

The Keys to Unlocking Complex Texts: Vocabulary & Reading Volume

Elfrieda H. Hiebert

TextProject & University of California, Santa Cruz

Complex Text & Vocabulary

The Birchbark House

Startled, Omakayas slipped and spun her arms in wheels. She teetered, but somehow kept her balance. Two big, skipping hops, another leap, and she was on dry land. She stepped over spongy leaves and moss, into the woods where the sparrows sang nesting songs in delicate relays.

Volcanoes

The mountain seemed much the same as it had been for the past month. Suddenly, at 8:32 a.m., Mount St. Helens erupted with incredible force. The energy released in the eruption was equal to ten million tons of dynamite.

The eruption of Mount St. Helens was the most destructive in the history of the United States.



**After one
day of
school
(one
penny=
500
words of
reading)**



**After
one
week of
school**



**After
one
month of
school**



**After
one
year of
school**



**Quarters
= 500
new
words
gained
through
reading**

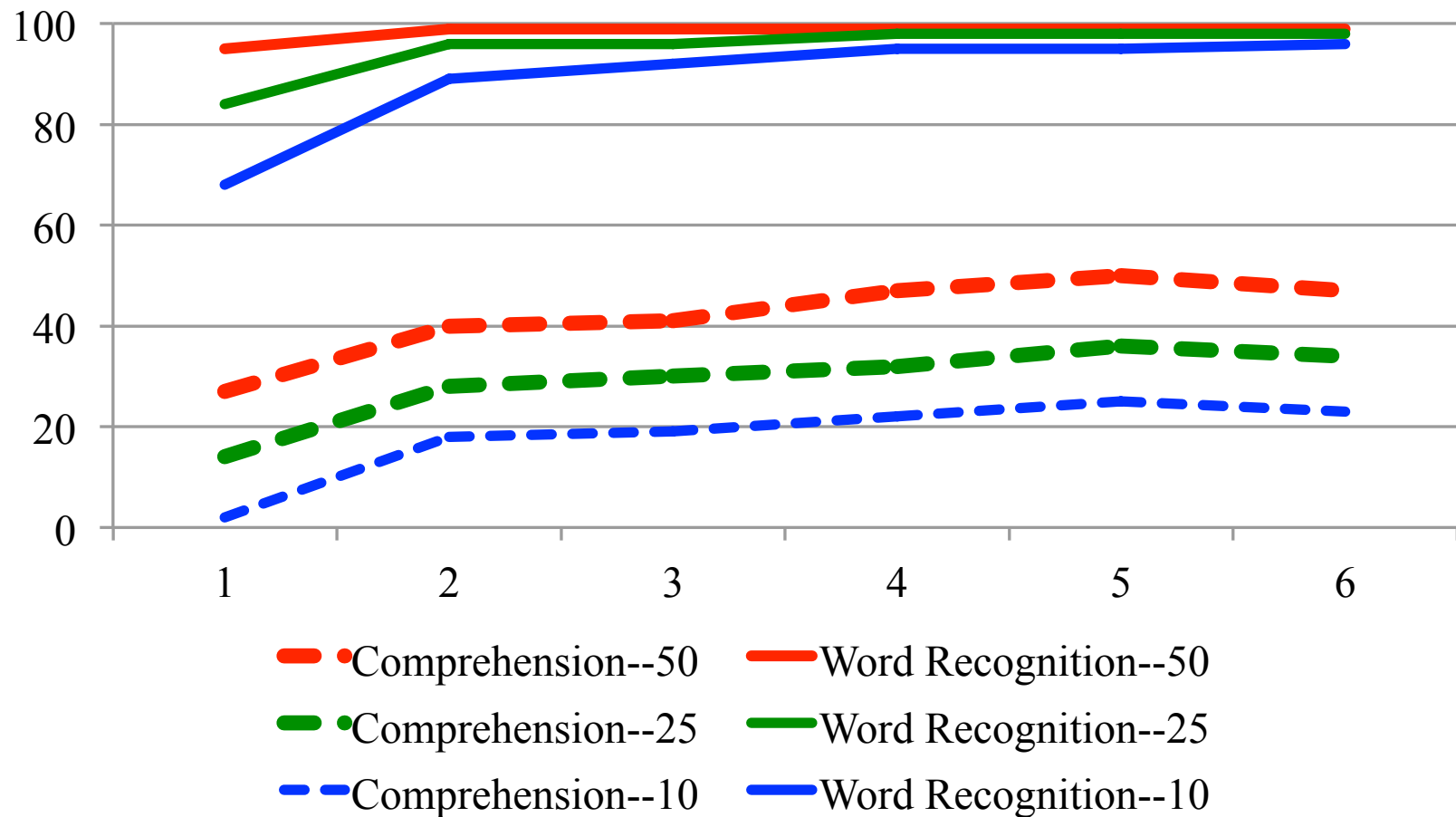


NAEP 2013 Grade 4 (Reading)



