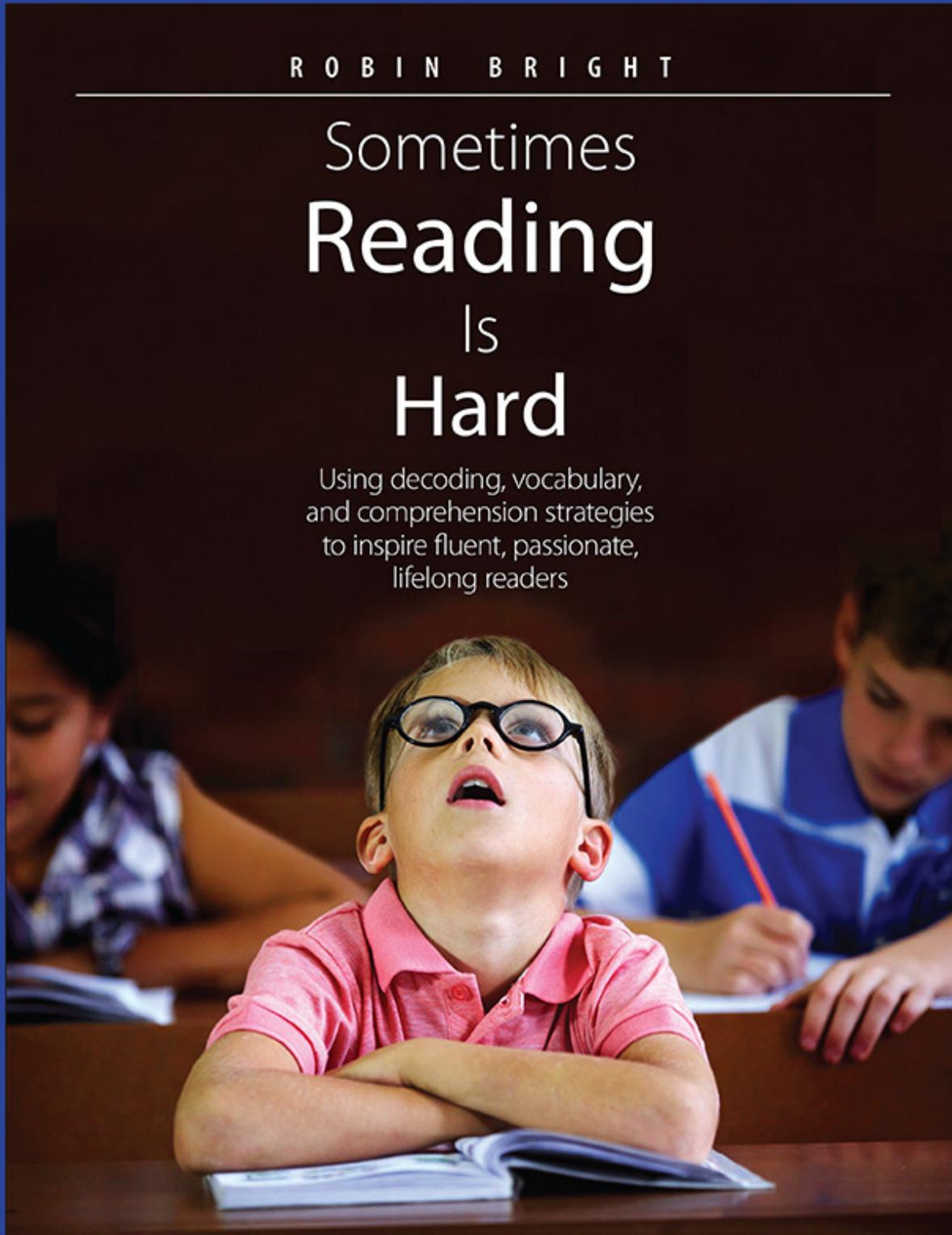


Pull-Out Guide

Highlights from the book *Sometimes Reading is Hard*



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* You can find out more about the book, preview the contents, and purchase a print or e-book version on [our website](#).

