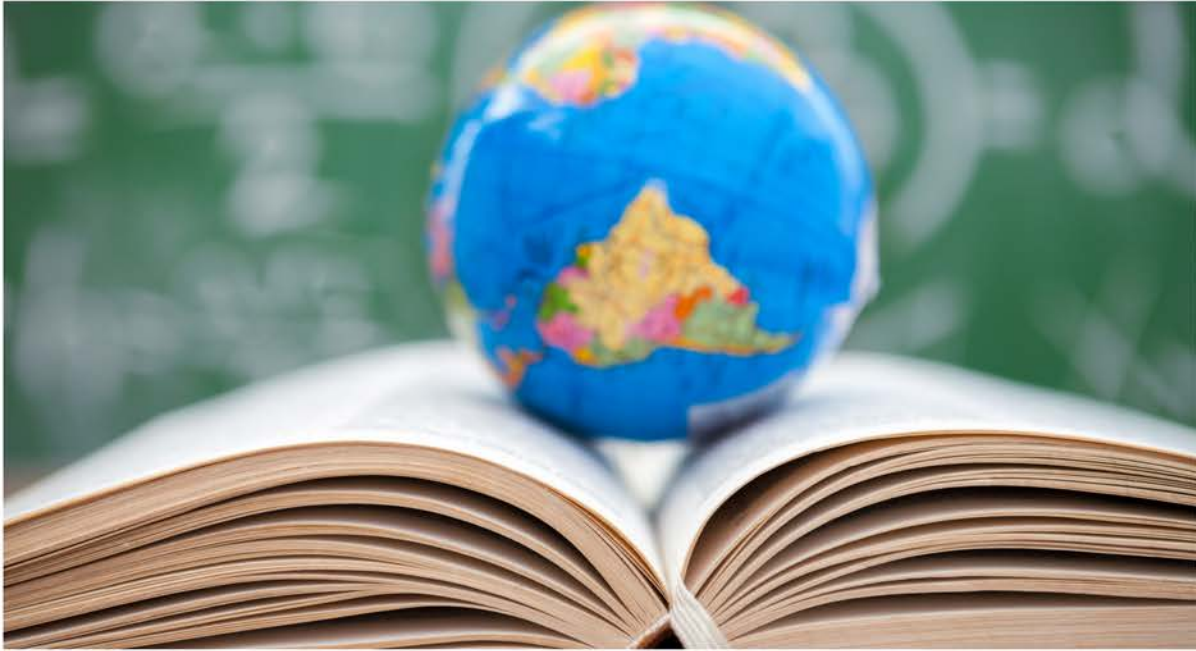


# Literacy News

Association for Literacy Educators and Researchers



## President's Message

Dear ALER Colleagues,  
As I eagerly anticipate our Fall 2025 meeting at the Skirvin Hotel in Oklahoma City, I hope you are making plans to be with us! This year's theme, *We See You: Supporting the Practices of All Readers and Literacy Leaders*, will allow us as literacy educators and researchers opportunities to collaborate and communicate regarding what it means to be seen, especially in times when the landscape of literacy and literacy research is rapidly changing and often contested.

At the conference this year, we will share several new collaborations and initiatives both within our organization and in partnership with other organizations.

While our field continues to face challenges, these new opportunities will allow us to reclaim space and support one another as educators, researchers, and humans.

Finally, we hope that you are able to join us for the 2025 conference, so we may continue to see one another as we endeavor to use our influence in our respective spaces to promote literacy and thinking. Regardless of role, we see *you* and hope you will make plans to be in Oklahoma City from November 6 - November 8.

*Ashley Horton*



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## Approaching Reading like Basketball: Making the Reading Process Visible

by Matthew Panozzo, University of Memphis

"Do you play basketball?"

At 6'5", it is a logical inquiry as height is an asset on the basketball court.

While I never took to sports, many middle school students center their identities on what they play—at recess, in P.E., and in extracurriculars. They live for connection and competition, whether it is a school team, a recreational team, or a game among friends. Their interest in sports shapes the texts they select. Books like Kwame Alexander's (2014) *The Crossover* and Gene Luen Yang's (2020) *Dragon Hoops* would make their rounds from student to student in my class. I asked myself: how can reading be seen as a sport?

