



PODCAST LISTENING GUIDE:

Small-Group Instruction



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 is 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,

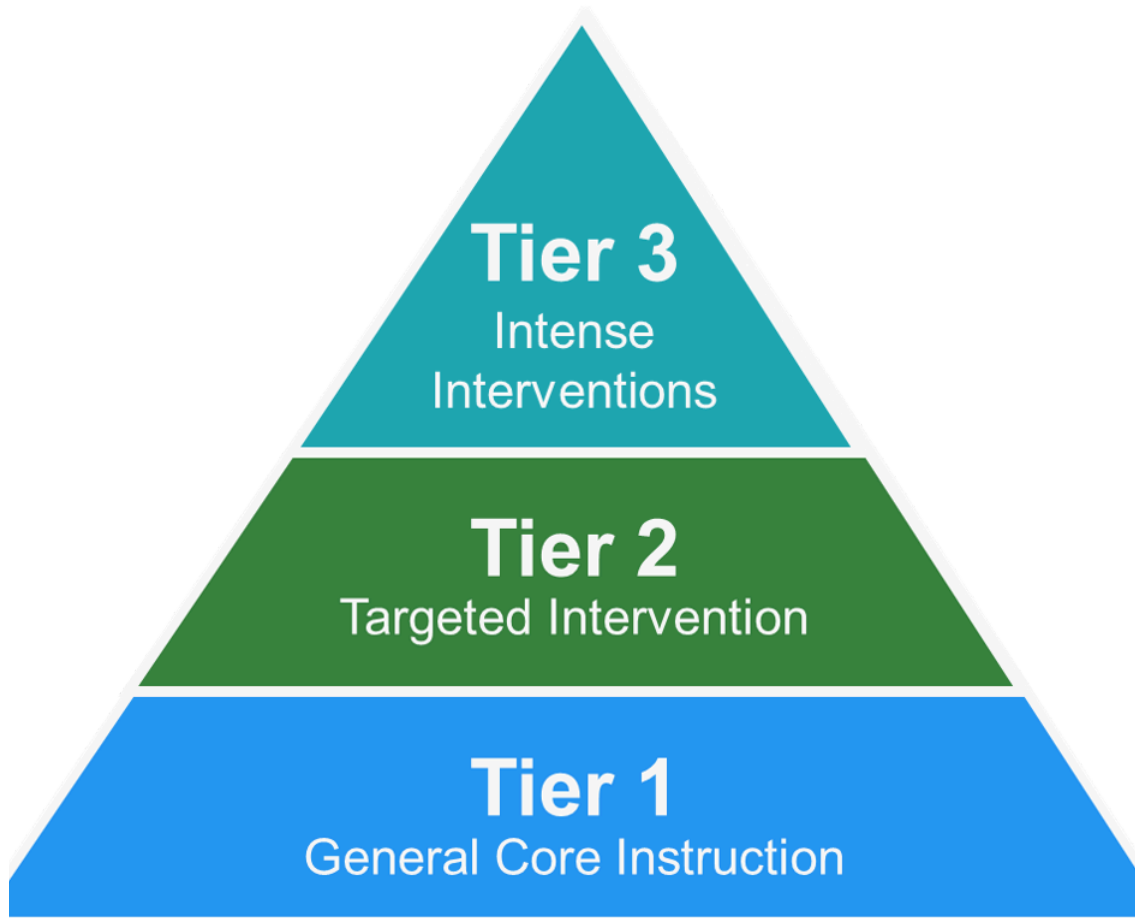
♥ *Melissa & Lori*



Small-Group Instruction

Why is small-group instruction important?

Small-group instruction is important because it creates time and space for teachers to respond to students' specific learning needs in a targeted way. When used intentionally, small groups allow teachers to provide focused practice and immediate feedback that builds on strong Tier 1 instruction. Across the research and classroom examples in this guide, small-group instruction is most effective when it is driven by assessment data, aligned to clear instructional goals, and used to support access to grade-level learning rather than replace it.



LISTEN: [MTSS for Reading Improvement with Stephanie Stollar and Sarah Brown](#)

Small-Group Instruction

Here are three big takeaways about small-group instruction from Melissa & Lori Love Literacy podcast straight from the voices of researchers and real classrooms:

1 Purpose Before Groups

Small-group instruction is most effective when it is driven by a clear instructional purpose, not by routine or schedule. Across the research and classroom examples, groups are formed based on what students need to learn, how instruction can support that need, and when small-group time is the right tool.

2 Strong Tier 1 Makes Small Groups Work

High-quality whole-class instruction is the foundation that makes small-group instruction possible and effective. When Tier 1 instruction is clear, structured, and knowledge-rich, small groups can be used to reinforce learning, provide targeted practice, or offer additional support without limiting students' access to grade-level content.

3 Responsive, & Flexible

Effective small-group instruction is responsive and flexible. Groups change as student needs change, instruction is adjusted based on ongoing assessment, and time is used efficiently. Small groups are not permanent placements but short-term supports designed to move learning forward.



In this guide, you will hear from researchers, classroom teachers, interventionists, and specialists who challenge common assumptions about small-group instruction. Together, these episodes explore when small groups make sense, what they can focus on, and how they can be used to support all aspects of literacy instruction. The goal is not to do more during small-group time, but to use it with clarity, purpose, and intention.

