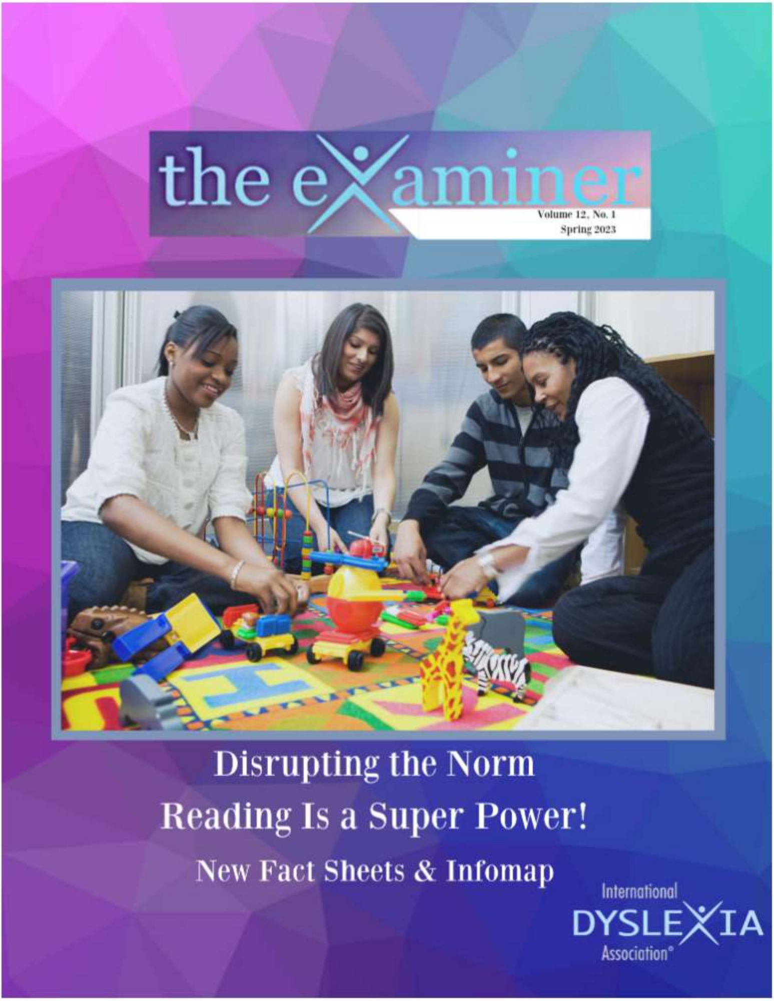
Volume 12 No.1 April 2023



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Volume 12, No. 1
Spring 2023

Disrupting the Norm

Reading Is a Super Power!

New Fact Sheets & Infomap

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x
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CONTENTS

Volume 12 No. 1 April 2023

1. Disrupting the Dyslexia Norm *by Deborah Lynam*
2. Being Able to Read Is the Superpower! *by Nancy Chapel Eberhardt*
3. *Annals of Dyslexia* open access articles on second language writing proficiency and reading profiles of rural school students
4. Structured Literacy Infomap
5. New IDA Fact Sheet – English Learners & Dyslexia
6. Our Condolences to the family of Will Baker

Annals of Dyslexia
3

Structured Literacy
4
Grounded in the Science of Reading

STRUCTURED LITERACY

Until Everyone Can Read

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DISRUPTING THE DYSLEXIA NORM

By Deborah Lynam

Emerging as important rally cries from our robust dyslexia advocacy community, campaigns such as #saydyslexia and #untileveryonecanread focus on disrupting the norm in U.S. schools. They serve to shine a light on the all too often unquestioned "normal" within the classroom. In demanding that schools acknowledge and support students with dyslexia, these calls to action seek to dismantle the status quo. The norm in many educational settings is to focus on the limitations of students with dyslexia while failing to cultivate their strengths or to provide the necessary support for early identification, interventions, and accommodations. They also call for a critical evaluation of popular instructional approaches that appear to work fine for a small percentage of children but are leaving many children with dyslexia to struggle. As advocates, we keep the spotlight on dyslexia. Our efforts ask for a re-norming of classroom instruction to include the literacy needs of reading-disabled students. Often, however, this advocacy is applied through another kind of normative lens—a universal identity of dyslexia. This norm is one that has been shaped by U.S. special education policy regulations and the experiences primarily of White, middle-to-upper class families like my own.