There is eye movement through the saccades, but some of my students were unable to conceptualize how much happens in the brain while reading! My job became making the process visible through a sports analogy.

### Understanding the Crossover

In basketball, the point-guard must understand the rules of the game and strategize how to score the most points. They study playbooks, review game films, and create their own plays. They read the court, the body language of players, and anticipate next moves. This process is perfected through practice, where they have a coach guiding, conditioning, and helping them reflect on game-play and see the larger court. David Yeager (2024) describes basketball coach Chip Engelland's approach, noting "Chip respected his players' autonomy and wanted them to do the thinking because they would compete in the game, not him" (p. 13).

When it comes to reading, the same philosophy and approach applies. A reader must understand language rules. They apply this knowledge to various genres and styles of texts—hopefully even producing their own. They decode the symbols and string them together to comprehend what is going on. Likewise, a teacher guides them through the reading process, modeling, scaffolding, and providing feedback. When teachers make reading visible like coaches do for sports, we grow confident, capable, autonomous readers. To do this, we must teach the rules, position the readers, and practice.

### Teaching the Rules

When learning the basics, coaches rotate players through different positions allowing young athletes to learn the ins and outs of the game. Beyond practice, young athletes learn about the game by admiring professionals. How many students practice what they see on TV, emulating their favorite athletes? My middle schoolers frequently wadded up a piece of paper and yelled "Kobe!" while flicking it into the trash can.

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Reading happens much in the same way. Students must learn the foundations but also be given a clear purpose for reading (Allyn & Morrell, 2016). Teachers should model their own reading behaviors through think alouds (Harvey & Goudvis, 2017). This is like sports commentators offering a play-by-play recap in a game. Coupling modeling with teacher feedback helps the student make sense of the reading process and become proficient, self-aware readers actively utilizing the tools at their disposal (Harvey & Ward, 2017; Ortlieb & Schatz, 2020).



### Positioning the Reader

Imagine a basketball game without communication. Just the squeak of sneakers, thump of a ball bouncing, and the satisfying swish of the net. It is hard to imagine teams playing in silence. Coaches teach players how to communicate on the court. They help players find their voice so they can embody their role during the game.

For my English classroom, the reader response is where students find their voice and relation to the text. When a student is paired with an engaging text, they cannot wait to discuss, react, create, and share. To accommodate for different reactions, teachers may provide choice in response styles. For example, if a student is dissatisfied with a scene, they could rewrite it. Or, to bring students deeper into the scene, they might transmediate a narrative into a graphic novel. I have even integrated coding to allow students to create interactive posters of scenes from Edgar Allan Poe's short stories (Panozzo & Hockless, 2024). These strategies help students see the transactional relationship of a text (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994).

### Practice

A championship does not come without practice. If we want our students to grow into ravenous readers, we need to give them opportunities to practice and develop their agency (Ortlieb & Schatz, 2020). When we offer students choice (e.g. text, format, assessment, individually or shared), we are empowering them as readers. As teachers, we should allow students to explore different texts to see how the genres, styles, and formats resonate with them. I cannot begin to tell you how many of my students see themselves as readers because of a graphic novel or thematic unit where they could select their own text around a topic. The latter allowed them the chance to see how their reading offered nuance and insight to our class discussion.

### Concluding Thought

Some might disagree with my desire for reading to be viewed like basketball, but when we help students see how active their mind can be while reading, we unlock wonder and creativity! Offering students choice promotes their sense of self, encourages a sense of belonging, and allows the formation of communities based around their reading interests. Just like fans enthusiastically cheering on their favorite teams, readers cheer for their favorite characters to triumph over conflicts and challenges. They learn that they too are capable of doing the same. 🌍

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# DIVISION DIALOGUE


## Teacher Education & Professional Learning (TEPL)

by Shelly Landreth, Chair-elect, The University of Texas Permian Basin

The Teacher Education and Professional Learning Division (TEPL) is ready for Oklahoma!