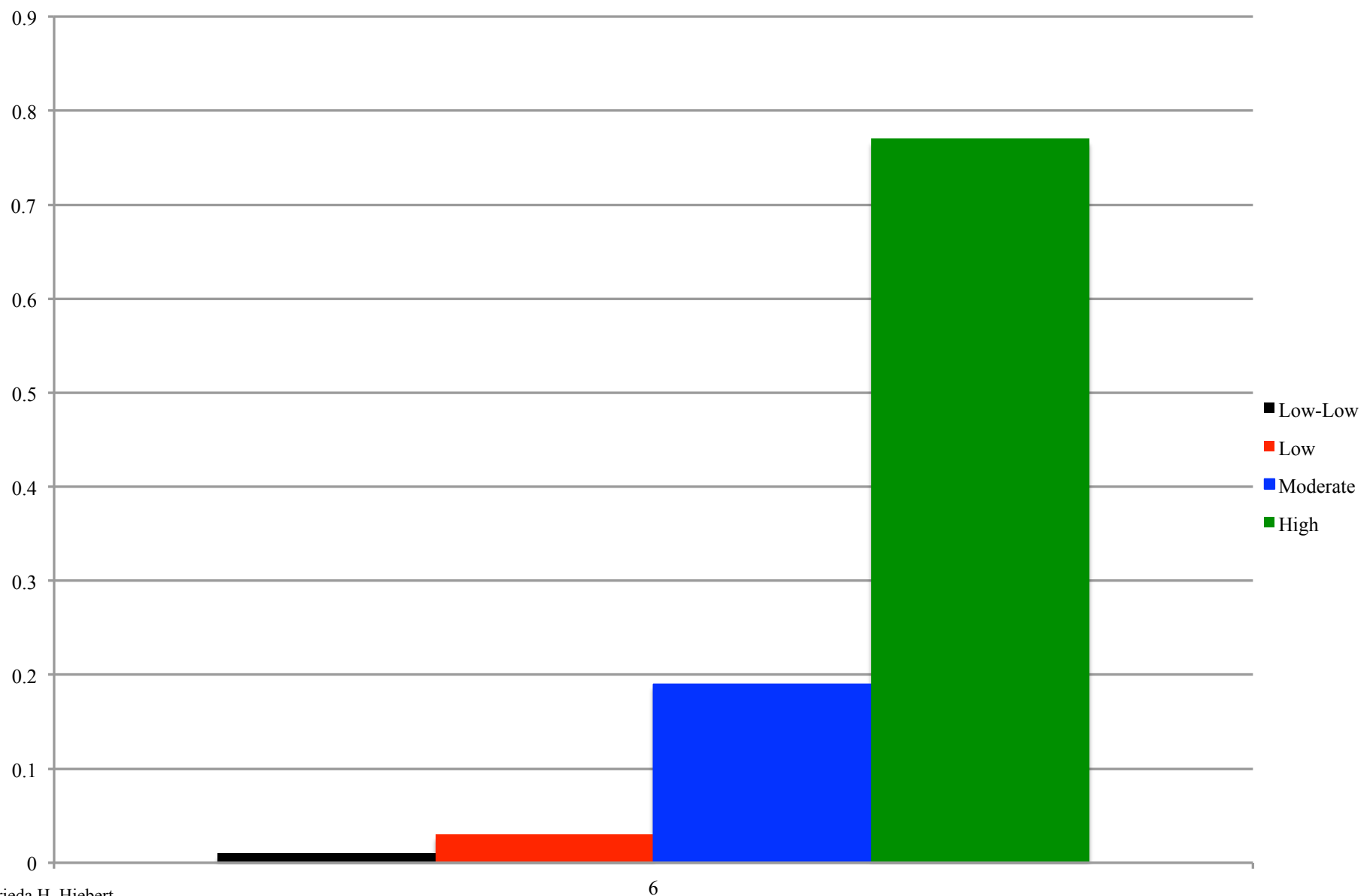
Below Basic Basic Advanced/Proficient

Word Recognition Accuracy & Comprehension of 10th, 25th & 50th Percentile (DIBELS)



