



PODCAST LISTENING GUIDE:

Adolescent Literacy



Hi Teacher Friends!

Welcome to the Podcast Listening Guide!

We know the Science of Reading can sometimes feel big and overwhelming. That's why we started the Melissa & Lori Love Literacy podcast. Each week, we talk with researchers, teachers, and literacy experts who break down the research and share ideas you can try right away.

This guide pulls those conversations together around one focused topic. Use it for:

- **your own learning**
- **team discussions**
- **school-wide PD**

You'll find:

- **episodes grouped by topic**
- **conversation starters and classroom takeaways**
- **space to jot down notes or next steps**

There's never enough time in a teacher's day. Between lessons, kids who need you, and stacks of grading, it is a lot. Podcasts make learning feel doable. You can listen in the car, while setting up your room, or when you finally have a quiet moment to yourself at home.

However you use it, we hope this guide helps you feel encouraged, supported, and ready to try something new.

We can't wait to keep learning with you,

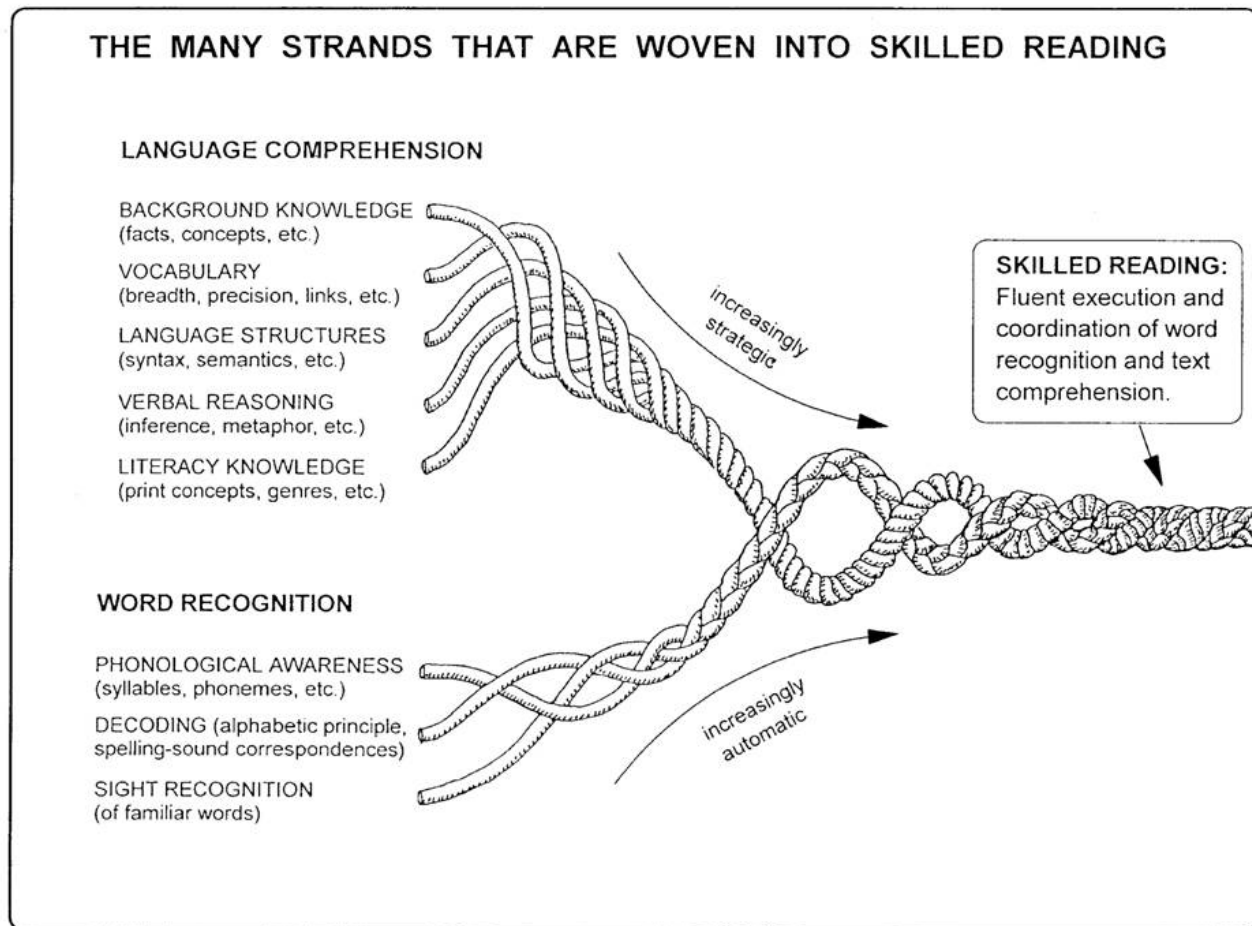
♥ *Melissa & Lori*



Adolescent Literacy

Why is adolescent literacy important?