The TEPL division reaches across many research topics and fosters many professional collaborations. The mission statement of the Teacher Education and Professional Learning Division states that the division shall advance and support high quality pre-service and in-service preparatory programs and curricula for education professionals engaged in professional study in higher education, including meeting the needs of diverse learners using innovative techniques and strategies.

The Teacher Education and Professional Learning Division (TEPL) will be hosting its annual business meeting at the ALER conference, and we hope to see you there! Each year the division members are asked to submit roundtable proposals to share out with the membership. We are happy to share that 12 round table presentations will take place in Oklahoma! Come and hear more from each of these groups of presenters about their work related to teacher education and professional development. TEPL members often talk about the deep conversations that they have with other members of the division around their research activities during these round table sessions. We would love for you to be a part of this research sharing community!

If you have questions about the TEPL Division, please contact Aimee Morewood (Chair) at [tepl@teacheredproflearn.org](mailto:tepl@teacheredproflearn.org) or Shelly Landreth (Chair-elect) at [landreth\\_s@utpb.edu](mailto:landreth_s@utpb.edu). 



# ALER 2025

Teacher Education & Professional Learning (TEPL) Division Session

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**Saturday, November 8 from 1:35-3:05 in the Continental Room**





## Preparing Literacy Educators for Inclusive Classrooms: Building Cultural Competence Through Oral and Written Language

by Katina Thomas, Prairie View A&M University

Writing serves as one of the most authentic and personalized productions of work that one can create. Coupled with oral language, it influences one's literacy abilities (Dockrell & Connelly, 2009). During early literacy development, oral expression and writing are demonstrations of a student's phonics, spelling, vocabulary, and word knowledge (Schrodt et al., 2024). However, in a college-level literacy education course, they can serve as a resource for building an awareness of culture that teacher candidates can apply in their future classrooms.

Culture is defined as the shared customs, languages, values, beliefs, and achievements of a group of people (Lustig & Koester, 2010; Sawchuk, 2022), and Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995, 2014) framed cultural relevance to integrate the concept of culture into pedagogical practices. Culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) consists of instructional practices that build cultural competence, foster academic success, and nurture socio-political thinking. Specifically, cultural competence involves the awareness of one's culture and those around them. Establishing cultural competence, when intersected with the understanding of literacy subskills in a teacher preparation course, establishes a learning environment that impacts the trajectory of pre-service literacy educators' development.

Building cultural awareness with my pre-service literacy educators begins the first week of each literacy education course. During the initial class meeting, students are expected to use the technology device of their choice (laptop computer, tablet, or cellular phone) to respond to a six-question prompt in complete sentences on an online discussion board. In written format, students list their name, classification, and the area of educator certification they seek. Students are then prompted to describe any teaching experience they possess. Teaching experience is not limited to a traditional classroom environment; they are encouraged to describe experiences with tutoring, substitute teaching, coaching, mentoring, parenting, camp counseling, or any additional personal accounts in which they are responsible for assisting someone with learning. Next, students must elaborate on what they expect to learn from the course. Presenting this prompt steers their focus onto their academic and professional goals from a student-centered perspective. Lastly, they are prompted to identify the grade level(s) they desire to teach if they receive a teaching contract and the rationale for their selection. Once students have completed their writing, they are expected to approach two classmates with whom they are unfamiliar to share their responses.

This interactive portion of the activity intersects the application of oral and written expression with the culturally relevant component of cultural competence. Students walk around class, introduce themselves to each other, and use their written responses as a source to broaden their cultural knowledge of their peers as they strengthen their oral and written skills.



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As students use their oral and written language, they build relationships with their classmates through shared cultural connections and expand their networks to peers with differing cultural blueprints.

Following the activity, students are asked to discuss the relevance of the introductory activity. Throughout the class discussion, students share the impact oral and written communication has on student literacy development. Conversations also center around the importance of being culturally aware as educators when teaching literacy. Modeling culturally competent writing assists my pre-service teachers in understanding how being culturally informed through collaboration and discussion of students' backgrounds enhances engagement and meaning-making in literacy (Kelly & Moore, 2021).