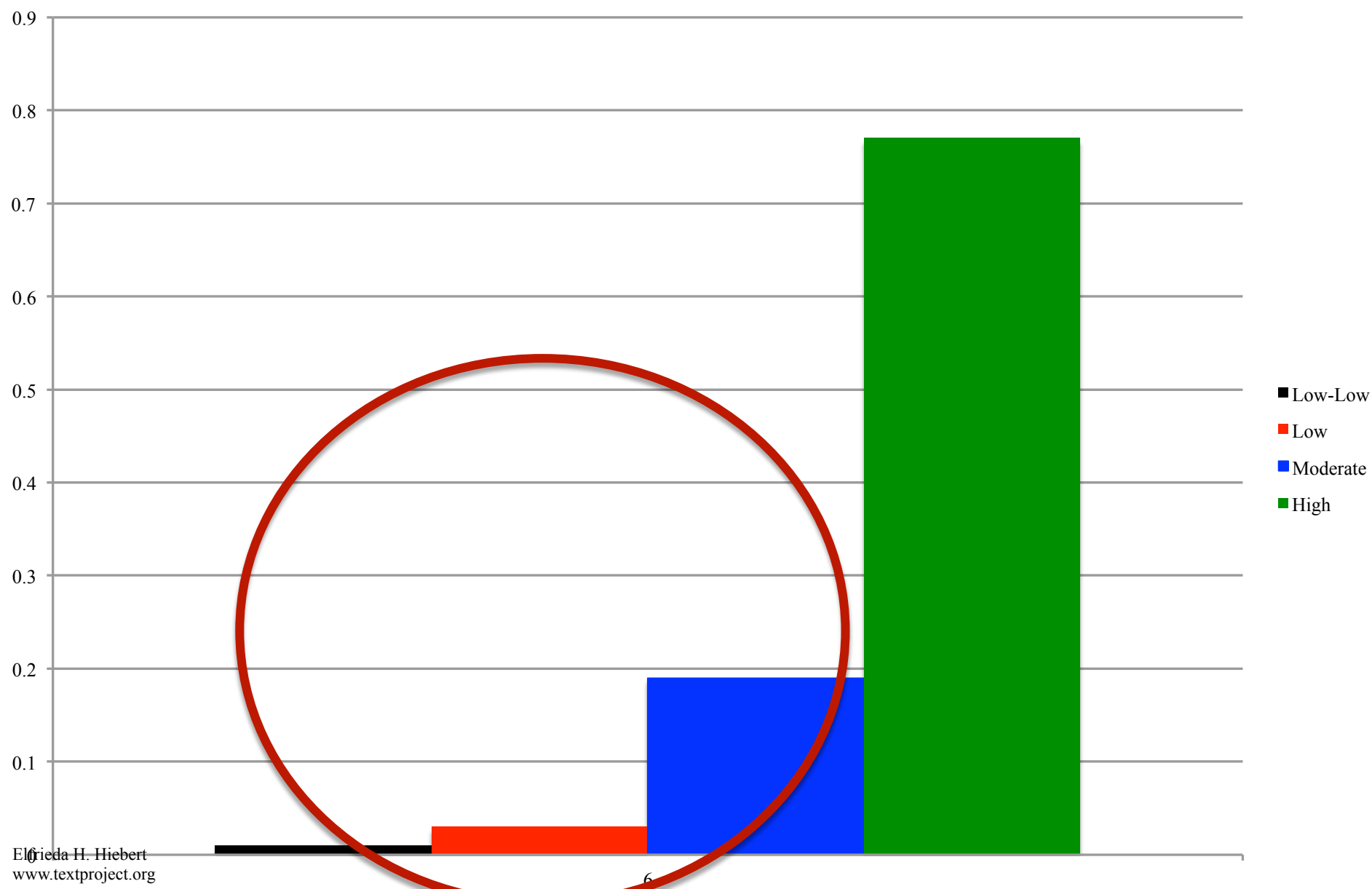
Comprehension Accuracy Groups

(Hiebert, Daniel, & Bielinski, 2015)



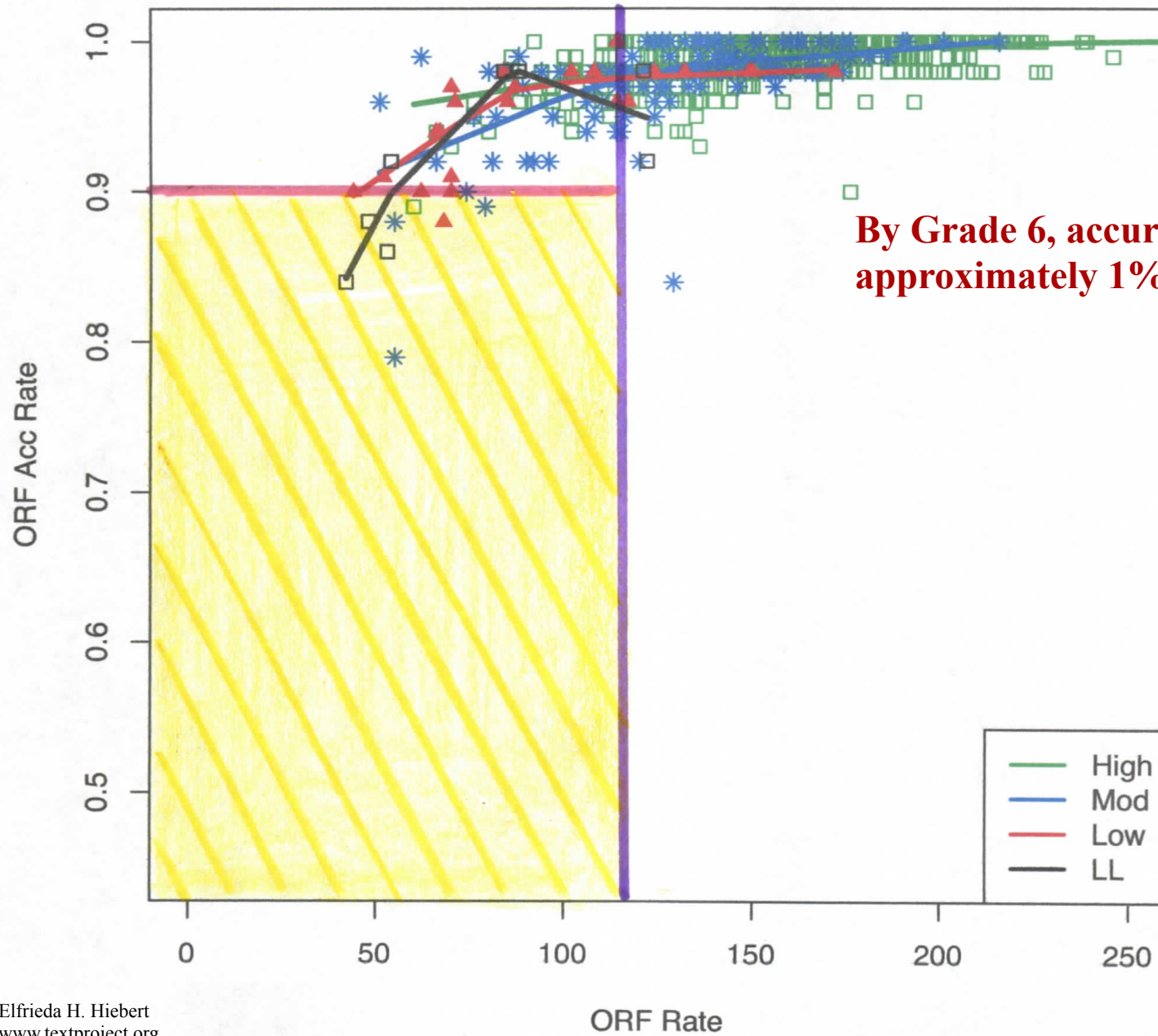
Comprehension Accuracy Groups

(Hiebert, Daniel, & Bielinski, 2015)



IS POOR COMPREHENSION IN SILENT READING INDICATIVE OF POOR WORD RECOGNITION PROFICIENCY?

