

READ ACT LITERACY NEWSLETTER

Activating and Building Background Knowledge

AUGUST 2025



Hello to another new school year!

It's hard to believe summer has already come and gone and many schools are already in full swing, doing the rewarding but sometimes challenging work that a fresh school year brings. It is always exciting to see students walking to school or clambering on school buses with backpacks and lunch boxes, on their way to a new day of learning.

For the August issue of our literacy newsletter, we [are digging into the topic of background knowledge, a sometimes neglected but highly important piece of the comprehension puzzle](#). We cannot control the knowledge and experiences students come to school with, but we can consciously plan instructional activities to both activate existing knowledge and intentionally build knowledge that makes our lessons more impactful. This collection of resources can be used to dive more deeply into the topic or refresh our practices as the new school year gets underway.

Enjoy!

LISTEN

Podcasts are a great way to learn on the go. This collection of four podcasts, each focusing on the topic of building or activating student knowledge, provides the listener with the opportunity to delve deeper into the topic, learn fresh ideas for instruction, and expand opportunities to help students grow. Take a listen!

THE KNOWLEDGE MATTERS CAMPAIGN PODCAST

[Ep. 2, Literacy and the Science of Learning: Dylan Wiliam on Building Student Knowledge - Knowledge Matters Campaign](#) 26 MIN

THE SCIENCE OF READING THE PODCAST - AMPLIFY

[Episode 6: Deconstructing the Reading Rope: Background knowledge with Susan Neuman | Amplify](#) 41 MIN

[A guide to integrating knowledge building into your classroom, with Jackie Relyea, Ph.D.](#) 44 MIN

MELISSA AND LORI LOVE LITERACY - APPLE PODCASTS

[Episode 10: Noticing The #Knowlege Gap with Natalie Wexler](#) 50 MIN

READ

[The Role of Background Knowledge in Reading Comprehension: A Critical Review](#)

Reid Smith, Pamela Snow, Tanya Serry, and Lorraine Hammond

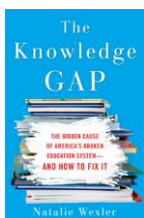
READING PSYCHOLOGY 2021, VOL. 42, NO. 3, 214-240

As educators, we are often short on time, or access to, the very thing that ultimately drives how and what we teach: reading research. While not everyone will want to sit down to read a research study for fun, it is important to have access to key findings from research when you need them. This review provides just that and drives home the important finding that background knowledge has a direct impact on reading comprehension. Read it now or bookmark it for later, but keep this one handy for reference!

[Literacy Ladders | Shanker Institute](#)

“A joint project of the Albert Shanker Institute, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), and the Core Knowledge Foundation”

This publication combines previously published articles by some of today’s reading experts into one handy resource, all focused on topics related to knowledge and comprehension. While all of the articles are worth reading, if you only have time for one, start with *How Knowledge Helps* by Daniel Willingham (p. 42).



THE KNOWLEDGE GAP: THE HIDDEN CAUSE OF AMERICA’S BROKEN EDUCATION SYSTEM - AND HOW TO FIX IT

Natalie Wexler

ISBN 0735213550

Much the way Emily Hansford sparked nationwide conversations around approaches to early literacy instruction with her APM podcast “Hard Words,” Natalie Wexler took the reins to start a new conversation - this time around the critical importance of knowledge building to address

the achievement gap in America's schools. This book is a must read if it hasn't reached your desk already. It is sure to light a spark and motivate changes in your classroom and school. For additional resources dedicated to this topic, visit [Natalie Wexler's website here](#).

WATCH - WEBINARS

[Strengthening Multilingual Learners' Background Knowledge for Reading Success | 2024 Literacy Symposium](#)
PaTTAN Presenters: Mindi Teich, Sydney Snyder

While important for all students, the activation and building of background knowledge is critical for Multilingual learners to support comprehension and access text content fully. PaTTAN once again delivers a great webinar on a timely topic. This presentation provides activities for building background knowledge and focuses on culturally responsive teaching practices.

[RECORDING: Knowledge: An Unsung Hero of Reading Comprehension - Knowledge Matters Campaign](#)
Knowledge Matters Unsung Hero Webinar Series Presenters: Susan Neuman, Margaret McKeown, and Kyair Butts

Knowledge for reading is not only content knowledge; and not every text a student reads requires extensive building of knowledge. This engaging discussion helps to better understand how to strategically develop knowledge for reading and how the texts we select for teaching drive our choices for instruction.

[Background Knowledge and Vocabulary: Their Roles in Building Language Comprehension... | 2024 Literacy Symposium](#)

PaTTAN Presenters: Dr. Maria Murray, Dr. Leslie Laud

In this webinar, Drs. Murray and Laud work together to discuss some of the misconceptions about the role of background knowledge and to explore how strategy instruction can be used to build language comprehension. This webinar also provides a variety of resources for educators to utilize in their planning.

ENGAGE/IMPLEMENT

[Activities to Build Background Knowledge - Bing Videos](#)

Short, sweet and to the point, this quick video gives four great activities to jump start your focus on building background knowledge.

[What Is Background Knowledge? \(Plus 21 Ways to Build It\) -We Are Teachers](#)

Just as the title implies, this no-nonsense resource explains the “what” and then backs it up with the “how.” This is a great starting place if you just want some simple strategies to support your instruction when focusing on building background knowledge in your classroom.

[Text Set Guidance from Achieve the Core](#)

Text sets can be a powerful way to build knowledge systematically while reading deeply about engaging topics. This simple guidance document explains what text sets are, provides instruction on how to develop effective text sets, and where premade sets can be located easily.

[Background Knowledge and ELLs: What Teachers Need to Know | Colorín Colorado](#)

This web-based text is full of video clips to support learning as you read and engage in content that supports learning about developing background knowledge with multilingual learners. Colorin Colorado is a go-to website for supporting MLs...and this page is a great one to explore!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Do you have a colleague with whom you would like to share these resources? Feel free to forward the newsletter, or have them [sign up to receive the newsletter here!](#)

If you have general questions or need assistance, find our contact information here:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/coloradoliteracy/contactus>

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