Maximizing Small-Group Reading Instruction

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& LORI
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EPISODE: 143

Maximizing Small-Group Reading Instruction

with Kristin Conradi-Smith, Steve
Amendum, and Tamara Williams

 [LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

The authors of the article “Maximizing Small-Group Reading Instruction” take a closer look at why small-group instruction is so appealing and what the research actually says about how it works best. They unpack common assumptions about small groups and clarify when and why small-group time can support student learning. You will walk away with a clearer understanding of how to make small-group instruction more focused, efficient, and impactful for students.

Episode Resources

In this **short video**, Dr. Neena Saha breaks down the research behind “Maximizing Small-Group Reading Instruction” and highlights key classroom takeaways.

Choose one idea from the episode that feels doable. How might you adjust your planning, grouping, or instructional focus to make small-group time in your classroom more intentional this week?

Team Discussion Prompt: What would it look like if small-group instruction in our classrooms was driven by instructional need rather than by schedule or routine?



EPISODE 140

K-2 Literacy Block Deep Dive
with Erin Metz



www.literacypodcast.com

EPISODE: 140

K-2 Literacy Block Deep Dive

with Erin Metz



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Teacher and interventionist Erin Metz from Blount County, Tennessee, offers an in-depth walkthrough of her district's K-2 instructional block. Erin explains her strategic approach to working with both students and teachers during small-group instructional time. She models how small groups can be used intentionally to reinforce accuracy and automaticity, build vocabulary and knowledge, and support comprehension, all while staying aligned to strong Tier 1 instruction.

Episode Resources

2nd Grade Reading Group with Geodes Decodables (video)

Watch Erin model how small-group instruction looks in practice within a K-2 instructional block.

As Erin walks through her district's instructional block, note where small-group instruction currently happens in your own K-2 literacy block and its goal.

After listening, reflect: Which routine, material, or structure could help make your small-group time more focused and intentional?

Structured Literacy in Small-Group Time

with Casey Jergens and Natalie Wexler



EPISODE: 142

Structured Literacy in Small-Group Time

with Casey Jergens and Natalie Wexler



[LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

In this episode, look at the structure and content of the literacy block and where small-group instruction fits within a structured literacy approach. Kindergarten teacher Casey Jergens connects research to real classroom practice, reflecting on his shift away from a guided reading model with heavy small-group emphasis and toward strong Tier 1 instruction aligned to structured literacy. Author Natalie Wexler joins the conversation to explore how prioritizing whole-class instruction supports access for all students and clarifies the role small groups should play.

Episode Resources

"Elementary Classrooms Are Too Noisy for Kids to Learn" by Natalie Wexler

An article that examines how classroom structures, including over-reliance on small groups, can unintentionally limit learning.

What is one way your Tier 1 instruction could become clearer or stronger so that small-group instruction is truly supplemental rather than foundational?

What instructional work truly needs to happen in small groups, and what might be more effective if it happened in whole-class instruction?

EPISODE 134

Decodable Text Series
Small Group Instructional Time



Listen on
Apple Podcasts



EPISODE: 134

Small-Group Instructional Time

with April Evans



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

First-grade teacher April Evans shares how she uses Tier 1 foundational skills assessment data to make intentional decisions about small-group time. She explains how data informs student grouping, what happens during small-group instruction, and why all students have access to readable, knowledge-building texts. April also discusses the structures and routines she uses to support accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, highlighting the purposeful role decodable texts play in her classroom.

Episode Resources

Decodable Reader Protocol

(Achieve the Core): A practical tool for using decodable texts intentionally to support foundational skills instruction.

Choose one small group you currently teach. As April describes her routines, note what data drives that group, the goal of the instruction, and the types of texts students are reading. After listening, consider one adjustment that could make that group's work even more intentional.

Kindergarten Intervention That Gets Results

with Linsey Jones



EPISODE: 233

Kindergarten Intervention that Gets Results

with Linsey Jones



[LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Speech-language pathologist Linsey Jones shares how she delivers smart, targeted, and manageable literacy interventions for kindergarten students. She explains how her background in speech-language pathology shaped a highly responsive Tier 2 intervention model. Linsey walks us through what her 15-minute intervention sessions look like, how she uses data on letter-sound knowledge and early phonemic awareness to guide instruction, and why close collaboration with classroom teachers is essential to her work.

Episode Resources

Speech Language Literacy Connection

Linsey's website features resources and insights at the intersection of speech-language pathology and literacy instruction.

As Linsey describes her 15-minute Tier 2 sessions, listen for the assessment data she uses, the skill she targets, and how she tracks progress. After listening, consider one way you could simplify or sharpen an intervention in your own setting.

Bringing It All Together...



1 After listening to these episodes, how has your thinking about the purpose of small-group instruction changed?

2 Which small-group routines or structures feel most doable to try right now? What would you need in place to make them work?

3 If you could redesign small-group time from the ground up, what would you keep, change, or let go of?

Learn More: Small-Group Instruction



Favorite Blogs

- What Should Small Group Reading Instruction Look Like? from Tim Shanahan
- Small Group Instruction Done Right by Pati Montgomery

Great Minds Blogs

- One Text, Three Ways: Small-Group Instruction with Geodes

Resources We Love

- Small Groups, Big Results: Evidence-Based Routines to Get Every Child Reading by Julia Lindsey
- K-5 Small-Group Literacy Instruction: Sample Schedule and Activities (Reading Rockets)



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[The Literacy 50 Book](#)