

# Cracking the Reading Code in Columbus

A practical guide for parents, educators, and students to turn data into action





# First, A Reality Check

To fix a problem, we must look it squarely in the face. The latest Ohio School Report Cards reveal a stark reality for our community's young readers.



Columbus City Schools' rating for Early Literacy, measuring if K-3 students are on track to read proficiently.



The approximate number of third-graders in the district who are not reading at grade level (based on 36-40% proficiency).



# The Consequence is 'The Third Grade Wall'

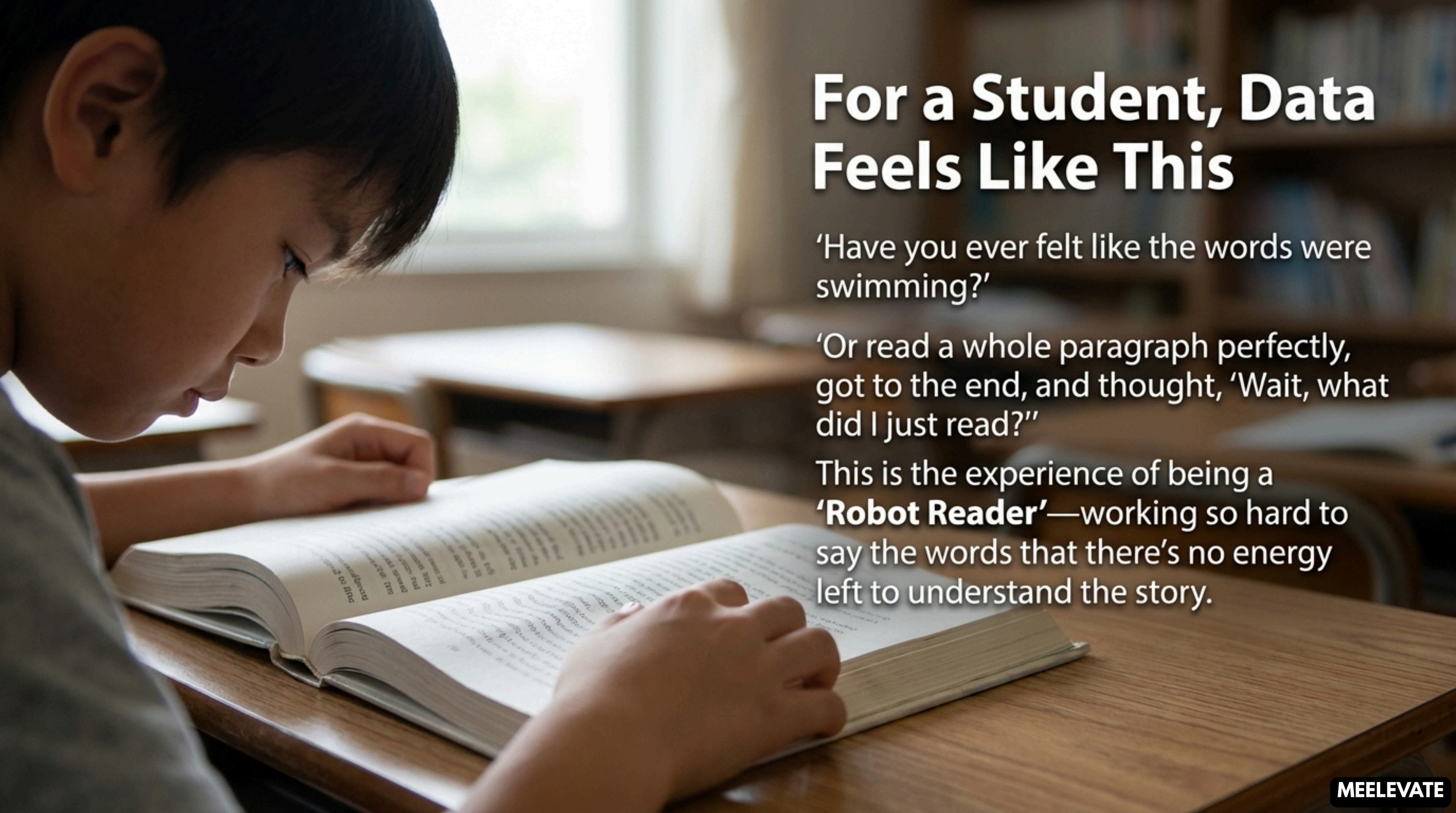
**Until 3rd Grade:**  
Children  
are *learning to read*.