Teacher cultural competence deepens an understanding of how to adapt literacy instruction for diverse learners that validates their identities and strengthens their literacy outcomes (Gibson, 2022; Dunham, 2025). Each time I engage these future educators in candid discussion about the value of oral and written expressions in relation to their shared and differing norms and experiences, they begin to perceive the influence of culture on literacy development and literacy instruction. As my pre-service literacy educators advance in preparation for their classroom environments, I want them to develop instructional approaches that affirm their students' identities and strengthen their literacy engagement. 🌍

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**ALER 2025**

"We See You": Supporting the Practices of All Readers and Literacy Leaders

November 6-8, 2025

[www.aleronline.org](http://www.aleronline.org)



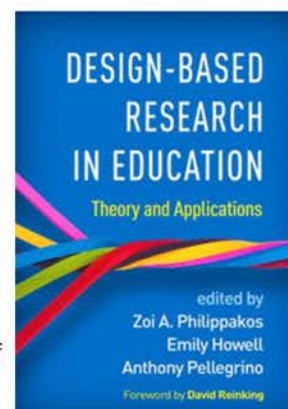
## Literacy Bookshelf



### A Review: Design-Based Research in Education: Theory and Applications

edited by Zoi A. Philippakos, Emily Howell, and Anthony Pellegrino

review by Nabanita Baruah, Sam Houston State University

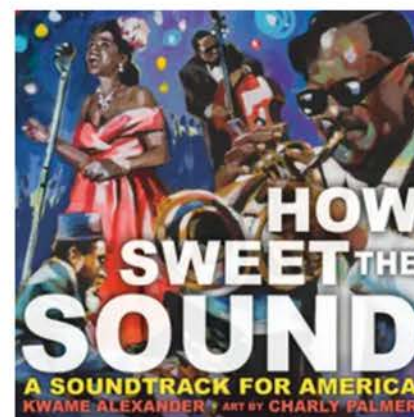


This summer, I came across an intriguing book—initially chosen out of necessity, but over time, I became increasingly attracted to it. This edited volume discusses Design-Based Research (DBR) as a methodology capable of transforming teaching and learning to better align with curricular goals and educators' intentions. What makes this book captivating is how it links theory and practice, staying true to John Dewey's educational philosophy by integrating research into real classroom settings.

This book provides a dynamic and practical approach, emphasizing what “works, how, for whom, and when” (p. xxii). It highlights the importance of collaboration between researchers and practitioners, with a strong focus on equity. A central theme is the value of iterative cycles—design, implementation, reflection, and revision as essential to meaningful educational change. One practical tool introduced is the “conjecture map” (p.15), which helps educators visualize and articulate their ideas, clearly connecting research to everyday literacy instruction to support student learning and outcomes. This book offers literacy educators real-world guidance on connecting research with classroom practice. Emphasizing iterative design and reflection, it provides tools—like the conjecture map—to help teachers adapt instruction based on student needs and data. Encouraging collaboration and continuous reflection, it supports literacy educators and student researchers in using research to improve literacy outcomes. 🌍

### A Review: How Sweet the Sound: A Soundtrack for America by Kwame Alexander

review by Michelle Lenarz, Walsh University



While on summer vacation at the idyllic Chautauqua Institution, I became acquainted with Kwame Alexander's, *How Sweet the Sound: A Soundtrack for America*, through an art exhibition of Charly Palmer's illustrations that showcased their partnership between art and literature. *How Sweet the Sound* takes the reader on an odyssey of Black music from West African talking drums to the chorus of the Black Lives Matter protests. Palmer's vibrantly colored illustrations, rendered in acrylic on board, accompany the names of memorable musicians, song titles, and lyrics that Alexander seamlessly weaves into his poetry. This kaleidoscope of the American soundtrack of Black music—heard in hymns, swung to jazz, rocked with a revolution, and sung with the sound of survival of the Black experience in America—reverberates in the reader's eardrums. The book includes extensive back matter, “musical notes,” that provides more context and history about the music, from African chants to rap and hip hop, and musicians, from Louis Armstrong to Prince. Toyomi Igus' *i see the rhythm*, illustrated by Michele Wood, makes an excellent paired text as Igus' poetry traces the genres of African American music over the past 500 years, from African storytellers, griots, to rap and hip hop. 🌍



