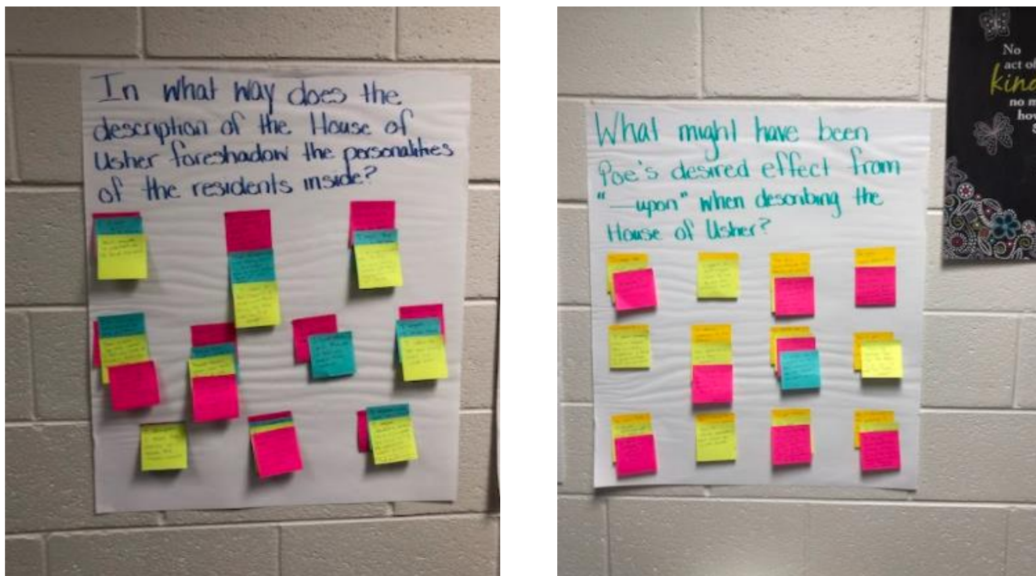
Students should be able to interact with a text in a variety of ways, and providing students opportunities to do so outside of typical classroom discussions may enhance student

engagement (Hardie, 2019). Striving readers especially are more motivated when given the opportunity to move about during text discussion and analysis, and they respond with greater confidence when given time to reflect and refine their responses to analysis or synthesis questions (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019; Webster et al., 2015). Considering these two facts, combining them into one activity will engage striving readers.

The delayed discussion strategy poses a question without requiring an immediate answer. The teacher should capture one aesthetic question at a time on large chart paper and present it at the end of class; students ponder the question until they return the next day when they write their reasoning on a sticky note, all of the same color. After students have placed their responses on the chart paper, they can read and review the inferences and interpretations of their peers, either from their own class or a different class period. On another sticky note of a different color, they respond to one or two of the original notes with their support or refutation. Below are examples of responses for two aesthetic questions about "The Fall of the House of Usher" by Edgar Allen Poe (Figure 3). Students will come to class and see that they have a response and can, in turn, reply back once again. This discussion develops over the course of several days, but there is no time taken away from the lesson of the day.

Figure 3

Examples of Aesthetic Responses about Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher"



Delayed discussions can easily convert to online platforms, such as Google Classroom, where students asynchronously give an initial response before reviewing and replying to their peers. Padlet or Google's Jamboard would also work well as virtual question charts. Because of the versatility offered in a digital classroom, students can also create delayed verbal discussions with tools such as VoiceThread.

By giving striving readers the time to mull over the question and their answer, teachers increase students' likelihood to participate with deeper insight and achieve greater equitability in assessing students' comprehension (Kamdideh & Barjesteh, 2019). In

addition, delayed discussions promote thoughtful communication and peer relationships from different class groups, all of which encourages student participation.

After several days of students volleying responses on the question chart, the teacher reads students' insights and contrasting viewpoints as a review for the text or to initiate a verbal classroom discussion. As a culminating activity, the teacher reiterates the skill of the question, corrects or reinforces student thinking, and provides positive feedback to students.

Structured Literacy Lesson

Strategy-based minilessons are an effective way to deliver instruction and reinforce skills in isolation; however, it is important for students to understand these skills are not independent of each other and to see how they work in conjunction with one another. A typical class lesson should incorporate several components of structured literacy instruction. Striving readers are particularly positioned to benefit from pairing lessons like the one that follows with ongoing strategy-based minilessons. This lesson can be adapted to any text or genre in any content area, and it guarantees morphological review, prosody practice, and meaningful transactions with selected texts.

Short stories or informational articles may be chosen for this lesson. Most text selections at the secondary level, however, are lengthy and may require an excerpt. When choosing a piece from a longer text, the teacher should focus on a passage that gives opportunity for deep analysis and contributes to the meaning of the text as a whole. Using a gradual release model, what follows are detailed outlines of both the guided and independent reading cycles for this lesson.