**From 4th Grade Onward:**  
They are *reading to learn*.

If a child can't read fluently by the end of third grade, they hit a wall. Science, social studies, and even math word problems become impossible because they can't decode the instructions. The foundation for all future learning is at risk.



A young boy with dark hair is shown in profile, sitting at a wooden desk and reading an open book. He is looking down at the pages with a focused expression. The background is a blurred classroom setting with other desks and a window letting in natural light. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

# For a Student, Data Feels Like This

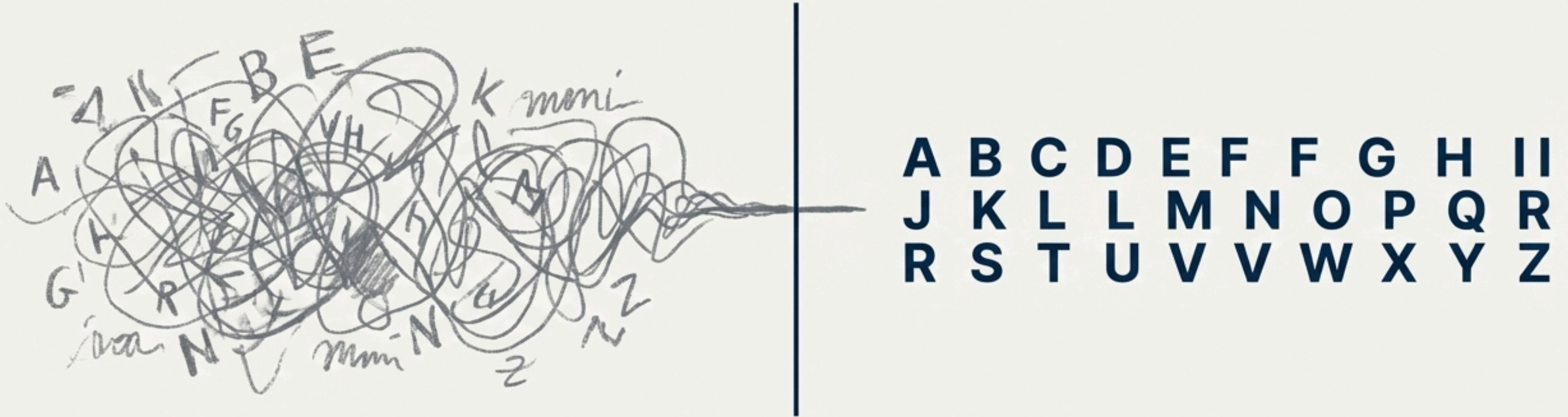
'Have you ever felt like the words were swimming?'

'Or read a whole paragraph perfectly, got to the end, and thought, 'Wait, what did I just read?''

This is the experience of being a **'Robot Reader'**—working so hard to say the words that there's no energy left to understand the story.



