



Session 8:
**The Importance of Knowledge
Building**

Teacher Professional Development Series



Recap

In our last session, we spent time...

- explaining the different components of reading fluency - rate, accuracy, and prosody
- explaining how you can use fluency norms and prosody rubrics to gauge a student's ability to read with fluency.



Today's Objective

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- ★ explain the importance of building a solid knowledge base among students - particularly K-2 students.
- ★ explain how knowledge impacts comprehension.



What is background knowledge and why is it important?

Put simply, *background knowledge* refers to what a student knows about a topic. They must also be able to activate that knowledge to support their comprehension.

According to Robert Marzano, "What students already know about the content is one of the strongest indicators of how well they will learn new information relative to the content" (2004, p. 1).



SOURCE: Cain, 2020; Marzano, 2004

What is background knowledge and why is it important?

Studies have consistently shown that students with a greater amount of background knowledge tend to be stronger at reading comprehension than those with more limited background knowledge.

They must also be able to activate and readily access that background knowledge.

A child with lower reading skill can partially compensate by having a higher degree of background knowledge (particularly as it relates to recall, less significant when it comes to making inferences).

SOURCE: [Smith, Snow, Serry, and Hammond, 2021](#)



Background Knowledge in Literacy Instruction

- Building background knowledge is an essential component of literacy instruction.
- It requires a transition away from the “skills-focused” approach that has characterized much literacy instruction for the past few years.
- Learning objectives like “ask and answer questions” or “examine text features of informational text” reflect a skills-based approach to literacy instruction.



SOURCE: Wexler, 2019

Background Knowledge

- Building a broad base of knowledge with your students is a crucial component of good reading instruction.
- As you build their knowledge base, they are able to think, speak, and write about many different topics.
- Many of our widely used curricula have a focus on building a wide knowledge base among students.



Background Knowledge

- Building background knowledge goes hand-in-hand with the application of comprehension skills.
- As students' knowledge in carefully curated content areas increases, you will be able to identify when they are demonstrating important comprehension skills or if there are gaps in their ability to process information.
- Comprehension skills should not be taught in isolation - support for these "skills" should be explicitly integrated in the work of building background knowledge.



The Louisiana Student Standards and Background Knowledge



Key Ideas and Details

1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
2. a. Retell stories, including key details.
b. Recognize and understand the central message or lesson.
3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

Craft and Structure

4. Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.
5. Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types.
6. Identify who is telling the story at various points in a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.
8. (Not applicable to literature)
9. Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.

The Louisiana Student Standards and Background Knowledge

Reading Standards for Informational Text

Key Ideas and Details

1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
2. Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text.
3. Describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text.

Craft and Structure

4. Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text.
5. Know and use various text features (e.g., headings, tables of contents, glossaries, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts or information in a text.
6. Distinguish between information provided by pictures or other illustrations and information provided by the words in a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas.
8. Identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.
9. Identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic (e.g., in illustrations, descriptions, or procedures).

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

10. With prompting and support read informational texts appropriately complex for grade 1.



Background Knowledge - Determining What's Important

- Many of our curricula have a strong focus on building a coherent knowledge base that is culturally responsive and grounded in an understanding of what knowledge is most essential for students to be erudite, engaged, and productive members of society.
- If you develop your own lessons, there are many resources that you can use to develop an appropriate sequence.



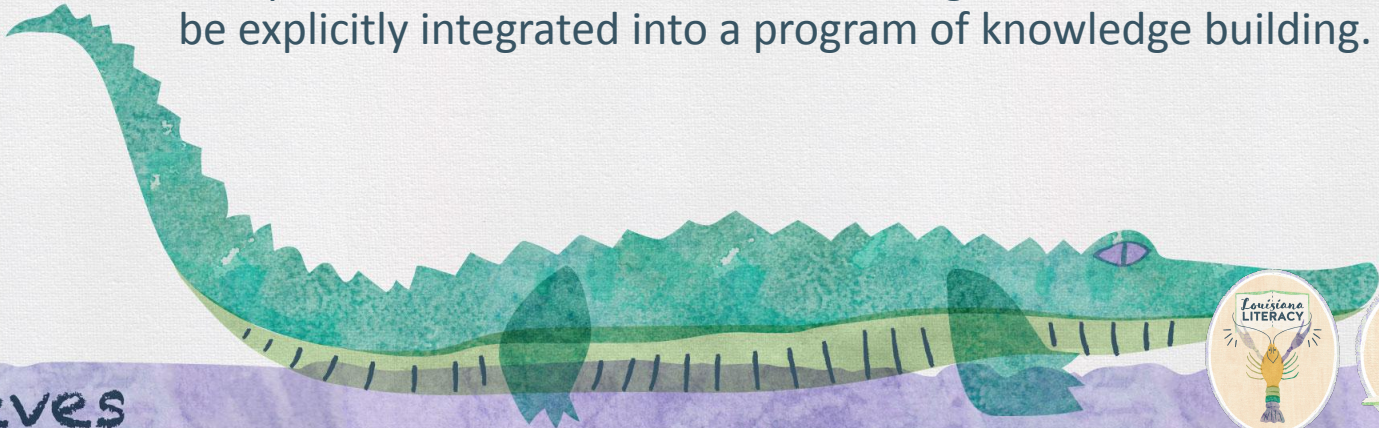
Background Knowledge - Determining What's Important

- For grades K-8, the Core Knowledge Sequence provides content-specific, cumulative, and coherent curriculum guidelines for all major content areas: language arts, history and geography, visual arts, music, mathematics, and science,
- The [Core Knowledge Sequence](#) is freely available for non-commercial use.



Final Thoughts

- Providing students with background knowledge is an important component of literacy instruction.
- Students with background knowledge are able to comprehend texts better than students with limited background knowledge.
- Comprehension skills should not be taught in isolation, but should instead be explicitly integrated into a program of knowledge building.



Engage!

Share some ways that you work to build background knowledge among your students.



References

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