The Whole is Greater than the Sum of Its Parts

Beginner readers, like beginner drivers, need to learn both skills and strategies. Experts agree that skilled readers are those who can fluently decode text so effortlessly that reading becomes automatic. Strategic readers can employ effort and deliberation as they encounter difficulties or barriers in a reading.

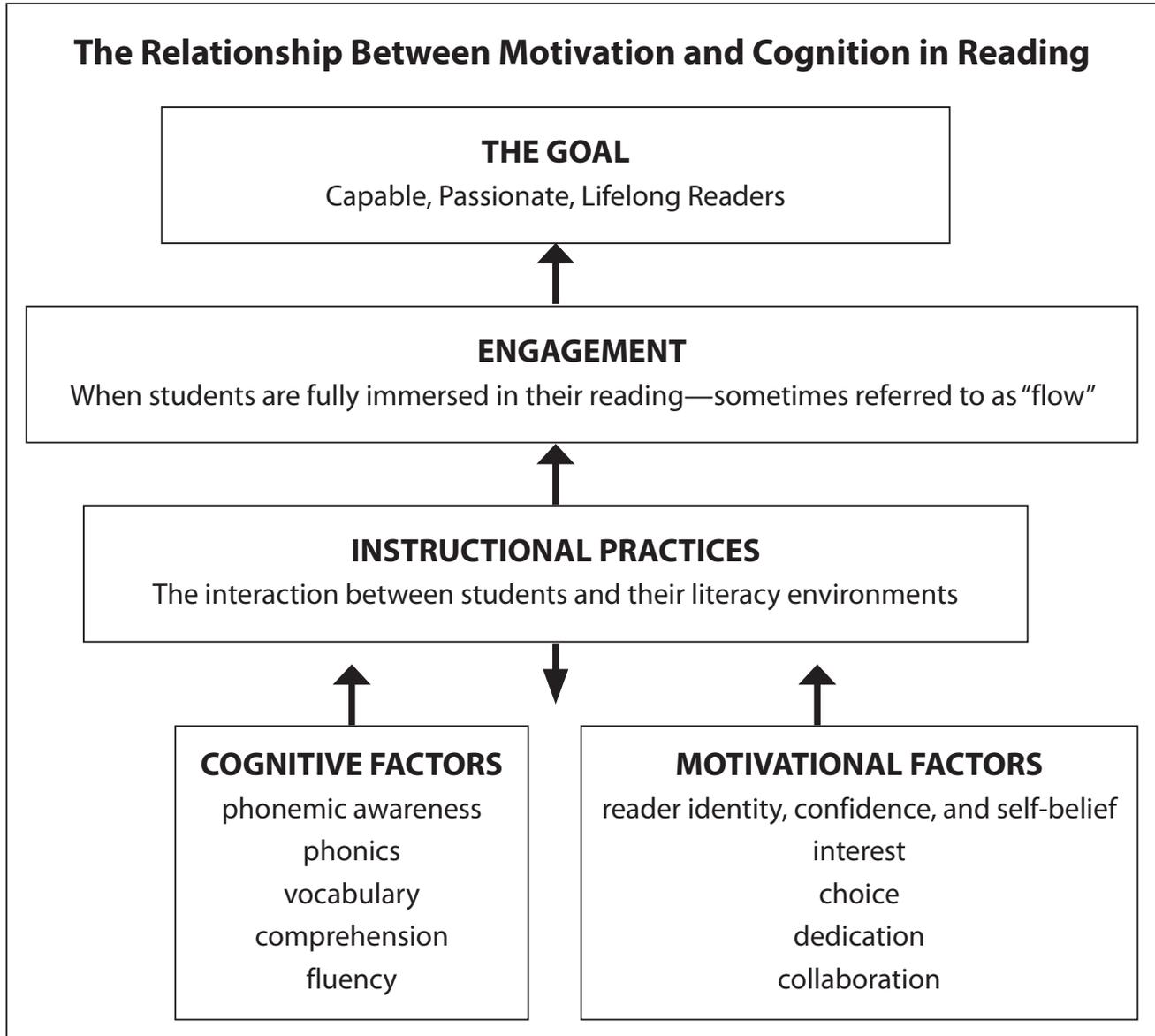
Those are the skills and strategies. But what of motivation in reading? If we spend all our time on reading skills and strategies, students might not feel the why of learning to read. If we always push texts onto students that they must struggle with to decode or make sense of, we are wasting their time and they will become frustrated and lose their confidence as readers. Just as new drivers need time to practice, students need time to practice what I would call “real” reading—the fun stuff.