# But Here Is The Science of Hope



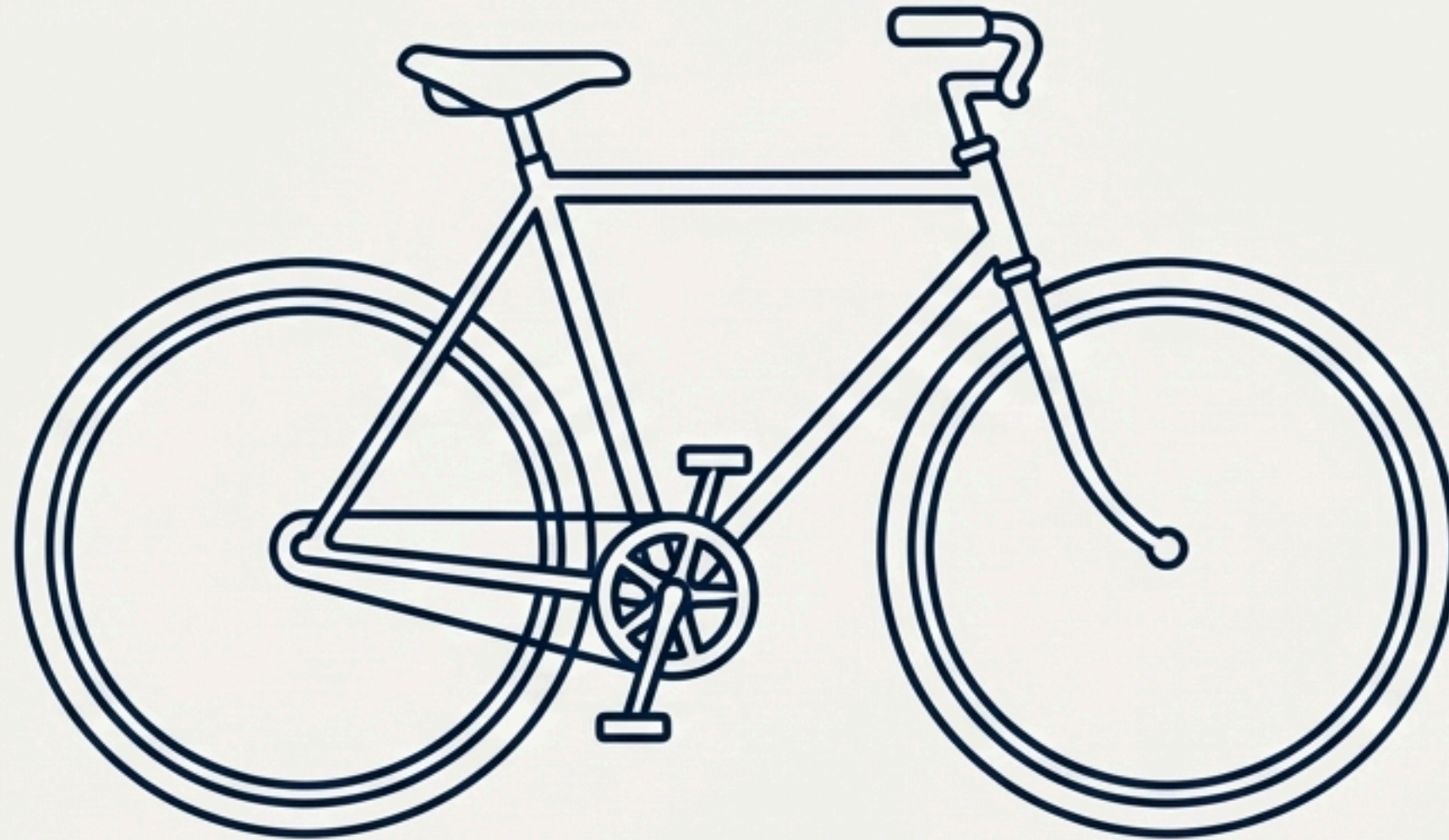
Reading is not a talent you are born with. It is a code.

- For decades, many schools taught reading the wrong way (e.g., guessing from pictures).
- The 'Science of Reading' proves the brain learns to read by connecting sounds to letters.
- **And just like any code, it can be cracked.**



# Cracking the Code Starts With a Simple Idea

Scientists have found that successful reading is just two skills multiplied together. Think of it like riding a bike.