Guided Reading Cycle

Before Reading. Before the lesson, teachers should proactively identify words which may pose a problem for striving readers (Rasinski, 2014). Pulling four or five words with affixes or roots simultaneously gives striving readers morphological review and builds their vocabulary without distracting students from the text's purpose (Collins et al., 2020). To preview the text, isolate the parts of these selected words and verbally analyze (i.e., think aloud) how they contribute to the meaning of the word in context.

After the initial discussion, adding these roots and affixes to an anchor chart in the room will serve as a visual reference for the students throughout the year (Hendrix & Griffin, 2017). Anchor charts are meant to be living documents and continuously revised; making additions to the chart with words from each class text will increase student buy-in and interaction with the information. Because anchor charts are easily accessible and can be reviewed as needed, students are more likely to transfer their knowledge of word parts in one context to words in other reading contexts (Bacchioni & Kurstedt, 2019).

There are some digital options for anchor charts. Padlet offers live updates for information on sticky notes, and Glogster provides visually engaging online posters. Google Classroom materials can be updated regularly as needed, and Quizlet creates flashcards which can display meanings of morphemes on a loop. Widgets displaying anchor charts can be embedded in common learning spaces within digital classrooms, as they would be displayed in a physical classroom.

First Reading: Question the Author. As the lesson moves from previewing to reading, the teacher should plan to demonstrate an oral reading through a read-aloud and think-aloud. The think-aloud process serves two important functions: (a) it models the transactions between reader and text, and (b) it gives the students a strong example of proper fluency because of the teacher's prosodic reading (Cypert & Petro, 2019). The read-aloud focuses on text transactions, such as personal background connections, interesting information, and confusing sentences or concepts (Tracey & Morrow, 2017; Vacca et al., 2019).

In a modified question-the-author strategy, after reading the selected text aloud, the teacher will think aloud about what she would be able to contribute to the author's text (Vacca et al., 2019). Such contributions include editorial suggestions, such as how the author might be more concise by eliminating superfluous details or determining which claims and ideas need more clarifying commentary. Suggesting these edits to the author maintains student-text engagement; using the ideas from this post-read strategy sets the stage for the next reading by giving a purpose for reading.

Second Reading: Choral Reading and Stop and Jot. For the students' initial oral reading, partners will read chorally and engage with the text through the stop-and-jot strategy (Englert & Mariage, 2020). Using the teacher's model as a guide for their own thought focus, they will jot on sticky notes about their own connections, interesting information, and confusing sentences or concepts and place the sticky notes directly on the text. They will end with sticky notes at the end of the selection with lingering questions and their editorial contributions to the author.

Third Reading: Choral Reading and Efferent Questioning. At this point in the lesson, the students are seeing the text for the third time and reading chorally for the second time. This reading's focus, while still encouraging prosody to enhance comprehension, is also focused on Rosenblatt's (1993, 2005) efferent questions. Explicitly stated comprehension questions that ask for factual details which cannot be disputed guide the students through the text and reinforce comprehension (Del Nero, 2019). While monitoring students as they respond to efferent questions, teachers may informally assess striving readers' fluency and comprehension. After this second round of choral reading and efferent questioning, the teacher brings the class together to review the answers and clarify misconceptions in the whole group setting.

Fourth Reading: Aesthetic Questioning and Discussion Groups. The fourth and final reading offers students the deeper, discussion-level questions students typically enjoy most. They will connect with the text through aesthetic questions, which may be interpreted differently (Del Nero, 2017/2019). Striving readers will find they are better able to verbalize their conclusions following the repeated choral readings (Cypert & Petro, 2019; Paige et al., 2017).

Students can answer the aesthetic questions on paper and then post on the classroom walls for a gallery walk. In digital settings, this is simply having students share thoughts in any format that allows for public display, so any of the online tools previously mentioned could be used. Verbal discussion is most engaging for students; students can discuss all of the questions in small groups of five or six, or questions can be posted around the room for

students to choose which question to discuss as they gather in a designated area. Teachers can facilitate a four-corner debate (Hopkins, 2017) or full or modified Socratic seminars. For online classes, Zoom breakout rooms work well for small group discussions, and sites such as Seesaw allow opportunities for debate. Responses to aesthetic questions can be done in a variety of ways; what is most important is that students understand there are multiple, diverse conclusions and takeaways from the same text (Rosenblatt, 1993, 2005).

Independent Reading Cycle

Repeated Readings. Following the gradual release model, the students move independently through the entire instructional cycle using a new excerpt or text (Webb et al., 2019). The teacher identifies four to five focus words, using the same affixes and roots introduced in the guided cycle. Students have to refer to the anchor chart as they read in order to define the words in context. As in the first cycle, the students will choral read repeatedly with a partner, concentrating on a new focus with each reading. For the first reading, student partners define the selected words, use the stop and jot strategy, and suggest revisions to the author. During the second reading, efferent questions will be asked; the final reading engages students in discussion through aesthetic questions. While monitoring student progress, only informal assessments should be noted. Formal assessments should only come after the repeated readings when striving readers will have the greatest ability to respond with full comprehension.

