

Fluency, Comprehension, Writing, and Fun with Bronco Charlie

Howdy, gold-seekers! I'm Bronco Charlie (a.k.a. Mark Pennington), author of *The Gold Rush Musical!* As a visiting musical author (ZOOM or live), I help grades 4 and 5 teachers integrate music, drama, and literacy skills into the history/social studies content standards. For contact and booking information, check out <https://penningtonpublishing.com/collections/mark-pennington/products/author-visits>.

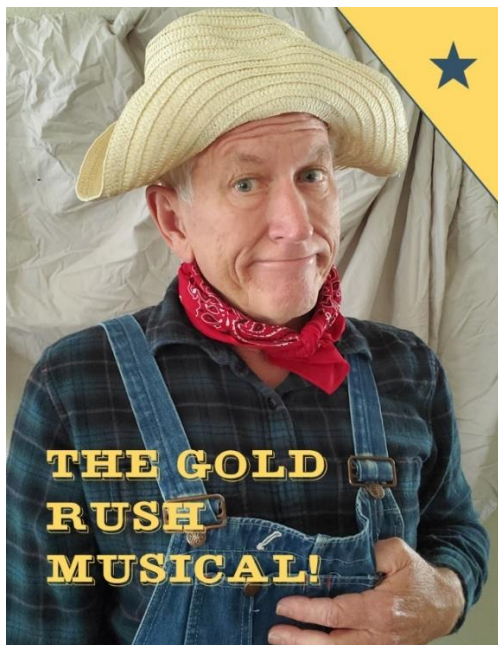
Instructional Resource Samples

Read It! Play It! Practice It! Reading Fluency Mark's 16-page digital comic book, "Bronco Charlie Rides the Pony Express," the "Bronco Charlie" song video with sing-along lyrics, and "Bronco Charlie" fluency practice song lyrics with word counts, fluency norms, and timing sheet. Note: Timing sheet includes all 12 songs of the visiting author resources.

Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension: Key vocabulary, "Bronco Charlie" song lyrics, 5 embedded comprehension questions per song, featuring the S.C.R.I.P. Comprehension Cues. Answers.

Readers' Theater: The Bronco Charlie section of the 8-page script with history, stories, journal entries, resource links, and humor, integrating the 12 Gold Rush songs to create the full *Gold Rush Musical!* performance.

Songwriters' Workshop: A lesson, using the 1849 "Oh! California" song lyrics to teach rhyme scheme, meter, and prosody. As part of visiting musical author experience, Mark records a song video of the students' lyrical re-writes. Students are published songwriters!



Read It! Play It! Practice It! Reading Fluency

Increased fluency rate and accuracy are highly correlated with increased reading comprehension. With a solid foundation in the alphabetic code, students can increase their fluency levels by practicing repeated choral readings along with modeled readings.

Modeled readings may include songs. Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, and Zimmerman comment:

We think that singing (while simultaneously having a visual display of the words in the songs) could be a very useful instructional tool to teach reading to beginning readers. A growing body of research and scholarly thought suggests that singing has potential for improving reading (Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, & Rasinski, 2008; Fisher, 2001; Harp, 1988; Hines, 2010; Miller & Coen, 1994; Smith, 2000).

The Reading Teacher Vol. 67 [Issue 2](#) pp. 137–141 DOI:10.1002/TRTR.1203 © 2013
International Reading Association

Read It! and Play It!

Display and read the “Bronco Charlie Rides the Pony Express” comic book. The text is the same as the song lyrics. <https://blog.penningtonpublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Bronco-Charlie-Rides-the-Pony-Express.pdf>

Next, display and play the song video, “Bronco Charlie.” Repeat and encourage students to sing or say-along. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-Lg_74Easc

Practice It! Timings and Repeated Reading Practice

1. Pass out colored pencils and the Reading Fluency Songs Timing Sheet to each student.
2. Copy and pass out the “Bronco Charlie” song (includes word counts in the left margin).
3. Say, “Each of you will read out loud in *six-inch voices* for one minute. Read at your own pace—not with another student. Don’t skip any words, and sound out any words that you don’t know. Pause at commas and stop at periods. During the timing, don’t stop reading. Ready, read.”
4. After one minute say, “Stop. Point your finger under the last word you read and keep it there. To figure out how many words you read in one minute, look at the number listed in the left margin. Begin with that number and add how many words you read on that line up to and including your finger. Watch how I do it on the display.”
5. “Now we are going to use a bar graph on the Reading Fluency Songs Timing Sheet to show how many words we read per minute. Look at the display to see how to do this. The first column after the numbers is colored blue at the bottom because it is the “cold” unpracticed timing. The red on top will be the “hot” practiced timing. Now shade in your “cold” timing.
6. Students practice repeated readings, chorally, individually, or along with the song video as the teacher monitors for accuracy, prosody, and attention to punctuation.
7. Have students take and record their “hot” timings.