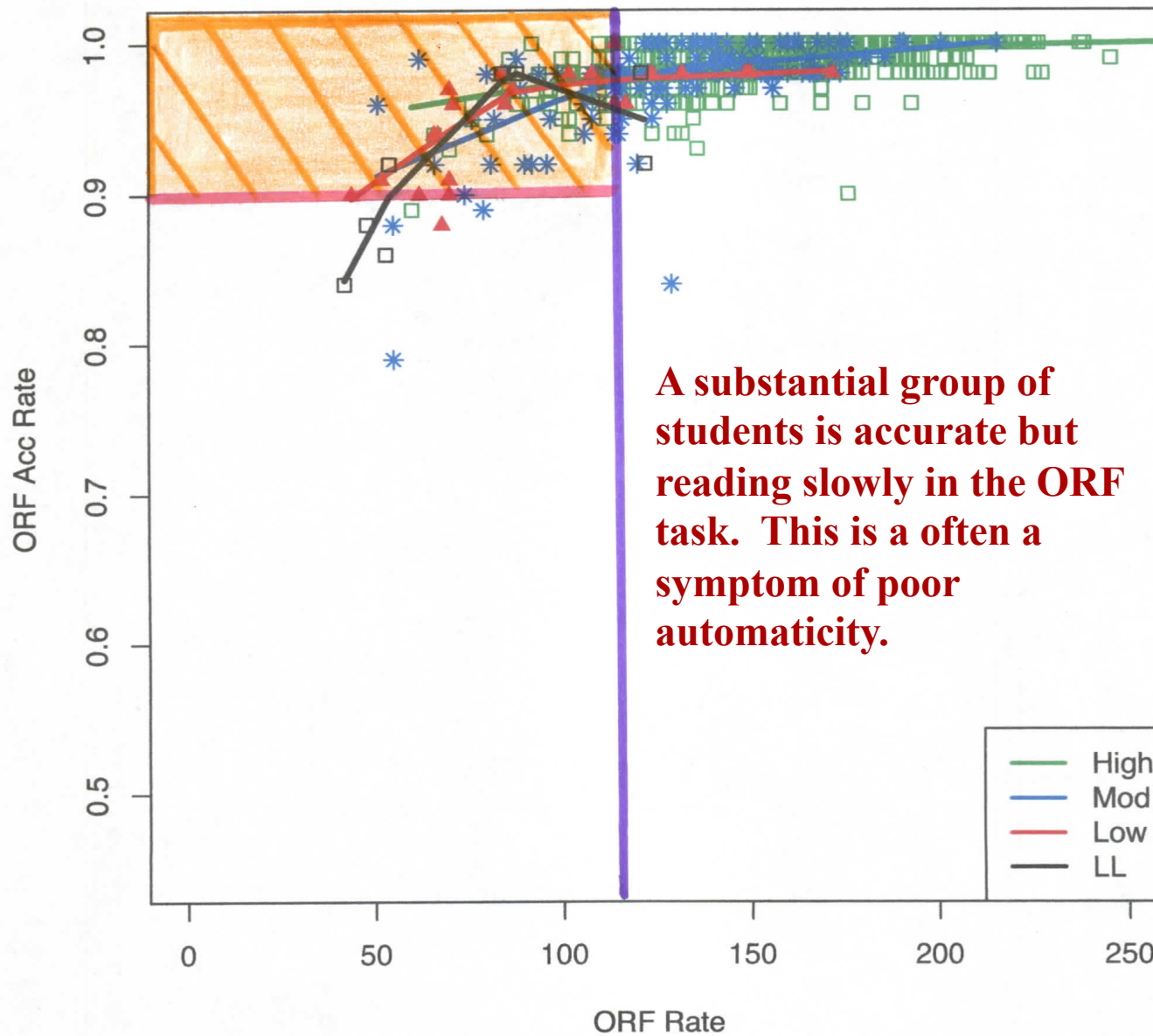
Grade = 6



By Grade 6, accuracy is a problem for approximately 1% of the sample).

