Partner Reading:
An Evidence-Based Practice
Teacher's Guide

PACT **PLUS**

PROMOTING ADOLESCENTS' COMPREHENSION OF TEXT

Preferred Citation

What Is Partner Reading?

Partner reading is an instructional routine that incorporates peer modeling into reading text. In the routine, one partner reads a text that is slightly challenging while the other partner corrects errors and checks for understanding. It is most effective to pair students so that one partner is a slightly more skilled reader than the other. Partners take turns being the reader and listener. The more skilled reader reads first, modeling fluent reading for the listener. While following along, the listener is exposed to any difficult words and essentially rehearses the text before reading it aloud. The partners switch roles, and the new reader reads aloud the same text while the new listener provides feedback and checks for understanding. This flexible routine can be used with any content area text in any grade level.

> The purpose of this guide is to provide teachers a feasible partner reading procedure that can be used in middle school classrooms.

Is Partner Reading Effective?

Partner reading is a form of peer tutoring, a process that has positive effects on student performance in academic areas such as reading and math, according to a large-scale meta-analysis (Leung, 2015). Partner reading improves reading accuracy and comprehension for both more competent and less competent readers (e.g., Topping & Lindsay, 1992b; Topping, Thurston, McGavock, & Conlin, 2012).

In an earlier form of partner reading known as paired reading, students selected a book to read and were paired with a peer tutor or a parent, who provided feedback (Topping & Lindsay, 1992a). In two widely researched forms of partner reading, classwide peer tutoring (CWPT) and peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS), this earlier form of partner reading was adapted so that more skilled readers were paired with less skilled readers in a routine of peer modeling and feedback. CWPT is a whole-class teaching strategy designed for existing reading materials, in which more skilled readers monitor the reading of the less skilled readers and provide feedback. It has been used in elementary and middle school settings with mixed-ability groups, students with disabilities, and English language learners (ELLs; e.g., Greenwood & Delquadri, 1995; Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1989). PALS is a partner reading teaching strategy that pairs students in a reciprocal reading routine guided by a script that includes two comprehension routines, paragraph shrinking, and prediction relay. It has been used in early elementary, elementary, and high school settings with positive outcomes for students in general, struggling readers, students with disabilities, and ELLs (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, Kazden, & Allen, 1999; Fuchs et al., 2001; Lemons, Fuchs, Gilbert, & Fuchs, 2014; McMaster, Kung, Han, & Cao, 2008; Rafdal, McMaster, McConnell, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2011).

Partner Reading Routine

The partner reading routine consists of three basic steps. First, the reader reads aloud while the listener follows along, checking for errors. Second, the listener provides feedback focused on accuracy of reading, and the partners go over any missed words together. Third, after the partners have established a complete understanding of the words in the passage, they check the reader's comprehension of the passage. The students then switch roles and repeat the three-step process.

Materials

- Text, one for each student
- Highlighters or pens for marking errors
- Cue card, one per pair (provided later in this document)

Step 1: Read Aloud

The reader reads aloud the designated section of text at an appropriate rate.

The listener follows along, underlining or highlighting errors.

Step 2: Feedback

The listener uses the cue card script to provide feedback for each error: "Here is a word that I underlined. The word is _____. Let's read the sentence together."

The partners correctly read aloud the sentence together. This process is repeated for each sentence with an error.

Step 3: Check for Understanding

The listener checks the reader's understanding by using the question on the cue card: "How well did you understand the section?"

The reader responds with the choices listed on the cue card and the partners take any necessary corrective action:

- "Not at all": Repeat steps 1 and 2.
- "Some of it": Be ready to ask your partner for help answering the critical reading question.
- "All of it": You are ready to answer the critical reading question with your partner.

Switch Roles and Repeat

The students then switch roles. There are two options for the second round of reading aloud, repeated or continued reading. In repeated reading, the new reader rereads the same section of text. In continued reading, the new reader moves on to the next section of text.