Reading Fluency Song Timing Sheet

Name _____

Reading Fluency Songs	Words Read per Minute	
	80	130
Blue = First Timing Red = Last Timing		
Example		
Oh! California		
Days of '49		
Clementine		
Sweet Betsy from Pike		
Seeing the Elephant		
Joe Bowers		
Bronco Charlie		
Ho! For California		
Big Jean Clair		
A Rippin' Trip		
Life in California		
Skip to My Lou		
	80	
	85	
	90	
	95	
	100	
	105	
	110	
	115	
	120	
	125	
	130	
	135	
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	180	

“Bronco Charlie” Reading Fluency

	Well, they call me “Bronco Charlie,” and I have a story to tell.		
13	Now, some of it’s a tall tale, but some is true, as well.		
26	Way back in 1861, I was eleven years old		
35	when a pony with no rider raced into Sacramento.		
44	That pony was carrying mail, sent by the Pony Express,		
54	in locked mochila pouches to join the East and West.		
64	“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;”		
74	It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”		
86	When the station keeper caught the reins, a crowd around him grew.		
98	He said, “I have no rider to take the mail on through.”		
110	But, the Pony Express motto is “The mail must go through.”		
121	So I shouted, “Give me half a chance to show what I can do.”		
135	“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;”		
145	It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”		
157	“I’ve ridden the route to Hangtown; I know the Placerville trail.”		
168	“No, you’re much too young,” said some in the crowd, “to carry the U.S. mail.”		
183	The station keeper had no choice, so he saddled me up to go,		
196	off to ride the 45 miles east from Sacramento.		
205	“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;”		
215	It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”		
227	I rode all day and through the night, got lost, then found the station.		
241	A new rider strapped on the mail to a fresh pony waiting.		
253	The next day at the station, the eastern rider arrived,		
263	but he couldn’t finish up his route with an arrow in his side.		
276	“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;”		
286	It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”		
298	Then the station keeper told me, “Now you work for the Pony Express,”		
311	so I took the oath and delivered the mail in record time, no less.		
325	As the youngest of hundreds of riders, I rode 5 months, but then		
338	the telegraph was completed, and the Pony Express did end.		
348	“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;”		
358	It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”		
370			
	Total Number of Words Read	Total Number of Words Read	
	- Total Number of Errors	- Total Number of Errors	
	= Total Number of Correct Words	= Total Number of Correct Words	

Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

In addition to **Read It! Play It! Practice It! Reading Fluency** resources, each of the 12 Gold Rush songs includes **Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension** instruction and practice.

Teachers will find that the songs provide “gold mines” for both literary and historical analysis. The colorful figures of speech, vocabulary, and use of literary elements (metaphor, simile, personification, etc.) will provoke rich class discussion, as will the “tall tales” interwoven in some of the song lyrics.

Analyzing the Gold Rush songs as primary source documents and comparing lyrical statements and facts with those learned in the students’ textbook and articles will help students understand the nature of history and the role of historians in determining what did happen, to whom, and by whom during this time historical period.

How to Use the Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension “Bronco Charlie” Worksheet

Pre-teach the bolded vocabulary, so that students will be able to reference these words as they read the songs. Read the background information and help students analyze the photographs.

The SCRIP acronym stands for Summarize, Connect, Re-think, Interpret, and Predict. Each Gold Rush song includes five questions, featuring each of these five cueing strategies. Teachers may wish to use these cues to develop questions for accompanying expository texts.

Determine whether students should answer the five comprehension questions independently or in pairs and review the answers in class discussion. Answers follow.

“Bronco Charlie” Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension

bronco	A wild or half-tamed horse
mochila	A bag with pockets hanging over both sides of a saddle

(1) **Re-think** what is meant by “some of it’s a tall tale.”

Well, they call me “**Bronco** Charlie,” and I have a story to tell. Now, some of it’s a tall tale, but some is true, as well.

Way back in 1861, I was eleven years old when a pony with no rider raced into Sacramento. That pony was carrying mail, sent by the Pony Express, in locked **mochila** pouches to join the East and West.

“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;” It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”

When the station keeper caught the reins, a crowd around him grew.

He said, “I have no rider to take the mail on through.”

But, the Pony Express motto is “The mail must go through.”

So I shouted, “Give me half a chance to show what I can do.”

“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;” It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”

“I’ve ridden the route to Hangtown; I know the Placerville trail. “No, you’re much too young,” said some in the crowd, “to carry the U.S. mail.”

The station keeper had no choice, so he saddled me up to go, off to ride the 45 miles east from Sacramento.

“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;” It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”

I rode all day and through the night, got lost, then found the station.

A new rider strapped on the mail to a fresh pony waiting.