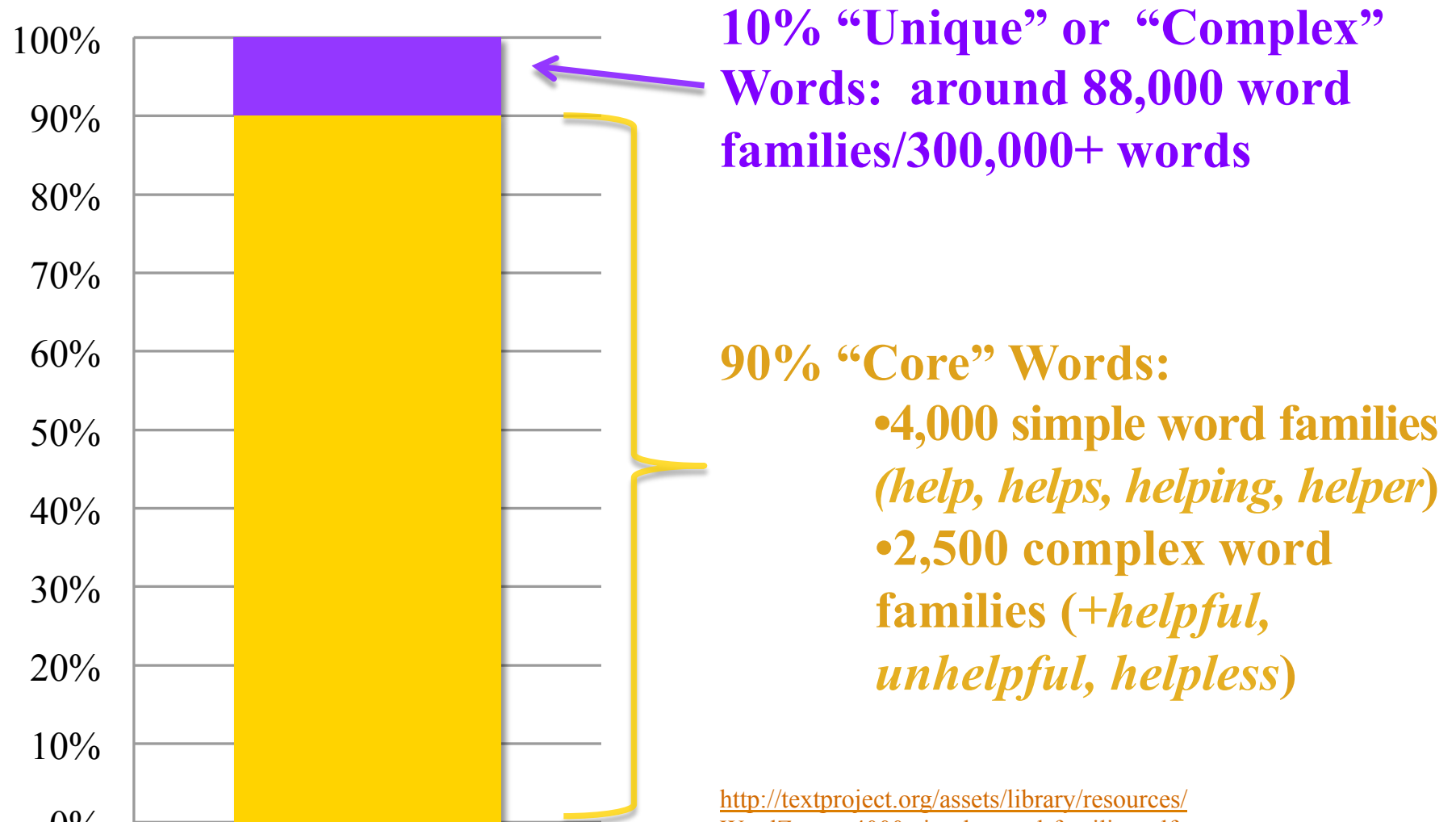
IS POOR COMPREHENSION IN SILENT READING INDICATIVE OF POOR AUTOMATICITY?

Grade = 6



**Idea 1: A small group of words
does the heavy lifting in English.
Students need to automatically
recognize these words—
including their multiple
meanings.**

The distribution of words in written English



http://textproject.org/assets/library/resources/WordZones_4000-simple-word-families.pdf

Examples of the Words in the Core Vocabulary

1st 100 words	the, by, no, through, must
101-300	long, great, put, last, family
301-1,000	power, north, story, strong, answer
1,001-1,500	valley, imagine, motion, nearby, importance
1,501-2,000	character, responsible, design, presence, trail
2001-2,500	mixture, discovery, civilization, attitude, assume

My knowledge of Canuck French derives from motion pictures usually with Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald, and it consists largely of "By gar." It's odd, but I didn't hear a single one of the potato pickers say "By gar," and they must have seen the pictures and known what is right. The women and girls wore pants usually of corduroy and thick sweaters, and they covered their heads with bright-colored scarves to protect their hair from the dust that rises from the fields with the smallest wind. Most of these people traveled in big trucks covered with dark canvas tarpaulins, but there were some trailers and a few camper tops like Rocinante. At night some slept in the trucks and trailers, but also there were tents pitched in pleasant places, and the smells that came from their cooking fires indicated that they had not lost their French genius for making soup.

from Travels with Charley, John Steinbeck

Chicago in 1871 was a city ready to burn. The city boasted having 59,500 buildings, many of them-such as the Courthouse and the Tribune Building-large and ornately decorated. The trouble was that about two-thirds of all these structures were made entirely of wood. Many of the remaining buildings (even the ones proclaimed to be "fireproof") looked solid, but were actually jerrybuilt affairs; the stone or brick exteriors hid wooden frames and floors, all topped with highly flammable tar or shingle roofs. It was also a common practice to disguise wood as another kind of building material. The fancy exterior decorations on just about every building were carved from wood, then painted to look like stone or marble.

"Don't **peck** at one another, children. Don't you wish we had the money Papa lost when we were little, **Jo**? Dear me! How happy and good we'd be, if we had no worries!" said Meg, who could remember better times.

"You said the other day you thought we were a deal happier than the King children, for they were fighting and **fretting** all the time, in spite of their money."

"So I did, Beth. Well, I think we are. For though we do have to work, we make fun of ourselves, and are a pretty **jolly** set, as Jo would say."