Real reading is sparked because someone wants to learn something new and gain knowledge. Or they’re just interested and enjoying the experience. Curiosity, interest, and enjoyment are motivational factors that must accompany learning to read. Perhaps most important, real reading is about connecting with others and feeling. It’s impossible not to identify with Oliver in the picture book, *Where Oliver Fits* by Cale Atkinson. He feels like an outsider until he finds a place where he belongs. A child reading about Oliver will connect. Real reading builds both interest and confidence. Teachers and students need to do a lot of it! More reading means more opportunities for students to further develop their skills and strategies.

Reading, like driving, requires synergy. The synergy happens at the intersection of reading skills, strategies, and factors of motivation because—and this is the important part—“the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” Some teachers describe the synergy as when something “clicks” for the reader, the point when it all comes together and it works.

There is nothing quite as exciting as watching a child read a book like Mem Fox’s *Time for Bed* and say, “I read it all by myself,” or a teen who tells you that he has never before read a book like *Long Way Down* by Jason Reynolds and asks you, “Does he have other books?” Students deserve to experience the same kind of jubilant excitement of learning to read that my daughters experienced while learning to drive.

The Relationship Between Motivation and Cognition in Reading



The pathway from instruction to engagement creates lifelong readers.

At-a-Glance Strategies Teachers Can Use To Teach Phonemic Awareness, Phonics Knowledge, and Decoding

Phonemic Awareness

1. Is developed through oral activities.
2. Should be fun and game-like. Keep a sense of playfulness with language and avoid worksheet and drill type learning.
3. Is achieved through songs, chants, and stories that have rhythm and rhyme.
4. Is developed through chanting, singing, and clapping activities.
5. Is supported by sharing high-quality, engaging literature.
6. Leads to fluency.

Phonics knowledge

1. Is taught through explicit, systematic instruction.
2. Begins with the sounds associated with letters and moves to consonant-vowel-consonant patterns.
3. Is developed through segmenting words into sound and blending those sounds.
4. Should be fun and game-like.
5. Is supported by sharing high-quality engaging literature.
6. Leads to fluency.

Decoding

1. Is taught through explicit instruction.
2. Is supported by looking at patterns in written text, for instance, “tion” in words like transportation, locomotion.
3. Is taught through learning about prefixes, suffixes, and multi-syllabic words.
4. Should include the pronunciation of words.
5. Includes seeing similarities and differences in words with similar etymology such as define, definition, definite.
6. Is built through teaching segmentation of words.
7. Is understood in the context of reading.
8. Leads to fluency.

The Goals: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics Knowledge, the Alphabetic Principle, and Decoding

The Goals: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics Knowledge, the Alphabetic Principle, and Decoding

Phonemic awareness: Students hear, recognize, and work with the sounds of language. Phonemic awareness is developed through oral language. Teachers provide opportunities for students to learn

- syllable awareness
- rhymes
- alliteration

Phonics knowledge: Students learn that the letters or symbols of language correspond to sounds. Phonics knowledge is developed through written language. Teachers provide opportunities for students to learn

- initial and final consonants
- onsets and rimes
- blending
- segmenting
- replacing and manipulating sounds

The alphabetic principle: When phonemic awareness and phonics knowledge come together to help students learn to read and spell.

Decoding: Students use phonemic awareness, phonics knowledge, and other clues such as the grammar and syntax of a sentence, contextual clues, word parts, and familiarity with similar words to sound out, recognize, and correctly pronounce words. Teachers provide opportunities for students to learn

- root words
- prefixes and suffixes
- multisyllabic words
- common word syllable patterns (such as *-tion*, *-ing*, and *-ment*)

A Structured Approach to Decoding

A structured approach to teaching decoding is required in the primary grades. Most such programs include the following.