**Decoding  $\times$  Comprehension = Reading**



# Reading is a Two-Part System: Pedaling and Steering



## Skill: Decoding & Fluency

**What it is:** The mechanical part. Reading the words on the page smoothly and accurately.

**If you fail:** You stop pedaling and fall over. Your brain is too tired to think about the meaning.



## Skill: Language Comprehension

**What it is:** The direction. Understanding the meaning of the words and the story.

**If you fail:** You stop steering and crash. You're just 'word calling'—making sounds without making a movie in your mind.



# So, Where is the Breakdown Happening?

A student's reading challenge is almost always in one of two buckets.

## The 'Pedaling' Struggle

**Archetype:** The Robot

**Symptoms:** Reads slowly, stumbles over words, forgets the beginning of the sentence by the time they reach the end.

**Core Issue:** Fluency.

## The 'Steering' Struggle

**Archetype:** The Forgetter

**Symptoms:** Reads smoothly but can't answer questions about the text. Doesn't remember details.

**Core Issue:** Comprehension.



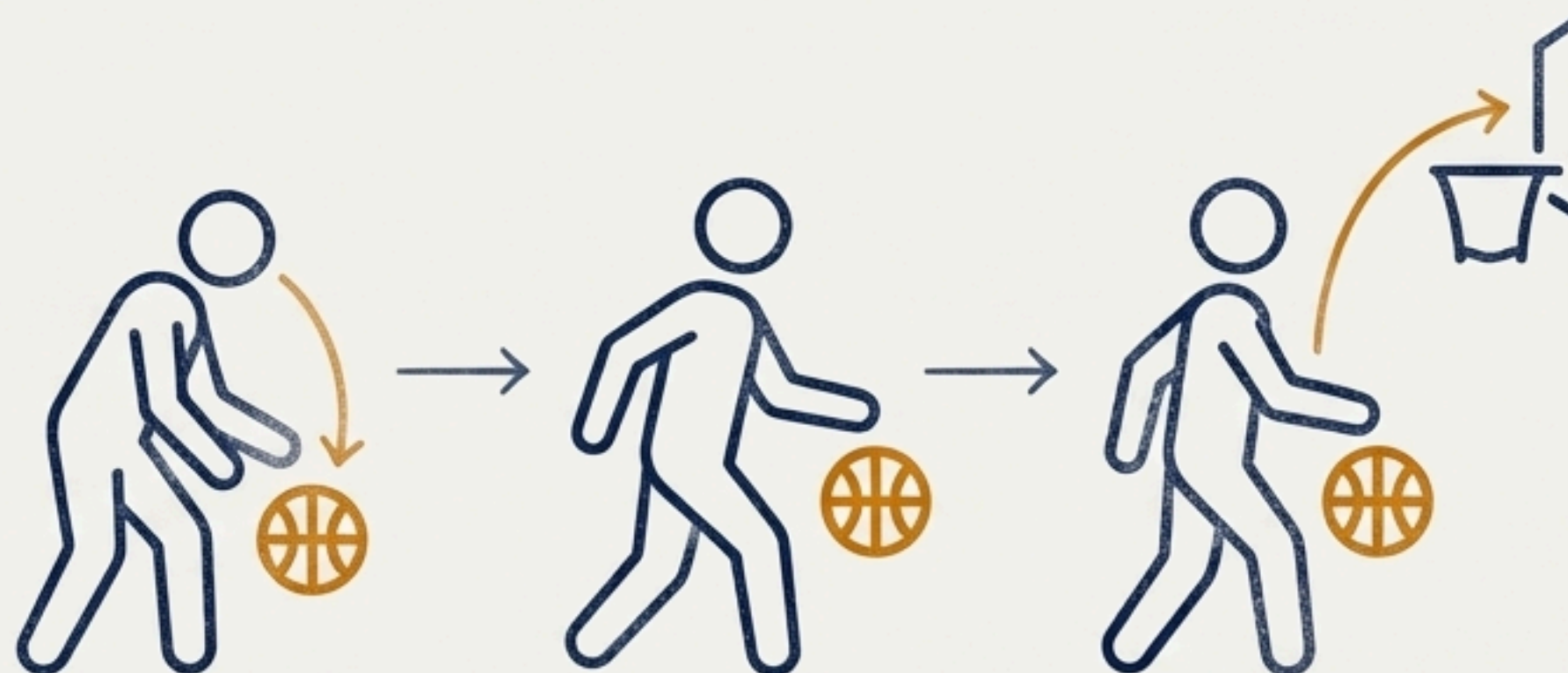
# Step 1: Stop Reading Like a Robot

We need to build **automaticity**.

## Analogy:

Think of a basketball player. At first, they stare at the ball to dribble. *Bounce, look, bounce, look.*

But after thousands of repetitions, they can dribble with their eyes closed while looking at the hoop.



## The Goal:

To get your reading to the point where your eyes see the word and your mouth says it, freeing up your brain to focus on the meaning.



# The Fluency Toolkit: Three Drills to Build Automaticity



## The Re-Run (Repeated Reading)

Never read a difficult passage just once. Read it three times: a cold read, a warm read, and a hot read. Each time gets smoother and faster.



## Punctuation is a Traffic Sign

Comma (,) = Slow down.  
Period (.) = Full stop. This teaches pace and expression.