"Jo does use such **slang** words!" observed Amy, with a **reproving** look at the long figure stretched on the rug.

from Little Women, Louisa May Alcott

- Increase the amount that students read texts and ensure that texts give opportunities to increase exposure to core vocabulary (i.e., 2,500 complex word families) as well as new rare vocabulary.

Action 1: INCREASE VOLUME OF READING

Bird Nests

volume 1
issue 1



Most birds build nests, but all nests are not alike. The most common bird nest is the kind made by robins. Robins build nests that look like cups. They make a frame of twigs and sticks and cover it with mud. When this is done, robins line their nest with fine moss, feathers, and hair they find on the ground.

Barn swallows build nests of mud.

They make them in barns, close to the roof where it is safe. Sometimes several swallows build nests near one another.

Some birds build their nests in unusual ways. All birds use their beaks to help make their nests, but Tailorbirds use their beak as a needle to sew leaves together. Tailorbirds use threads they gather from the cotton in cotton plants.

Some birds don't build nests at all. Some lay their eggs right on the ground or on a rocky cliff. Auks are birds that lay their eggs on rocky cliffs near the sea.

Auks' eggs are pointed at one end. This shape lets the eggs roll in a circle if another animal tries to move them or if the wind blows hard. Because the eggs can roll in a circle, they do not roll off the cliff.

King penguins also do not build nests. Instead, they tuck their eggs into the folds of skin on their lower belly. The eggs rest on their feet and stay warm in the cold arctic winds.

Some bird species also lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. Cuckoos get other birds to keep their eggs safe and to feed their babies.

Most birds build a new nest each year. Some use the same nest for several years but clean the nest a little each year. Eagles build huge platform nests that they use for several years. However different they are, though, birds build nests that are just right for their families.



©2007 by Jonathan_W in Flickr. Some rights reserved <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/deed.en>



For more information about TextProject and *FYI for Kids*, visit textproject.org
v.1.0 © 2013 TextProject, Inc. Some rights reserved (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>).

Putting Two Words Together

volume 3
issue 2



A lot of sports that people play use balls. In basketball, players try to get a ball through a hoop. In baseball, players use a bat to hit a ball. In football, players throw a ball to get it close to the goal.

There are other words with “ball” that describe things that are round. But they are not balls with which you play a game. Meatballs are not used in any sport. But

they are great with spaghetti.

Eyeballs help in playing sports. But there isn’t a sport called eyeball where teams throw and catch eyeballs. You wouldn’t want to be in a game that uses fireballs. If you would ever see a fireball, you should get as far away as fast as you can. Then call 911 right away. You should also watch out if a cannonball is going to be fired. It is round but you don’t want to play with a cannonball. You especially do not want to catch a cannonball!

There are some words, though, that have ball in them but it has nothing to do with round. Ballpoint pens make

writing a lot easier. It’s easy to see how the “point” got into ballpoint pen. But why the ball? That part is in the name because of the tip of a pen is round. There are also rooms that are called ballrooms. People hold balls in ballrooms but they aren’t the round kind.

Other words with ball have nothing to do with round. In these words, the “ball” part of the word is not even said the same as ball in baseball or meatball. Ballerina is not ball with “erina.” Ballerinas are dancers and the word has nothing to do with ball. A ballot is used by people to vote but it is not round. You don’t even say “ball” when you say the word ballot.

Whenever you see ball as part of a word, look carefully. Usually, the word has something to do with games and sports. But remember eyeballs, fireballs, and cannonballs. These balls may be round but they aren’t used in sports! Ballerina and ballot show that some words with “ball” have nothing to do with being round.



©2012 by Scott Moore. Some rights reserved <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/deed.en>



For more information about TextProject and *FYI for Kids*, visit textproject.org
v.1.0 © 2013 TextProject, Inc. Some rights reserved (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>).

A Birthday Wish: Rachel Beckwith

volume 5
issue 1



In the summer of 2011, Rachel Beckwith had just finished third grade. She was looking forward to riding her bike and playing games like jump rope with her friends. Rachel also liked dancing.

Then she heard someone say that there were children in Africa who did not have clean water to drink. The person was from an organization called

charitywater.org, a charity that builds wells for towns in Africa. The wells provide people with clean water. Without wells, people often have to walk many miles to find water, then carry it home in buckets. Often, the water is not clean.

Instead of presents for her ninth birthday, Rachel asked her family and friends to donate \$9 for clean water in Africa to charitywater.org. If she could raise \$300, 15 people could get clean drinking water.

By the time her birthday came, Rachel had raised \$220. That meant that 11 people could get clean water.

She told her mom that she would try harder the next year to raise more money for the charity.

A month later, Rachel was critically injured in a car accident. On July 23, 2011, she was taken off life support. She died soon after.

When the news about Rachel's story and her birthday wish spread, people all around the world began to donate money in her name. Some gave \$9, some \$19, some more. A month later, 30,000 people had given more than \$1.2 million. Because of Rachel Beckwith, 60,000 people in more than 100 villages now have clean water to drink.

In her honor, one village put up a sign that reads, "Rachel's great dream, kindness, and vision of a better world will live with and among us forever." Clearly, one person, even a child, can make a difference.



For more information about TextProject and *FYI for Kids*, visit textproject.org
v.1.0 © 2013 TextProject, Inc. Some rights reserved (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>).

©2011 by Nestlé in Flickr. Some rights reserved <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/deed.en>

Bird Nests

volume 1
issue 1



Most birds build nests, but all nests are not alike. The most common bird nest is the kind made by robins. Robins build nests that look like cups. They make a frame of twigs and sticks and cover it with mud. When this is done, robins line their nest with fine moss, feathers, and hair they find on the ground.