## Literacy Bookshelf

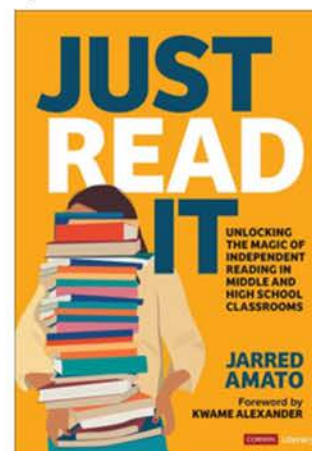


### A Review: Just Read It: Unlocking the magic of independent reading in middle school classrooms

by Jared Amato

review by Soumi Chakraborti, Cinco Ranch Junior High, Katy ISD

With thoughtful, student centered structures and strategies to sustain independent reading success, *Just Read It* by Dr. Jarred Amato, offers ready-to-go activities to establish routines and continue literacy growth in middle school classrooms. Dr. Amato's Read and WRAP (write, reflect, analyze, participate) framework helps teachers cultivate meaningful learning interactions with daily dedication to independent reading time, followed by whole-group reflections, conversations, and community-building activities. The WRAP activities encourage students to build their reading identity by self-awareness, critical thinking, and fostering a deep understanding of the learning processes. When young minds are given opportunities to engage in their own reflections, they are able to build greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence. This incredible book is full of ideas, inspirations, and activities that empower teachers to bring back the joy of reading and build the culture of reading in their classrooms. 🌍



This book has eight chapters. Each chapter offers strategies and advice to engage and motivate middle and secondary school students during their process of reading. For example, in one of the initial chapters, Dr. Amato shares his thoughts about altering the reading mindset. Students' and teachers' mindset determine the motivation and engagement in literacy classrooms. It is necessary to determine the mindset the students bring into their classrooms. There are strategies in this book that provide literacy educators with a remarkable opportunity to change mindset and help grow confident readers. Additionally, Dr. Amato clarifies the integration of independent reading with whole-class novels, ensuring an equitable practice that meets curriculum demands and fosters a love of reading. He also provides insights into launching and leading a Project LIT chapter, further promoting literacy and community engagement. This book has a plethora of ready-to-go activities which can successfully manage to engage even reluctant readers to enjoy reading.

### A Review: Equitable Literacy Instruction for Students in Poverty

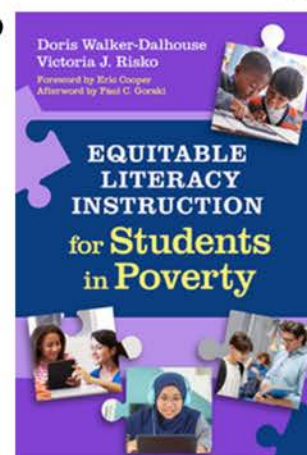
by Doris Walker-Dalhouse and Victoria J. Risko

review by Jennifer Lakas, University at Albany-SUNY

*Equitable Literacy Instruction for Students in Poverty* provides guidance for those who work with and those who care about the education of students whose life experiences are situated in poverty. This text reminds educators how impactful pedagogical choices can be for students.

The authors divide the book into three sections which focus on situating knowledge about poverty and how it is related to student's literacy development, equity-centered instructional and assessment practices, and support for educators who advocate for change. Within each chapter the authors provide contextual and research-supported information around a specific topic followed by illustrative vignettes that demonstrate how practitioners can execute the ideas presented.

This text was easy to read and rich with relevant, information. The vignettes in each chapter provided glimpses into classrooms wherein poverty and inequity play a role in daily life. Strategies center the role of students and an appreciation for all they bring to the classroom. 🌍





## Member Spotlight: Shelly Landreth The University of Texas Permian Basin

### Tell us a little about yourself.

It's hard to believe, but this year, I am beginning my 30th year as an educator. I spent 23 years teaching middle school and high school English and Reading before moving into higher education in 2019 when I took on the role of Assistant Professor of Literacy at the University of Texas Permian Basin. In August of 2025, I was promoted to Associate Professor and Chair of Teacher Education, a role I never would have thought possible. As an undergraduate student, I was prepared well by my professors at Sam Houston State University, and it is humbling to do the important work I am called to do now as a teacher educator. I love spending time outdoors, especially hiking and exploring state and national parks. I have two grown children, a husband, and a very spoiled cat, Rosie!