Setting Up the Classroom for Partner Reading

Time Allotment

Partner reading is most effective in improving students' reading skills when implemented consistently for 20 to 30 minutes per session, 2 to 3 days per week. When using content area text, it can easily be incorporated into existing lessons.
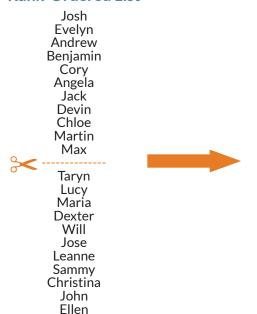
Pairing Students

To pair students, create a list of students in the class, ranking them from highest reading ability to lowest based on reading assessment scores or teacher judgment. Split the list in half to form two lists, one containing students of higher reading ability and the other containing students of lower ability. Pair the top students on each list, then the second student on each list, the third, and so on. In this way, you create dyads with one student of higher and one student of lower reading ability, but the gap between them is not large.

Though the structured routine should prevent student conflict, adjust the pairs based on your knowledge of students' characteristics to prevent any potential mismatches. You may also adjust pairs to accommodate the language or learning needs of ELLs or students with disabilities, ensuring that they are paired with someone who will provide appropriate support and encouragement.

Example

Ms. Roberts has created a rank-ordered list of students in her class based on reading scores and her observation of students' classroom performance. She has divided the list in half, creating pairs, with partner 1 being a more capable reader than partner 2.

Rank-Ordered List

Josh
Evelyn
Andrew
Benjamin
Cory
Angela
Jack
Devin
Chloe
Martin
Max
- - - - - - - - - - -
Taryn
Lucy
Maria
Dexter
Will
Jose
Leanne
Sammy
Christina
John
Ellen

Initial Pairings

Partner 1	Partner 2
Josh	Taryn
Evelyn	Lucy
Andrew	Maria
Benjamin	Dexter
Cory	Will
Angela	Jose
Jack	Leanne
Devin	Sammy
Chloe	Christina
Martin	John
Max	Ellen

After creating the list, Ms. Roberts makes adjustments based on her knowledge of the individual characteristics and needs of the students.

- Maria and Jose are ELLs who may have difficulty with some of the vocabulary and concepts in the text. She is confident that Angela will be a good match for Jose because Angela, who also speaks Spanish and was formerly classified as an ELL, will have a good understanding of the type of support Jose might need.

- Ms. Roberts will adjust Maria's partner, pairing her with Evelyn.

- Sammy, a student with specific learning disabilities, struggles with decoding and reads slowly. Ms. Roberts reassigns him to Chloe, who is especially patient and supportive.

Initial Pairings

Partner 1	Partner 2
Josh	Taryn
Evelyn	Lucy
Andrew	Maria
Benjamin	Dexter
Cory	Will
Angela	Jose
Jack	Leanne
Devin	Sammy
Chloe	Christina
Martin	John
Max	Ellen

Final Pairing

Partner 1	Partner 2
Josh	Taryn
Evelyn	**Maria**
Andrew	Lucy
Benjamin	Dexter
Cory	Will
Angela	Jose
Jack	Leanne
Devin	Christina
Chloe	**Sammy**
Martin	John
Max	Ellen

Teaching the Routine

Modeling the Process

Teaching an instructional routine such as partner reading involves teacher modeling and facilitation, with a gradual release of responsibility to students as they learn to function independently. The initial introduction requires explicit instruction and modeling to establish clear expectations and familiarize students with the routine. In the initial demonstration, model the role of the listener to show students how to highlight reading errors, use the script to go over the missed words, and check for understanding.

After one or two sessions of explicit instruction and modeling, students will be able to engage in partner reading with a moderate level of teacher direction, eventually moving into greater independence with the process. (See **Lesson 1: Modeling the Partner Reading Process** later in this document.)

Student Expectations

Set clear expectations for the reading and peer support process. The cue card script ensures that students focus on just the reading errors and offer assistance in a nonjudgmental manner. Specifically, in Step 2, the listener says, "Here is a word that I underlined. The word is _____. Let's read the sentence together." During the initial modeling phase, you play the role of listener and model giving appropriate praise and positive support when the error is corrected. In Step 3, the listener continues to offer positive encouragement.

Choosing and Preparing Text for a Lesson

Selecting Text

Select passages that pose a slight challenge for the students but are not so difficult that compre-hension is out of reach. Both narrative and expository texts work well. Content area teachers should select passages from textbooks or supplementary materials that support the unit or lesson.