Barn swallows build nests of mud.

They make them in barns, close to the roof where it is safe. Sometimes several swallows build nests near one another.

Some birds build their nests in unusual ways. All birds use their beaks to help make their nests, but **Tailorbirds** use their beak as a needle to sew leaves together. Tailorbirds use threads they gather from the cotton in cotton plants.

Some birds don't build nests at all. Some lay their eggs right on the ground or on a rocky cliff. **Auks** are birds that lay their eggs on rocky cliffs near the sea.

Auks' eggs are pointed at one end. This shape lets the eggs roll in a circle if another animal tries to move them or if the wind blows hard. Because the eggs can roll in a circle, they do not roll off the cliff.

King **penguins** also do not build nests. Instead, they tuck their eggs into the folds of skin on their lower belly. The eggs rest on their feet and stay warm in the cold arctic winds.

Some bird species also lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. **Cuckoos** get other birds to keep their eggs safe and to feed their babies.

Most birds build a new nest each year. Some use the same nest for several years but clean the nest a little each year. Eagles build huge platform nests that they use for several years. However different they are, though, birds build nests that are just right for their families.



©2007 by Jonathan_W in Flickr. Some rights reserved <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/deed.en>



For more information about TextProject and *FYI for Kids*, visit textproject.org
v.1.0 © 2013 TextProject, Inc. Some rights reserved (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>).

Putting Two Words Together

volume 3
issue 2



A lot of sports that people play use balls. In basketball, players try to get a ball through a **hoop**. In baseball, players use a bat to hit a ball. In football, players throw a ball to get it close to the goal.

There are other words with “ball” that describe things that are round. But they are not balls with which you play a game. Meatballs are not used in any sport. But

they are great with **spaghetti**.

Eyeballs help in playing sports. But there isn’t a sport called eyeball where teams throw and catch eyeballs. You wouldn’t want to be in a game that uses fireballs. If you would ever see a fireball, you should get as far away as fast as you can. Then call 911 right away. You should also watch out if a cannonball is going to be fired. It is round but you don’t want to play with a cannonball. You especially do not want to catch a cannonball!

There are some words, though, that have ball in them but it has nothing to do with round. Ballpoint pens make

writing a lot easier. It’s easy to see how the “point” got into ballpoint pen. But why the ball? That part is in the name because of the tip of a pen is round. There are also rooms that are called ballrooms. People hold balls in ballrooms but they aren’t the round kind.

Other words with ball have nothing to do with round. In these words, the “ball” part of the word is not even said the same as ball in baseball or meatball. **Ballerina** is not ball with “erina.” Ballerinas are dancers and the word has nothing to do with ball. A **ballot** is used by people to vote but it is not round. You don’t even say “ball” when you say the word ballot.

Whenever you see ball as part of a word, look carefully. Usually, the word has something to do with games and sports. But remember eyeballs, fireballs, and **cannonballs**. These balls may be round but they aren’t used in sports! Ballerina and ballot show that some words with “ball” have nothing to do with being round.



For more information about TextProject and *FYI for Kids*, visit textproject.org
v.1.0 © 2013 TextProject, Inc. Some rights reserved (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>).

©2012 by Scott Moore. Some rights reserved <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/deed.en>

Young Heroes:

Rachel Beckwith

volume 5
issue 1



In the summer of 2011, Rachel Beckwith had just finished third grade. She was looking forward to riding her bike and playing games like jump rope with her friends. Rachel also liked dancing.

Then she heard someone say that there were children in Africa who did not have clean water to drink. The person was from an organization called

charitywater.org, a charity that builds wells for towns in Africa. The wells provide people with clean water. Without wells, people often have to walk many miles to find water, then carry it home in buckets. Often, the water is not clean.

Instead of presents for her **ninth** birthday, Rachel asked her family and friends to donate \$9 for clean water in Africa to **charitywater.org**. If she could raise \$300, 15 people could get clean drinking water.

By the time her birthday came, Rachel had raised \$220. That meant that 11 people could get clean water.

She told her mom that she would try harder the next year to raise more money for the charity.

A month later, Rachel was critically injured in a car accident. On July 23, 2011, she was taken off life support. She died soon after.

When the news about Rachel's story and her birthday wish spread, people all around the world began to **donate** money in her name. Some gave \$9, some \$19, some more. A month later, 30,000 people had given more than \$1.2 million. Because of Rachel Beckwith, 60,000 people in more than 100 villages now have clean water to drink.

In her honor, one village put up a sign that reads, "Rachel's great dream, kindness, and vision of a better world will live with and among us forever." Clearly, one person, even a child, can make a difference.