I am going

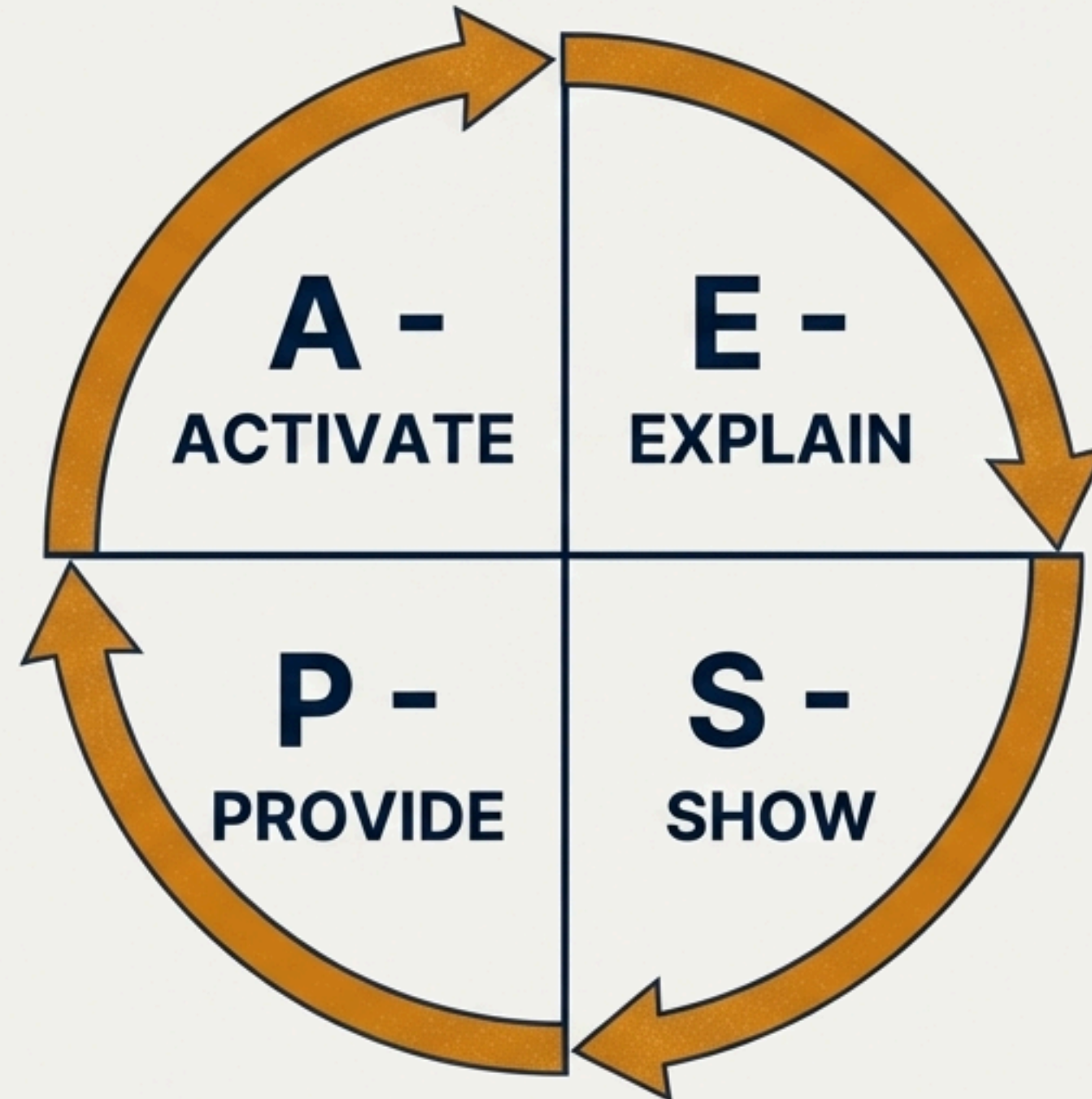
## Scoop the Words

Fluent readers don't read word-by-word. Scoop 3-4 words together and read them in a single breath.  
*(I am going / to the park.)*



# A System for Mastery: The ESPA Framework

This isn't just about tips; it's about a process. The ESPA framework ensures that every skill is learned, proven, proved, proven, and put into practice.



- **E - EXPLAIN:** Understand the core concept simply.
- **S - SHOW:** See a clear example of the skill in action.
- **P - PROVIDE:** Get a tangible tool or drill to practice the skill.
- **A - ACTIVATE:** Receive a clear mission to use the skill immediately.



# ESPA in Action: The Re-Run Challenge

**E - Explain:** You learned that rereading a passage builds speed and smoothness, freeing up brainpower.

**S - Show:** A “cold read” is choppy: *\*The... huge... elephant...\**  
A “hot read” is smooth: *\*The huge elephant / walked slowly...\**

**P - Provide:** The “Re-Run Rule.” Find a short paragraph in any book.

1. Time yourself reading it once.
2. Read it two more times out loud.
3. Time yourself on the 4th try.



**A - Activate:** See the difference? Your mission is to use the Re-Run on one tricky passage every day.



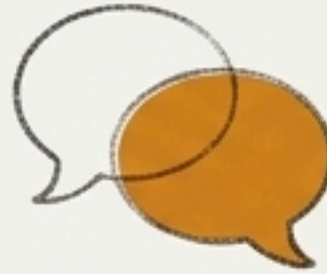
# Building the Home Team

This is a community effort. Parents and educators are critical coaches.



## Strategy 1 for Parents: The “20-Minute Protect”

Set aside **20 minutes** every day. No phones, no TV, no distractions. Just dedicated reading time.



## Strategy 2 for Parents: Use Dialogic Reading

Instead of asking yes/no questions, ask **open-ended questions** like, “Why do you think the character did that?” This builds comprehension.



## Strategy 3 for Educators: Focus on Tier 2 Words

Prioritize high-utility academic words (**analyze, compare, evaluate**) that appear across all subjects.



# The Mission: Use the Data as Fuel

We started with a stark reality: the 1-Star rating and the proficiency gap. But we don't ignore data; we use it as fuel to rise above it. The gap is real, but it is also solvable.

**Activate the tools you've learned. Start the 30-Day 'Reading Mastery' Challenge.**





# Reading is Not Just a School Subject



It is the master key that unlocks every other door.  
Solving a math problem, understanding history, applying  
for a job, participating in your community.

**It's time to close the gap. Let's get to work.**