Select one passage for the whole class or differentiate by selecting different passages based on student reading levels (see **Determining Student Reading Levels** chart below).

When selecting text, consider the following questions:

- **Is the passage an appropriate length?** When using a textbook, carefully select text that can be covered in a 20- to 30-minute session, such as a section of a chapter or one to two pages.

- **Is the vocabulary appropriate?** Read the passage and examine the words to determine the level of difficulty for your students. If it has no more than three to five challenging words that can be handled with preteaching, the passage will work well for partner reading.

- **Is the text conceptually appropriate?** As you read through the passage, consider the com-plexity of the text. If the text contains many complex grammatical structures, it may pose challenges for reading aloud with a partner. Likewise, if the text is conceptually dense, it may be difficult for partners to unpack the ideas.

Determining Student Reading Levels
According to the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), teachers should use quantita-tive and qualitative information to make appropriate text selections for their students.
Quantitative Information • Students in sixth through eighth grades should read text in the 955–1,155 Lexile band. • If a text in that Lexile band is too difficult for your students, choose an easier text with the intent of moving into the higher Lexile band as soon as possible.
Qualitative Information • Does the text have one or more levels of meaning (literary text)? • Does the text have one or more purposes (informational text)? • Is the text structure simple or complex? • Does the author use literal, clear, contemporary language, or is the language figura-tive, ambiguous, or unfamiliar? • What are the background knowledge demands of the text?

Additional Resource

For more information on choosing text in line with the Common Core State Standards, see the following:

Swanson, E., & Wexler, J. (2017). Selecting appropriate text for adolescents with disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 49*(3), 160–167.

Preparing the Text

1. **Divide the text.** Identify logical points for partners to stop, give feedback, check for understanding, and switch roles. Depending on your students' reading abilities and the nature of the text, stopping points can be after one or several paragraphs.

2. **Identify key vocabulary words.** Select three to five words to preteach prior to the partner reading session. When using different passages for different groups, build into your lesson an opportunity to go over each group's selected words prior to the partner reading session.

3. **Prepare critical questions.** For each section, create one comprehension question that focuses on key concepts and fosters rich discussion for the partners. You will use the critical questions in a teacher-led discussion following the partner reading. If you use one passage classwide, there will be one set of questions. If you use different passages for different groups, plan to debrief on the questions with each group.

In the next section, you will find two social studies lessons that incorporate partner reading.
The first lesson focuses on modeling the partner reading process.
The second lesson focuses on student practice.

Lesson 1:
Modeling the Partner Reading Process

Objective

Students will learn the steps of the partner reading routine.

Materials

- Text (provided at the end of this lesson)
- Markers for underlining words
- Document camera
- Cue card, one per pair (provided later in this document)

Introduction

"We will learn a way of reading in class called partner reading. Today I will be one of the partners, so I can show you how the process works. In the future, I will assign you a partner, and you will work with your partner to read and answer questions together. There is a saying, 'Two heads are better than one.' Partner reading is a way to put your heads together while you read to make sure you understand what you are reading."

"When you do partner reading, one of you will be the reader and the other will be the listener. After you read a section, you will switch roles."

Display the cue card on the document camera.

"You will have a cue card, like the one I have put up here, to guide you through the process. We will go through the process together today and, later, you will do it with a partner. Today, I will ask _____ to be my partner. We will read a passage about the American Revolution."

Preteach Vocabulary

"Every time we do partner reading, we will practice reading and talk about the meaning of a few important words. In this passage, there are three words to remember. They are important to understanding the passage, and one of them might be a new word for you."

Write each of the following words and definitions on the board. Then discuss the meaning, especially in the context of the passage.

- *natural rights*: Rights that all people have
- *revolution*: An overthrow and replacement of a government by the people governed; drastic action or change
- *preservation*: To keep something alive or make something last

Introduce Critical Reading Questions

Tell students that you will give them stopping places for each passage. When they reach a stopping place, there will be a critical question to answer.

In this lesson, there are two sections with one critical question for each section. Use the first paragraph for the first round of partner reading, with each partner taking a turn as reader, and then repeat the steps with the second paragraph.

Question 1: According to John Locke, what is the role of government regarding people's rights?

Question 2: According to John Locke, what is likely to cause a revolution?