1. Explicit instruction linked to reading. You clearly and deliberately explain key skills.
2. Phonology. You plan lessons that focus on the sounds and letters of language, using such techniques as rhyming, clapping syllables, and counting words in a spoken sentence.
3. Sound-symbol relationships. You use a planned sequence of instruction that is both sequential and cumulative. You begin by teaching foundational skills such as recognizing consonant sounds and vowel sounds, and then progressing to more advanced skills such as blending sounds and segmenting words.
4. Morphology. You provide syllable instruction and help students see word parts as they learn to read.
5. Syntax. You provide opportunities for students to learn about word order and sentence structure.
6. Semantics. You embed phonics instruction into a rich language context by highlighting the relationship among words to create meaning.
7. Opportunities for writing. Through daily writing, students practice and show their developing knowledge of sound-symbol relationships and spelling.
8. Monitoring students' progress. Regular diagnostic assessment is crucial because, once students have developed decoding skills, it is important to move them along as readers.
9. Interventions, as necessary. Interventions are provided to students in small groups or one to one to meet their specific learning needs. Students requiring this extra support might include English language learners (ELL), students with language disabilities, and students with a diagnosis of dyslexia.

Try Tongue Twisters: A Strategy for Practicing Fluency

Fishing for a little fun in your focus on fluency? Add tongue twisters to the mix! They provide an entertaining, light-hearted way for students to practice pro-nunciation and fluency (both oral fluency and reading fluency). Tongue twisters encourage students to chew over words, not just for their spellings or meanings but for their sounds.

When reading specialist Sheila Stern introduced “Fun Fridays with a Focus on Fluency” to her students in Grades 3, 4, and 5, she found students’ fluency made huge improvements. And her students loved it. Tongue twisters can be used at any grade level and can be tailored to specific reading needs as well. You can find tongue twisters that zero in on specific letter sounds, patterns, consonant blends, and vowel sounds. The great thing is that students aren’t intimidated by tongue twisters because, let’s face it, they are hard for you, too.

Teaching Tongue Twisters Step by Step

Start small. I love to start a class on tongue twisters, whether for school-aged students or pre-service teachers, with one word: toyboat. I write this word on the board, and everyone reads it aloud. Not too difficult yet. Then I suggest they try and repeat it three times, then four and even five times. Of course, it gets progressively more difficult because each syllable requires the mouth to take a completely different shape. Try it! The difficulty of saying the word over and over again successfully, according to experts, has to do with the placement of the tongue and how the brain processes sounds. For such a simple word, this is quite a complicated process.

Shorties. Next, find or make a variety of tongue twisters for students to read. These can incorporate sounds for decoding practice as well as vocabulary students are encountering in their reading. Write these out on cards and give them to pairs of students to practice reading together. Remember, collaboration works wonders to help fluency along. I have seen teachers laminate these cards and keep them in a box or link them with a binder ring for ease of use.

Tongue twisters can be alliterative, especially if you want your students to see the relationship between certain sounds and letters, but they don’t need to be. You can use them to provide fluency practice for a variety of sounds in language and vocabulary. Here are a few for you to try:

- “Five frivolous friends followed Frankenstein.”
- “Ethan eats elegant Easter eggs.”
- “Yellow butter, purple jelly, red jam, black bread.”
- “Any noise annoys an oyster, but a noisy noise annoys an oyster more.”

Twister books. Find a set of books with tongue twisters that are just right for your students' grade level and interests. Here are a few to get you started:

- *A Greyhound, a Groundhog* by Emily Jenkins (ages 5–7)
- *Tongue Twisters for Kids* by Riley Weber (ages 6–10)
- *Orangutang Tongs: Poems to Tangle Your Tongue* by Jon Agee (ages 4–8)
- *Double Trouble in Walla Walla* by Andrew Clements (ages 7–11)

Watching the results. If students have access to tablets, phones, or other technology with video capability, encourage them to capture themselves reading their tongue twisters to view or share with others. If you teach young children, have them look in a mirror as they say the tongue-twister words. This lets them see how they move their mouths to make certain sounds. This adds a metacognitive aspect to the “game.”