### When did you become a member of ALER?

### What do you enjoy about the ALER community and the conference?

I joined ALER in 2017 when I was a student in the doctoral program at Sam Houston State University. I attended my first conference in St. Petersburg that same year to co-present with my dissertation chair, Dr. Chase Young. With the exception of the year the conference was cancelled due to COVID, I have returned every year, and this organization has become my conference home. The membership is amazing and so welcoming and supportive! I love attending and presenting at the conference and learning from my literacy colleagues. I always come away feeling renewed and motivated. Due to my continued engagement, I have been offered opportunities to collaborate in scholarly activities, join and serve on various committees, and more.

### What research are you currently working on?

I am working on a collaborative project with several members of the Specialized Literacy Professionals special interest group—you'll have to come to our session at this year's conference to learn more about that! I have a publication under review that I co-wrote with three of my undergraduate students. We wrote about a literacy-based service learning project where we partnered with a local school on a motivational reading program focused on the Texas Bluebonnet books. I am also working on putting together a resource for teachers connected to a fluency intervention I designed for my dissertation.

Back in 2021, I had an article published in the *Journal of Educational Research* describing the intervention, and I have continued to receive emails requesting curriculum materials—I'm excited to be finally making time for this project!

### Do you have any recent publications that you would like to share with the ALER community?

A project I am very proud of is one I worked on with teacher educators from across the country as part of the US PREP Coalition. I was invited to participate in the creation of a peer-reviewed Curriculum Toolkit (2024) focused on practice-based coursework. Not only am I proud of the materials we developed together, but I was truly inspired by my experience working with this innovative group of teacher educators.

### Any words of wisdom for early career faculty?

First, find a good mentor. This is so important when you are just starting out. An experienced mentor can provide practical advice to help you navigate the sometimes-tricky environment of higher education. Your mentor does not have to be in your department or even in your college—a few of my best mentors are colleagues I met through my engagement in ALER. Second, set goals annually and create an action plan to meet them! Doing this will help you stay focused on what you need to do and keep you from overloading yourself with projects and commitments that aren't in line with your goals (this is easier said, than done!). And finally, do not fall into the trap of comparing yourself with others. Figure out your identity as a faculty member and what you can contribute using your gifts and talents, and do it to the best of your ability!

### What brings you literacy joy?

I am currently on the board for the Recording Library of West Texas, a non-profit that has been providing recorded texts for blind, low-vision, or print-impaired clients since 1963. It brings me great joy to work alongside the other board members to further the mission of this organization. Not only do the volunteers "lend their voices" to provide access to print, but they also provide access to the local community and the world. 







## Social Consciousness through Graphic Novels

by Lori Spradley, Auburn University

Libraries have long been at the forefront of advancing intellectual freedom and information flow, positioning them strategically to enhance social awareness through the use of graphic novels (Scullin et al., 2024). Librarians extend their efforts beyond collection development to teaching students how to look beyond the stories and interpret the societal struggles and accomplishments depicted in books (Higginbotham et al., 2022). During this practice, students can view the world and its inequities more broadly and understand the consequences of ignoring different perspectives (McDevitt, 2021). Graphic novels are tools for students' social activism and engagement (McClanahan, 2022), and can enhance students' literacy skills (Ranker, 2007).

### Graphic Novels as a Tool for Social Change

Graphic novels can effortlessly tap into complex societal and cultural issues, which in turn provides educators the potential to promote communication among students from different backgrounds (Rainford, 2021). Graphic novelists provide the reader with an interplay of text and image, which allows for an in-depth look into the core ideological battles and social values (Barab et al., 2010). Comics are a highly accessible form of visual data. Through the intermingling of words and images, they are well-suited to convey the multidimensionality of real life, making them practical tools for social sense-making (Darnhofer, 2018).

With unique visual language and storytelling, experiences unfold through the pages, broadening the reader's perspective on life. This attribute significantly enhances the possibility of exploring social consciousness themes on a systemic level.