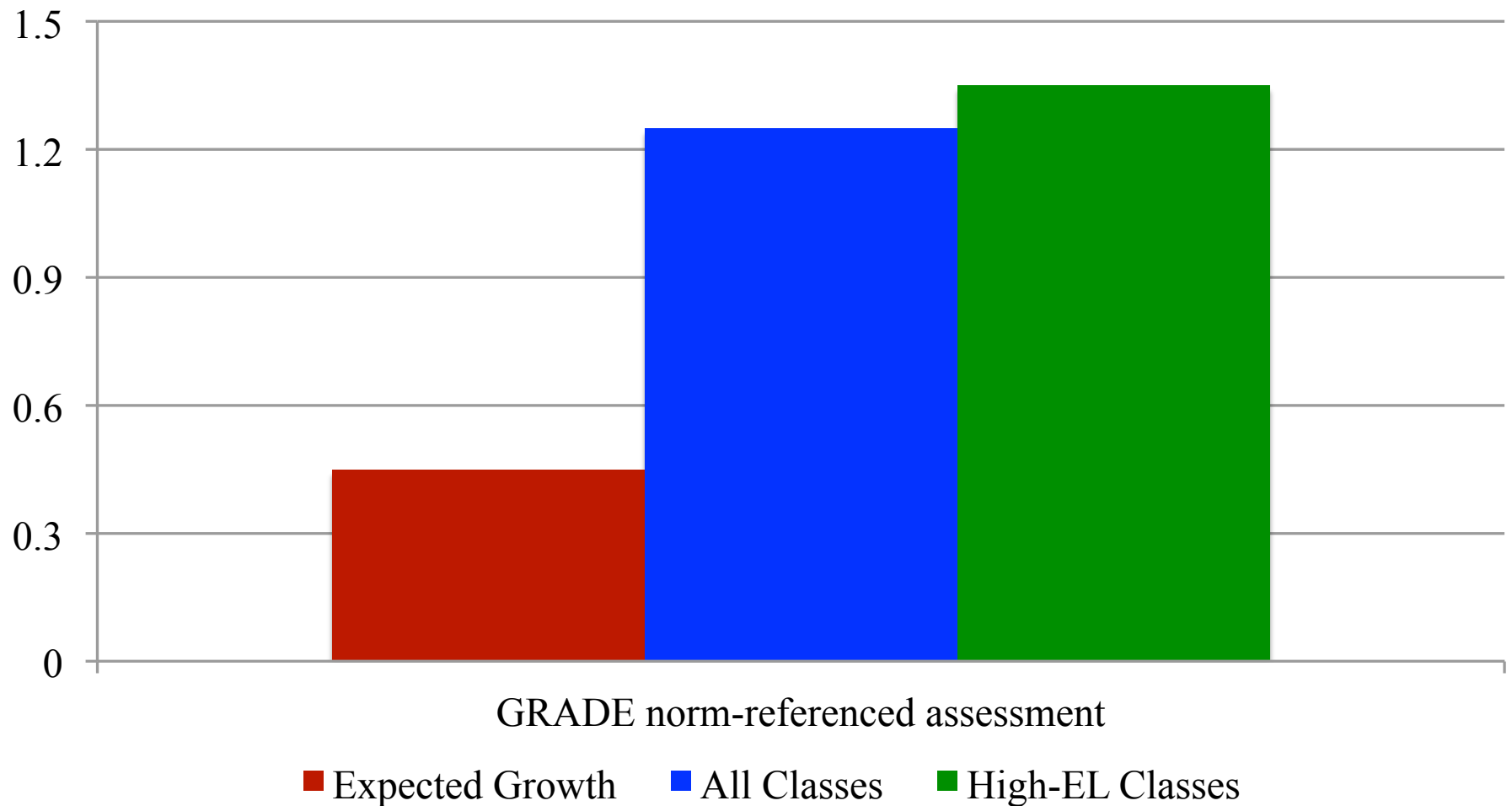


For more information about TextProject and FYI for Kids, visit textproject.org
v.1.0 © 2013 TextProject, Inc. Some rights reserved (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/us/>).

©2011 by Nestlé in Flickr. Some rights reserved <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/deed.en>

Readworks.org has approximately
1,500 free passages for Grades 1-
early high school

What happens when struggling middle schoolers have access to lots of texts...for 3-4 months?



What can be done NOW— before kids lose another year

- **An article a day—at least one (e.g., FYI for Kids, Readworks). Description of why and how at <http://www.textproject.org/library/frankly-freddy/join-the-read-an-article-a-day-initiative/>**
- **Don't use dumbed-down articles (e.g., articles that are promised to be on the same topic but a range of Lexiles)**
- **For summer: Initiate a summer reading program such as the SummerReads (open access)**



TextProject

[Go](#)

Strategies, tools, and texts to bring beginning readers and struggling readers to high levels of literacy

[HOME](#)[CLASSROOM MATERIALS](#)[LITERACY TOPICS](#)[TEXTPROJECT LIBRARY](#)[ABOUT](#)

Welcome to TextProject

TextProject is the only website with high-quality student texts and teacher guides that are all available for free download. Texts for students, vocabulary lessons and lists, professional development modules and videos —TextProject provides a world of open-access resources for teachers, teacher educators, parents, tutors, and students.



Download Classroom Materials for Teaching Reading



Classroom-proven resources including, favorite books, reading passages, vocabulary

lessons, word pictures, literacy lists & forms

[Read More »](#)

Keep Current on Literacy Topics

Latest news and research on crucial literacy topics:

- Common Core State Standards
- Beginning Reading, Reading Automaticity and Fluency, and Core Vocabulary
- Comprehension, Close Reading, and Assessment
- English Learners and Literacy
- Knowledge and Informational Texts
- Reading Volume, Stamina and Silent Reading, and Summer Reading
- Text Complexity
- Vocabulary and Morphological Awareness

[Read More »](#)

Browse the TextProject Literacy Education Library



Curated, quality resources for literacy education: books, guides, research papers,

webinars, presentations, full TextProject archives.

[Read More »](#)

•pdf (free)
at: www.textproject.org &
[independent.academia.edu/](http://independent.academia.edu/ElfriedaHiebert)
ElfriedaHiebert

•e-book (free): smashwords.com

•Kindle: 99 cents at amazon.com



TEACHING STAMINA & SILENT READING IN THE DIGITAL-GLOBAL AGE

Edited by Elfrieda H. Hiebert