Introduce the Steps of Partner Reading

Using the partner reading cue card, briefly describe each step of the partner reading routine, as shown below.

Step 1: Read Aloud

The first reader reads aloud the designated section of text at an appropriate rate. The listener follows along, underlining or highlighting errors.

Step 2: Provide Feedback

The listener uses the cue card script to provide feedback for each error: "Here is a word that I underlined. The word is _____. Let's read the sentence together." The partners correctly read aloud the sentence together. This routine is repeated for each sentence with an error.

Step 3: Check for Understanding

The listener checks the reader's understanding by using the question on the cue card: "How well did you understand the section?"

The reader responds with the choices listed on the cue card and the partners take any necessary corrective action:

- "Not at all": Repeat steps 1 and 2.
- "Some of it": Be ready to ask your partner for help answering the critical reading question.
- "All of it": You are ready to answer the critical reading question with your partner.

Tell students that they will switch roles and go through the steps again—both partners will take a turn as reader before answering the critical reading questions.

Model Partner Reading

"Today, my partner, _____, will be the first reader, and I will be the first listener."

"**Step 1** says that the reader will read aloud. I am the listener, so I will follow along and underline any words the reader misses. I will use the document camera to show you how I do this."

Display the text on the document camera. Underline words the reader misses.

"**Step 2** says to stop reading and go over any reading errors. I will use the script to go over the words with _____."

For each word underlined, use the script to ask the reader to reread the sentence.

If the reader did not miss any words, simply use a what-if scenario (e.g., "Great job reading. You did not miss any words here. Let's just pretend that you missed two words…").

"For **Step 3**, I am supposed to ask the reader, 'How well did you understand the section?' Let's do that now."

Demonstrate and discuss the decision process for the next steps. Emphasize that the partners need to switch roles and read one more time before answering the question.

Switch roles and go through the process one more time, repeating the first paragraph. Make a few reading errors, so your student partner can go through the correction process.

Answer the First Critical Reading Question

"We have both taken a turn as reader for the first paragraph. Now we will answer the critical reading question. Question 1 is, 'According to John Locke, what is the role of government regarding people's rights?' As partners, we have to think together to answer this question. We should look back at the paragraph for clues."

Model the process of working together with a partner to answer the question. Lead a discussion about how to think together.

Paragraph 2: Teacher-Guided Student Modeling

Select two additional students to model the roles of reader and listener with the second paragraph. Be sure to go through two readings of the paragraph so that each student will serve in each role.

After both students have read aloud, address the second critical reading question.

Debrief

Review the partner reading steps and procedures. Engage students in a discussion about the purpose and process, emphasizing ways to provide positive support and feedback.

John Locke's View on the Role of Government

Each man joins together with others to **preserve** their life, liberty, and property … Government is for the **preservation** of every man's right and property, and by protecting man from the violence or injury of others, government is for the good of the people.

> **According to John Locke, what is the role of government regarding people's rights?**

John Locke's View on Revolution

But whenever the legislators take away and destroy the **natural rights** of the people, or reduce them to slavery under absolute power, the government puts itself into a state of war with the people, who are no longer required to be obedient to that government … It is no wonder that they will then rise up and try to put power into hands that will protect their **natural rights**. This is why government was originally organized.

> **According to John Locke, what is likely to cause a revolution?**

Lesson 2: Student Practice

Objective

Students will use the partner reading routine to read a passage and answer comprehension questions.

Materials

- Text (provided at the end of this lesson)
- Markers for underlining words
- Cue card, one per pair (provided later in this document)

Introduction

"We have learned about partner reading. Now, we will use it. I have already assigned you a partner, and you know who is Partner 1 and Partner 2. Partner 1, you will be the reader first, and Partner 2, you will be the listener first. After you go through the three steps, you will switch roles. Remember, two heads are better than one. Partner reading is a way to put your heads together while you read to make sure you understand what you are reading."

Review the steps on the cue card. Tell students how to move to sit with their partners and pick up their materials. Review the process of thinking together to answer the critical reading questions. Remind students that they must each take a turn as reader before answering the questions.

Preteach Vocabulary

"This passage is about the American people declaring their independence from Great Britain. We will read it in three parts. Before we read, let's go over a few words."

Introduce each of the following words, providing the meaning of the word and discussing how it relates to the topic of the passage.