Older students don't stop needing support just because they've made it past the early grades. On Scarborough's Reading Rope, many secondary students still have gaps in word recognition strands like decoding and fluency, even as language comprehension strands like vocabulary and background knowledge keep developing. That gap is often why a student can talk through complex ideas but still stumble over the words on the page. Missing strands don't close on their own with age, which is why older struggling readers need real intervention, not just more time.



LISTEN: [Ep. 178: The Simple View and Scarborough's Reading Rope with Hugh Catts](#)

Adolescent Literacy

Here are three big takeaways about teaching reading to older readers from Melissa & Lori Love Literacy podcast straight from the voices of researchers and real classrooms:

1

Big Words Need Their Own Instruction

Multisyllabic words trip up many older readers, even ones who decode simple words fine. Without direct instruction in syllable patterns and word structure, students plateau instead of progressing to grade-level texts. Decoding instruction has to continue well past elementary school for older students.

2

Fluency Instruction is a Priority

Fluency isn't something students either have or don't by middle school. Older struggling readers often need fluency practice built around the specific words and texts they're stuck on, not generic repeated reading. Teaching fluency at this age takes a different approach than it does in early grades.

3

Intervention Doesn't Have an Expiration Date

Secondary students who struggle with reading need intervention designed for their age, not scaled-down elementary programs. Without it, many get accommodations that help them cope but never actually build reading skill. The window for intervention doesn't close after fifth grade.



Together, these conversations help you see adolescent literacy as its own area of instruction, not an extension of early reading. The episodes feature researchers and classroom teachers, with research and real practice you can bring into your own classroom.

Helping Every Reader Move Past the Decoding Threshold

with Rebecca Kockler

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EPISODE: 257

Helping Every Reader Move Past the Decoding Threshold

with Rebecca Kockler



[LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Expert Rebecca Kockler dives into the “decoding threshold.” She explains how students can look strong in early literacy, only to hit a wall in middle school when texts get longer, denser, and packed with multisyllabic words. If students fall below that decoding threshold, comprehension growth stalls.

Decoding instruction shouldn’t retire after elementary school; it needs to bulk up alongside vocabulary and morphology as language gets more complex.

Episode Resources

The **Decoding Threshold** is the minimum level of word-reading accuracy and automaticity a student needs to reach before their reading comprehension can meaningfully improve. The Threshold changes from text to text!

While You Listen

What I Want to Remember	What I Want to Try
<i>Listen for how Rebecca defines the Decoding Threshold.</i>	<i>Notice how morphology, vocabulary, and spelling work together.</i>

Research-Based Routines for Multisyllabic Word Reading

with Jessica Toste & Brennan Chandler



EPISODE: 237

Research-Based Routines for Multisyllabic Word Reading

with Jessica Toste & Brennan Chandler

 [LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Researchers Jessica Toste and Brennan Chandler tackle what to do when kids hit a big word. You'll learn a six-step multisyllabic word reading routine you can teach your students to employ when they come to a big word.

The conversation is full of practical, ready-to-use strategies that help kids break big words into manageable pieces and read them with fluency.

Episode Resources

This [6-Step Multisyllabic Word Routine](#) is a repeatable routine that teaches students how to read longer words. Try it tomorrow in your classroom!

While You Listen

What I Want to Remember	What I Want to Try
<i>Pay attention to the role flexibility plays when students read bigger words.</i>	<i>Listen for routines that help students tackle long words without getting overwhelmed.</i>

6-Step Routine for Multisyllabic Word Reading



Underline the vowels in the word.



Join vowel teams so they stay together.



Circle the word parts you recognize.



Count the syllables in the word.



Break the chunks apart and read them



**Read the whole word aloud and check:
"Does it sound right? Is it a word I know?"**



EPISODE: 256

Intervention for Adolescent Readers

with Faith Howard

 [LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

In this episode, we talk with interventionist Faith Howard about what students can do when they encounter unfamiliar words in a text. She shares practical strategies, including word pyramids for decoding and a simple dictation routine to connect spelling and reading. Faith also explains a weekly fluency routine that helps build accuracy, automaticity, and expression over time.

You'll walk away with clear, manageable ways to support students with complex words in connected text.

Episode Resources

Faith's [Dictation Routine](#) outlines a four-step routine that helps students build strong sound-to-spelling connections and become more accurate, independent readers and writers.

While You Listen

What I Want to Remember	What I Want to Try
<i>How are clear, repeatable routines helpful for students when they encounter multisyllabic words?</i>	<i>Notice a new routine you would like to try, like word pyramids or a structured fluency plan!</i>

Dictation Routine



Say It

Say the word aloud to hear all the sounds clearly.