Student Pairs. During the independent cycle, students will use a reciprocal reading strategy to assess one another's comprehension (Silver & Strong, 2007). In order to ensure correct answers to efferent questions, the students will have the answers to their question set. In this fun and engaging reciprocal learning method, the student pairs essentially quiz each other on the passage. Student A will have a set of efferent questions with answers so they can quiz Student B, while Student B will have a different set of questions and answers for Student A. As instructed by their given question sets, each student will stop the choral reading at their designated places in the text and then ask the assigned questions. In this way, student pairs independently engage in a repeated choral reading at their own pace and feel confident in the accuracy of their comprehension without needing the supervision of the teacher. Examples of questions for student pairs as they read the first paragraph from Edgar Allen Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" are included in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4
Student-Pairs Efferent Questions for the First Paragraph of "The Fall of the House of Usher"

Student A Questions (to ask Student B)	**Student A Answers**
Line 2: What is the weather on the day of the narrator's arrival?	It was chilly, cloudy, and "dreary."
Line 18: According to the narrator, why does he feel this way?	He does not know why he feels this way and says it is a "mystery." He thinks it could be from the look of the house and the yard, but he also thinks it is from something supernatural.

Student B Questions (to ask Student A)	**Student B Answers**
Line 10: Describe how the narrator feels as he approaches the house.	He immediately feels sad and "depressed," and the closer he gets to the house, the stronger this feeling grows.
Line 23: How does the narrator suggest to fix the problem of the "gloomy" house?	He thinks the house and grounds would be better if cleaned up with a "different arrangement" of the decorations in the yard and if the house were made to look prettier.

The student pairs will discuss the aesthetic questions together before the teacher poses them to the whole class for open discussion. Because the students know these questions are not meant to have one decidedly correct answer, they are at liberty to agree or disagree and even to amend their answers after hearing from their partner. In order to cultivate this exchange of ideas, these discussion questions are general and open-ended, though the students are expected to use text evidence to support their thinking and conclusions (Harvey & Ward, 2017). Because students bring their backgrounds and biases to their interactions with the text, these aesthetic questions guarantee student exposure to novel ideas and opinions (Beers & Probst, 2017).

This instructional cycle will add to the students' vocabulary and give them the tools for independently increasing their comprehension for texts they will encounter in different classes or real-world situations. With the focused repeated readings, the striving students will have a safe environment to practice fluency. They will also build applicable morphological knowledge and maintain continuous engagement with the text.

Online Contexts. The independent cycle can be easily adapted to hybrid and concurrent teaching contexts. For online learning, the independent practice can be broken into sections, dividing the readings into two parts: stop-and-jot thinking and transactional questions. Students can record themselves reading on a platform such as Flipgird or read synchronously with their partners using video conferencing. Padlet would work well as an online board for back-and-forth sticky notes. If the school uses a hybrid model, the transactional questions can be saved for the day when the students are in-person, but for all-online classes, using a Zoom breakout room will still ensure the reciprocal reading happens in real time.

For concurrent teachers, the students can participate in each step of the instructional cycle through Zoom or the school's preferred video classroom platform. Students can move into breakout rooms and read aloud as requested. In concurrent classrooms, teachers can assign in-person students to breakout rooms with digital students so there is a blend of student learning environments, and the teacher can more easily listen to readings for informal formative assessments. Mixing the students fosters a greater sense of community and encourages participation in the lessons (Pinner, 2020).

Because of its versatility, this lesson framework can be applied to any text of any length; teachers can use short stories which can be read in one reading or whole works which take numerous days to complete. This instructional cycle also lends itself to literary nonfiction, further broadening the selections for teachers. The texts can change while the cycle stays the same, which means teachers do not have to consume themselves with creating new material in order to ensure quality instruction. Most importantly, striving readers will develop a routine for engaging with and analyzing various texts, a skill which adolescents need beyond the classroom.

Call to Action

Secondary teachers feel a sense of urgency regarding how best to support striving readers, especially during the ongoing COVID pandemic. Some teachers have never met their students in-person because of widespread online learning, creating unique challenges to establishing important teacher-student relationships. Information and directives change day to day, and educators constantly speculate about the next month's teaching environment. Bombarded with such uncertainty during this extended COVID pandemic, teachers are searching for trusted methods that are effective and efficient. Supporting striving readers, even in this environment, does not require major adaptation. Striving readers, even at the secondary level, need structured support with foundational literacy skills, such as morphological awareness and fluency building to foster comprehension and meaningful transactions with texts. Without intentional instruction, striving readers will move forward into adulthood without the vital capabilities needed for life-long success. Structured literacy approaches, like the one described in this article, can empower striving readers to thrive.

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