- *independence*: An agreement that the people of a nation are in charge of the government, rather than being ruled by another nation
- *declaration*: A formal statement or announcement
- *liberty*: Personal freedom or rights that are guaranteed by the government

Introduce Critical Reading Questions

Read the questions. Remind students that they will answer the first critical reading question, which pertains to the first section, only after both partners have had a turn as reader.

Question 1: Why were the words of the Declaration of Independence so important?

Question 2: What does the author mean when he writes, "Government should have the consent of the governed?"

Question 3: How did the Declaration of Independence help the colonists win the Revolutionary War?

Partner Reading Routine

Move students into partner groups with their materials. Remind students that Partner 1 will be the first reader and Partner 2 will be the first listener. Then, they will switch roles to read the next section of text, or repeat the first section in a repeated-reading format, before answering the critical reading question.

"You are ready to read the first section of the text using the partner reading routine. Use the cue card to guide you through the process."

Step 1: Read Aloud

"Readers, you will read aloud, doing your best reading. Listeners, you will follow along using your own copy of the passage to mark any words that are read incorrectly. Ready? Go."

The reader reads aloud the designated section of text at an appropriate rate.

The listener follows along, underlining or highlighting errors.

Step 2: Provide Feedback

"Listeners, it is time to give feedback. Remember to be positive and encouraging. Use the script to go over the words and reread the sentences. Ready? Go."

Circulate and give support as needed for the feedback process:

- The listener uses the cue card script to provide feedback for each error.
- The partners correctly read aloud the sentence together.
- This process is repeated for each sentence with an error.

Step 3: Check for Understanding

"Now it is time to check the reader's understanding of the passage. Listeners, use the question on the cue card to check for understanding. Listen to the reader's response. If the reader does not think he or she understood it well, you will need to go through steps 1 and 2 again."

The listener checks the reader's understanding by using the question on the cue card.

The reader responds with the choices listed on the cue card and the partners take any necessary corrective action.

After a few minutes, stop and debrief.

"How did everyone do? Did anyone need to repeat steps 1 and 2? Are you ready to switch roles and read it again?"

Switch Roles and Repeat

Remind students that both partners take a turn as reader. Rereading will help them to think together when they answer the critical reading question. Continue to circulate and support students as they repeat steps 1 through 3.

Critical Reading Question

"Now, it is time to answer the first critical reading question: 'Why were the words of the Declaration of Independence so important?' Put your heads together and use evidence from the text to support your answer. Thinking together helps you to really understand the ideas. Write your answer and be ready to discuss it in class. Ready? Go ahead and have a great discussion."

Circulate and reinforce examples of high-quality peer discussion.

After a few minutes, debrief with a whole-class discussion focused on the question. Be sure to draw on responses from pairs to deepen their understanding of the key ideas.

Continue Partner Reading

Go through two more rounds of the partner reading routine with the second and third sections of the text. Continue to reinforce the steps of the process and engage students in discussion about the questions. If time does not permit going through all three parts in a day, go through them over the course of a few days.

Declaring Independence

(1)

I have a date for you to remember. Something happened on this day that changed America—it even changed the whole world. It was a day that King George III didn't think important. He would find out how wrong he was. The date is July 4, 1776. That was the day the members of the Second Continental Congress approved the Declaration of Independence. It was a year after the Battle of Bunker Hill, and finally, the Americans had made up their minds to be free of Great Britain.

(2)

But that wasn't why the world was changed. It was the words they used in that **declaration** that made all the difference.

(3)

The delegates believed that if they were going to vote for **independence**, they should have a good reason. They knew that when they signed the **declaration**, they would become traitors to England. They would each be hanged if England captured them. If they were to take that big a risk, they wanted to make it worthwhile. And it would be worthwhile if they could help create a free nation, a great nation, a nation run by its citizens.

(4)

That's why the members asked Thomas Jefferson, one of the members of the Congress, to write a paper—called a "**declaration**"—that would do the following:

- Tell their beliefs about good government
- Tell what King George had done wrong
- Announce that the colonies were now free and **independent**—no longer under British rule

> **Why were the words of the Declaration of Independence so important?**

(5)

Some people thought it surprising that Thomas Jefferson was asked to write the **declaration**. Jefferson was one of the youngest members of the Continental Congress. He was a tall, shy redhead who loved to read, run, ride horseback, and play the violin. He had a reputation for writing well. John Adams said of him, "Though a silent member in Congress, he was so prompt, frank … and decisive upon committees and in conversation—not even Samuel Adams was more so—that he soon seized upon my heart."