Clap It

Clap and count the syllables in the word.



Show It

Draw a dashed line for each syllable to map the word.



Write It

Write the word on the dashed line syllable at a time.



Dictation builds strong sound-to-spelling connections, helping students become more automatic, accurate, and independent readers and writers.

Episode 210

How Can You Improve Fluency for Older Students?

with Janee' Butler



EPISODE 210

How Can You Improve Fluency for Older Students?

with Janee' Butler



[LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Fluency is a complex but critical skill, especially for older students. Janee' Butler, Director of Program Design & Implementation at The Center for Literacy and Learning, explores **how fluency instruction evolves from the primary through the secondary grades**, highlighting common challenges for students and teachers.

Episode Resources

Check out "[Teaching Oral Reading Fluency to Older Students](#)" by Tim Shanahan for practical strategies to support fluency in middle and high school readers.

While You Listen

What I Want to Remember	What I Want to Try
<i>Pay attention to how Janee describes the relationship between fluency and independence.</i>	<i>Think about how your definition of fluency shifts for grades 3-12.</i>

LISTEN AGAIN: Episode 110

Baltimore Secondary Literacy Teachers Talk Fluency



EPISODE 110

Baltimore Secondary Literacy Teachers Talk Fluency

with Tanisha Dasmunshi, Emily Jaskowski, and Emery Uwimana



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Middle school educators from Baltimore City Public Schools discuss their focus on fluency through Continuous Improvement work. They explain what Continuous Improvement is, and you will hear about their fluency strategies and outcomes.

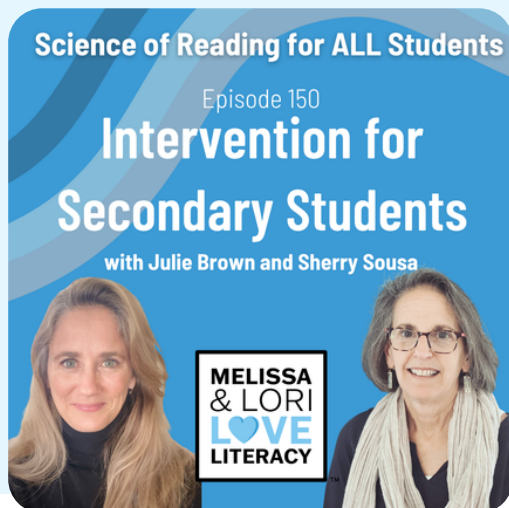
This episode is especially relevant for **secondary teachers looking to strengthen fluency instruction.**

Episode Resources

Read this [article by Louisa Moats](#) to learn more about helping older students who need more support with reading.

While You Listen

What I Want to Remember	What I Want to Try
<i>Listen for how teachers use complex, grade-level texts during fluency work.</i>	<i>think about how repeated, supported reading can help students access texts that might initially feel too difficult.</i>



EPISODE: 150

Intervention for Secondary Students

with Julie Brown & Sherry Sousa

 [LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Two Vermont educators, a superintendent and a structured literacy teacher, describe how they built a secondary reading intervention program that moved students out of special education and into AP classes, grouping teens by skill rather than grade and pairing explicit phonics instruction with peer connection and belonging.

Episode Resources

Check out [The Reading League's six-step lesson plan](#), which Julie Brown's structured literacy classes follow, at thereadingleague.org.

While You Listen

What I Want to Remember	What I Want to Try
<i>Notice the specific things Sherry and Julie built into their program for secondary students.</i>	<i>Listen for how Julie describes a typical lesson.</i>

Bringing It Together...



1 What's one idea from these episodes that stayed with you, and why that one?

2 Several guests push back on the idea that decoding and fluency work is "done" by a certain grade. What are your experiences and thoughts about this after listening?

3 How has your thinking shifted on what intervention should look like for an older struggling reader?

Making It Happen...



What's one specific classroom move from these episodes that you can picture yourself trying tomorrow, and why that one?



How will you build this into your classroom? What might it sound or look like in action?



What needs to be in place for this to go well?

Learn More: Adolescent Literacy



Resources We Love

Looking to learn more? These resources connect closely to the ideas discussed in this listening guide:

- The IES Practice Guide, Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices, a free research-based guide from the National Center for Education Evaluation.
- Project for Adolescent Literacy phase one report at seekcommonground.org
- AdLit.org, a resource hub from WETA specifically for adolescent literacy strategies and content.



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[The Literacy 50 Book](#)

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in recognition of your successful completion of the

**ADOLESCENT LITERACY LISTENING GUIDE
(6 HOURS)**

You've shown your dedication to growing your knowledge and sharpening your practice. This achievement celebrates your commitment to learning, your curiosity about the science of reading, and your hard work turning insights into impact.

Date:

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Notes