Reflection. While some tongue twisters are easily memorized, encourage your students to read the twisters as they repeat them. This will emphasize fluency. After working with tongue twisters for several weeks, ask your students if they think it has helped with their reading fluency. This is an important step, especially with older readers who can and should be encouraged to reflect on their own reading progress throughout the school year.

Vocabulary: Teaching How to Build a Library of Words

Books for Budding Word Nerds

Elementary

- *The Word Collector* by Peter H. Reynolds
- *The Missing Donut* (from the Big Words, Small Stories series) by Judith Henderson
- *Look! I Wrote a Book! (And You Can Too!)* by Sally Lloyd-Jones

Middle school

- *The Lost Words* by Robert Macfarlane
- *What a Wonderful Word* by Nicola Edwards
- *One Word for Kids* by Jon Gordon

High school

- *Misery Is a Smell in Your Backpack* by Harriet Ziefert
- *Beauty Is a Verb: The New Poetry of Disability* edited by Sheila Black, Jennifer Bartlett, and Michael Northen
- *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur

All ages

- *When We Were Alone* by David A. Robertson (themes: Indigenous knowledge and history, social justice, strength, and empowerment)
- *Cicada* by Shaun Tan (themes: hope, perseverance, bullying, transformation)
- *How to Read a Book* by Kwame Alexander and Melissa Sweet (themes: reading enjoyment, language, poetry)

For the teacher

- *Thereby Hangs a Tale* by Charles Earle Funk
- *The Mother Tongue* by Bill Bryson
- *The Word Circus* by Richard Lederer

Comprehension: How To Construct Meaning From Reading

How to Be an Active Reader

-  /  I ask myself questions like, "What does this remind me of?"
-  /  I stop reading for a minute or slow down to see if I can remember what I read.
-  /  I go back and look at pictures or diagrams.
-  /  I reread sections that I have already read.
-  /  I try to picture what I am reading by closing my eyes and visualizing what is happening.
-  /  I write things down like the names of the characters or the parts of a plant.
-  /  I say to myself, "Could I tell someone else what this is about?"

Sometimes Reading Is Hard explores the science of reading and shows teachers how to balance decoding, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency skills with a love of reading. Full of ready-to-use instructional strategies, this timely book demonstrates fresh ways to build student confidence, curiosity, and empathy.

When students say that reading is boring, difficult, overwhelming, it is almost impossible to sell them on the idea that reading is fun and worthwhile. The powerful classroom examples in this remarkable book demonstrate how to help students develop the skills they need to be successful readers. These skills activities are balanced with innovative approaches for nurturing passionate, lifelong readers.

Sometimes Reading Is Hard looks at planning lessons, balancing instruction, and reflecting on and adapting proven classroom practice. This comprehensive resource is based on the belief that students will want to read when they

- develop a *positive identity* that inspires confidence and belief in their reading abilities
- are *interested* in what they are reading
- exercise a degree of *choice* over their reading
- have the skills of a *dedicated* reader to overcome challenges
- can *collaborate* and *talk* with others about their reading

These beliefs form the core of the step-by-step activities in this remarkable book. Classroom vignettes throughout the book include new ways of using effective teaching tools such as mentor texts, guided reading, poetry, and reading conferences. These model lessons around *decoding*, *vocabulary*, *comprehension*, and *fluency* are balanced with techniques for inspiring students to read for pleasure.

This practical approach to teaching reading will help teachers give all their students the proficiency and passion for reading they will need to live life to the fullest.



A teacher, researcher, literacy leader and award-winning author, **Robin Bright** is a professor of Education at the University of Lethbridge. A former elementary school teacher, Robin's passion for children's development as readers and writers drew her to a life of researching language and literacy in school and home settings. Robin teaches undergraduate and graduate students in the areas of Early Childhood/Elementary/Middle Education, Reading, Writing, and Children's and Young Adult Literature. Her previous book *From Your Child's Teacher* won the Parent's Guide Award.

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