(6)

Jefferson wasn't sure he could write a good **declaration**. But John Adams and Benjamin Franklin had faith in him. They talked Thomas Jefferson into trying. Adams told him, "You can write 10 times better than I can."

(7)

Adams and Franklin were right. Thomas Jefferson knew just what to say, and he said it in a way that inspired people all over the world. The whole **declaration** is something to read and think about, but one part will ring in your ears with its greatness. Jefferson wrote:

> *We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life,* ***Liberty****, and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

(8)

Just what does equal mean? Are we all the same? Look around you. Of course we aren't. Some of us are smarter than others, and some of us are better athletes, and some of us are better looking, and some are nicer. But none of that matters, said Jefferson. We are all entitled to **natural rights**: the right to live, the right to be free, the right to try to find the kind of life that will make us happy. And that is the whole reason for having governments, he said. Governments are not made to make kings happy. They are for the benefit of the people who are governed. Governments should have the "consent of the governed." When lawmakers try to gain or give someone else absolute power over lives, **liberties**, and property of the people, lawmakers abuse the power the people had put into their hands. It is then the privilege of the people to establish a new group of lawmakers to provide for their safety and security.

What does the author mean when he writes, "Governments should have the consent of the governed"?

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(9)

The Declaration of Independence primarily referred to the rights of white men. Other minorities such as women and African Americans used the Declaration of Independence to fight to win **liberty**. Jefferson said, "all men are created equal." He didn't mention women. Did he mean to include women? No one knows. Perhaps not. In the 18th century, very few people thought much about women's rights. Women in America did not have the right to vote until the 20th century.

(10)

Did Thomas Jefferson mean to include black men when he said "all men"? Historians sometimes argue about that. He said that "nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free." In the first draft of the **declaration**, he described slavery as a "cruel war against human nature." Many congressmen agreed. John Adams spoke out strongly against slavery. So did Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush. But South Carolina and Georgia would not sign the **declaration** if it contained the antislavery section. So Jefferson's antislavery words were taken out.

> **How did the Declaration of Independence help the colonists win the Revolutionary War?**

Adapted from Hakim, 1993.

Partner Reading Cue Card

Step	Partner A	Partner B
1	Read aloud.	Follow along and underline errors as your partner reads.
2	Stop reading. Read the sentence with your partner. Repeat for all sentences.	For each sentence with errors, say: "Here is a word that I underlined. The word is _____. Let's read the sentence together." Read the sentence with your partner. Repeat for all sentences.
3	**How well did you understand the section?** **Not at all:** Repeat steps 1 and 2. **Some of it:** Ask your partner for help answering the critical reading question. **All of it:** You are ready to answer the critical reading question with your partner.	
4	Follow along and underline errors as your partner reads.	Read aloud.
5	For each sentence with errors, say: "Here is a word that I underlined. The word is _____. Let's read the sentence together." Read the sentence with your partner. Repeat for all sentences.	Stop reading. Read the sentence with your partner. Repeat for all sentences.
6	**How well did you understand the section?** **Not at all:** Repeat steps 1 and 2. **Some of it:** Ask your partner for help answering the critical reading question. **All of it:** You are ready to answer the critical reading question with your partner.	

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Additional Resources to Support Partner Reading

Wexler, J., Vaughn, S., Edmonds, M., & Reutebuch, C. K. (2008). A synthesis of fluency interventions for secondary struggling readers. *Reading and Writing, 21*, 317–347.

> *This article summarizes the literature on fluency interventions, including partner reading. One important finding is that repeated reading of the same passage and continuous reading for the same amount of time have the same effect on reading fluency.*

The Meadows Center for Preventing Educational Risk. (2017). *How do I engage in partner reading with my child?* Retrieved from **https://www.meadowscenter.org/files/resources/Parent-Flyer_PartnerReading.pdf**

> *Middle schools can use this handout to promote parent support of reading at home.*

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