

Teaching Fluency through “Fluency Idol”

Summary: It can be scary for elementary students to work on their oral reading fluency, especially if they are struggling readers. In an article for *The Reading Teacher*, a pair of researchers from Hood College and a Maryland 2nd grade teacher teamed up to use pop culture as a way to build students’ fluency.

Practical Applications

Based on well-researched best practices, the authors developed “Fluency Idol,” an activity in which students are sent home with a poem at the beginning of the week and ‘perform’ it for an audience at the end of the week. The components of “Fluency Idol” are:

- **Selecting the poem** – the teacher and students together choose a high-interest poem
- **Practicing the poem** – poems are “practiced throughout the week in pairs, at home, and with the teacher”
- **Performing the poem** – every Friday, three students perform their poem (even using a toy microphone); performances are recorded so that students’ families can see
- **And the winner is...** - students cast secret ballots for the performer they thought had the best fluency; all students receive a certificate for participation

The authors conducted a study using Fluency Idol as part of a summer program, finding significant and measurable increases in fluency, especially in the areas of reading with expression and with appropriate volume. Parents were also given pre- and post-assessments, and they noticed an increase in their students’ enjoyment of reading aloud and their decoding skills.

The authors give the following tips:

- Students need multiple opportunities to practice in different ways, such as with modeling, choral reading and echo reading. Moreover, practice needs to happen in a way that they can receive targeted feedback, as well as times when they can practice on their own. In this study, there were undergraduate interns as well as reading therapy dogs that were used to boost the amount of individual/small group practice time, but there are many ways to provide this practice.
- During the “Fluency Idol” performance, play up the theater – banners, a ‘stage,’ etc. can all make students excited to show off. If it works for your context, consider inviting in families.

Conclusion and Citation

Much like Reader’s Theater, “Fluency Idol” brings in elements of performance to give students a fun purpose for working hard and employing best practices in improving their fluency skills.

Cole, K., Koltz, E., & Woolard-Ferguson, T. “Fluency Idol: Using Pop Skills to Engage Students and Boost Fluency Skills.” *The Reading Teacher* 66.6 (Dec./Jan. 2012/13), pp. 454-458. <http://bit.ly/Y0HQd9> (subscription only).