The next day at the station, the eastern rider arrived, but he couldn’t finish up his route with an arrow in his side.

“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;” It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”

Then the station keeper told me, “Now you work for the Pony Express,” so I took the oath and delivered the mail in record time, no less.

As the youngest of hundreds of riders, I rode 5 months, but then the telegraph was completed, and the Pony Express did end.

“The mail must go through;” “The mail must go through;” It’s the motto of the Pony Express: “The mail must go through.”

(2) **Interpret** the meaning of the Pony Express motto.

(3) **Predict** what the station keeper will do.

(4) **Connect** the station keepers’ decisions to let “Bronco Charlie” ride.

(5) **Summarize** how “Bronco Charlie” became a Pony Express rider.

Reading Comprehension Answers

“Bronco Charlie” Music and Lyrics by Mark Pennington © 2023

1. Some details of the story to be shared are fictional and some are true.
2. No matter the obstacles, the mail had to be delivered by the Pony Express riders.
3. The station keeper will let “Bronco Charlie” ride the route with the mail because there is no one else to do so.
4. Both the Sacramento and Placerville station keepers had no riders to carry the mail. In both instances, “Bronco Charlie” was available and given the job of carrying the Pony Express mail.
5. He had “ridden the route to Hangtown,” and “knew the Placerville trail, and he was willing to ride. In Placerville, the station keeper made him an official Pony Express rider because he had proven his ability to deliver the mail and because there was no one else to ride.

The Gold Rush Musical! Readers' Theater

The Gold Rush Musical! features an historically-based **Readers' Theater** to serve as an interactive speaking and musical performance.

Readers' Theater is a dramatic presentation in which dialogue is emphasized more than costumes, stage decorations, and props. The method is also known as “stage reading,” “performance reading,” and “theatrical reading.” Students are assigned as readers in the play.

Benefits of Readers' Theater

Readers' theater is fun! Additionally, this instructional tool provides a means for teaching public speaking, practicing reading fluency, and learning historical content.

In their 2023 meta-analyses of 23 studies regarding the use of readers' theater with students ages 6–12, researchers Mastrothanasis, Kladaki, and Andreou summarized the research findings:

[Readers' Theater] contributes positively to the development of the students' reading skills, along with the creation of positive attitudes towards reading and the development of incentive for the learning of reading within linguistic environments of either the mother tongue or a foreign language. Moreover, based on the meta-analysis results of 11 studies with similar research hypotheses and design, it was discovered that Readers' Theatre contributes considerably to the improvement of the students' reading skills and has a large effect size indeed.

International Journal of Educational Research Open [Volume 4](#), 2023, 100243

“Bronco Charlie” Sample Readers' Theater Text

Chorus 1: Why were the gold miners so selfish?

Chorus 2: All they ever said was “Mine! Mine! Mine!”

Reader 1: This next song is about an eleven-year-old boy, nicknamed “Bronco Charlie.”

Reader 2: “Bronco Charlie” was raised on a horse ranch outside of Sacramento. By age eleven, he could ride any horse on the ranch, and he was allowed to ride all over the Sacramento area by himself, doing errands for the ranch. Kids grew up fast back then.

Reader 3: Yes, they did. Anyway, one day “Bronco Charlie” was in Sacramento when the Pony Express rider was due to arrive after his 45-mile-ride from “Hangtown.”

Reader 4: The Pony Express carried the U.S. mail from Missouri to California in only 10 days with riders riding from station to station, changing ponies and riders along the way.

Reader 5: Let's hear how “Bronco Charlie” became the youngest Pony Express rider.

Songwriters Workshop: Gold Rush Song Rhyme Schemes

The Gold Rush songs use *verses* to tell a story, explain a character’s feelings, or describe different events. In some of the songs, repeated *choruses* state the main idea of the song. Both verses and choruses feature rhymes at the end of each line. The pattern of these rhymes is called a *rhyme scheme*.

We use capital letters to identify the rhyme scheme. The first set of rhyme sounds in a song is labeled A. The next set is labeled B, and so on. Listen to the rhyme scheme from this verse from “Life in California.”

I lived way up in Maine, where I heard about the diggings,	A
so I shipped aboard a boat, commanded by Joe Higgins.	A
I sold my little farm, from wife and children parted,	B
and off to California sailed and left ‘em broken-hearted.	B

Label the rhyme scheme in this verse from “Sweet Betsy from Pike.”

Oh, don't you remember Sweet Betsy from Pike?	_____
She crossed the wide mountains with her lover Ike	_____
with two yoke of oxen and a big yeller dog,	_____
a tall Shanghai rooster and one spotted hog.	_____

Add your own verse.

Write a four-line AABB verse to add to the song, “Oh! California.” Share what you plan to do in California during the Gold Rush.