### Instructional Strategies

To fully utilize graphic novels and assist students in maximizing their benefits from this format, educators can employ several instructional strategies. One of the strategies I used frequently in information literacy lessons involved guided reading sessions where students evaluate how pictures and words work together to convey a message. Students are tasked with designing their own graphic stories or comics as a means to investigate and present significant social themes or their personal journeys (Hartel et al., 2017; Brown, 2013).

Another practical approach is to use graphic novels as a basis for a Socratic seminar where students debate and discuss their perceptions about the characters and society depicted in the book. For instance, students can discuss the messages a graphic novel conveys and give more thought to complex social issues (Aziz & Aziz, 2023).

Furthermore, educators can implement multimodal approaches in students' responses, such as digital storytelling projects and visual essays, which can further empower students' ability to synthesize information and articulate their understanding of complex social issues presented in graphic novels (Issa, 2017).



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Another example, related to the classroom application of graphic novels, is when students are asked to create new endings or alternative character viewpoints, which helps them consider the story from different perspectives and boosts their critical thinking (Rycroft, 2014). These strategies align with the constructivist approach to learning, which theorizes that learners acquire knowledge through active engagement in activities and the application of graphical and cognitive techniques (Yussof et al., 2012).

These approaches also align with the principles of self-selected reading, allowing students to choose materials that resonate with their interests, thereby fostering intrinsic motivation and deeper engagement with the content (Petrich, 2015). Instructors who decide to implement metacognitive reading strategies as part of the course-based curriculum ensure that students have an awareness of how they read, which enhances their ability to handle complex texts and transfer this skill to other courses. For example, the use of techniques such as think-alouds or reciprocal teaching to explicitly model how meaning is constructed in graphic novels can be highly effective (Jelani et al, 2023). Thanks to these skills, students can adequately understand complex stories because they know how to use metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension (Ghimire & Mokhtari, 2025).

The incorporation of graphic novels into the school curriculum to raise students' awareness and help them acquire new skills is compelling. Thanks to this feature, educators can use them to advance learning on social issues across several disciplines. By leveraging their unique multimodal format, these narratives provide a dynamic platform for exploring complex social issues and promoting critical thinking.🌍

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# Research Spotlight

## Literacy Research and Instruction (LRI)

### Volume 6, Issue 4

#### LRI Mission

To publish high-quality manuscripts that engage with current literacy topics, showcase diverse methodologies, and amplify a variety of lenses and perspectives. We aim to foster meaningful conversations that continue to advance the field of literacy research and instruction. Here are some highlights from our recent issue.

### Helping Children Achieve Literacy Proficiency: A Case Study

by Leonardo Herrera & Richard G. Lambert

Discover how one case study sheds light on practical strategies that help children move closer to literacy proficiency, offering insights teachers can use immediately.



### Empowering Adolescent Emergent Readers in Government Schools: An Exploration of Multimodal Texts as Pathways to Comprehension

by Aruna Parandhama

This study explores how multimodal texts open new doors for adolescent readers, transforming classrooms into spaces of engagement and comprehension.

### A Systematic Review of Rehearsal Use in Literacy Methods Courses

by Murphy K. Young & Amy Gillespie Rouse

What role does rehearsal play in teacher preparation? This review synthesizes research to reveal how practice opportunities impact literacy instruction.



### “Making Sure the Books Check Every Box”: Preservice Teachers Learning to Select Texts for Reading Instruction

by Catherine Lammert, Elfrieda H. Hiebert, & Samuel DeJulio

How do future teachers decide which books belong in their classrooms? This article dives into preservice teachers' learning process when selecting texts.

continued on next page



## Behavioral Engagement Mediates the Relationship Between Main Idea Summarization and Multiple Document Comprehension

by Ymkje E. Haverkamp, Ivar Bråten, Natalia Latini, & Helge I. Strømsø

This study uncovers how student engagement plays a critical role in connecting summarization skills to deeper comprehension across texts. 🌍



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- **Research/Publication Spotlight:** Share recent research or a recent publication with ALER members. Write a piece about how you came to this research and why it is important to literacy education and provide link if published. Suggested Word Count: 500-600

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