The Dyslexia Norm

Thinking more critically about how the "dyslexia" label itself becomes normalized, (i.e., the ways it is assigned to certain students experiencing reading difficulties yet denied to others) could strengthen our overall advocacy community and actually expand our collective ability to disrupt the norm. Representations of children with dyslexia in both popular culture and the education domain prove themselves to be complex sites of negotiation for both the children themselves and the adults and systems that share responsibilities for their intervention and care. There is a dynamic relationship between the real-life child experiencing difficulty learning to read and the conceptualization of dyslexia as an inherent or biologically based reading disability. This relationship deserves a more critical analysis as it is not as universal as our hashtag rallying calls would suggest. Advocacy efforts that push to pathologize dyslexia as solely a biological disability, as easily distinguishable from other factors that contribute to reading struggles, may actually be obscuring the many ways our current policy, research, and practice are creating artificial categories of difference that privilege some children and marginalize others. As advocates, we do understand the ways in which socioeconomic status, race, and linguistic background intersect in the lives of children experiencing reading difficulty, but these understandings aren't always directly accounted for in our advocacy agendas, policy discussions, and translations to practice. This inconsistency or, at times, lack of consideration for the ways in which various sociodemographic factors differently impact children's opportunities to learn to read, presents many challenges to our work in terms of literacy equity.

While strategic campaigns, such as #SayDyslexia, have helped to galvanize and mobilize an effective dyslexia movement, it is worth thinking more deeply about how a dyslexia norm carries some limitations in education policy and practice. For example, dyslexia may not offer a flexible or responsive enough umbrella across general and special education settings to support all children in need of reading support and intervention. Many claim dyslexia to mean the genetic underpinnings of a specific kind of reading difficulty, and this claim fits well within the framework of current U.S. special education policy. However, it is well established in the research literature that environmental and economic factors also play a large contributing role in achievement. Despite these ambiguities around the causes of reading difficulty, the category of specific learning disability (SLD) in the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has essentially constructed a privileged category of reading difficulty. Knowing that IDEA goes on to state that learning problems primarily resulting from other factors, such as environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage, do not qualify as specific learning disabilities should raise significant concern within our advocacy community.

Considering the Intersections

Dyslexia, under the category of SLD, has become a sorting mechanism tied to restrictive special education funding streams, state policies and protocols, and potentially biased professional judgment calls and/or IQ discrepancies. It's highly problematic that federal special education policy establishes disability status for a select group of children with reading difficulties, affording this group a guarantee to a free *appropriate* public education (FAPE), while denying this same guarantee of appropriateness and procedural safeguards to other children with similar reading struggles. If we are committed to ideals like #untileveryonecanread, then we must ask tough questions about why the system is built in such a way that children from well-resourced, White, English-speaking families seem to more readily acquire the dyslexia diagnosis and these IDEA protections; while children from different racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds are seeing their same reading difficulties reduced to sociodemographic variables deemed outside these same protections.

Since we know that reading difficulties result from a range of both genetic and environmental factors, we should be sure that our advocacy goals are comprehensive enough to account for these intersections between disability and other sociodemographic factors. Can we envision an inclusive advocacy platform that actively seeks to disrupt the idea of a universal dyslexia norm—one that doesn't seek to stridently differentiate between *students with dyslexia* and *other struggling readers*? Can we frame, as central tenets of our dyslexia advocacy, calls for things like more critical interdisciplinary reading research, access to culturally and linguistically responsive assessment and diagnostic tools, teacher training aligned to both the science of reading and culturally responsive pedagogy, funding for bilingual programs, campaigns to recruit and retain more teachers of color, and FAPE guarantees that extend to general education initiatives, such as response-to-intervention and multi-tiered system of supports? This type of reflexivity could be an important component of our work moving forward—listening, learning, and thinking critically about these collective equity issues that may stretch and even disrupt our old ways of heralding literacy as a social justice issue for all.

***Deborah Lynam** is currently pursuing a graduate degree in Childhood Studies at Rutgers University-Camden. She serves on multiple boards focused on improving children's literacy outcomes: the National Center on Improving Literacy's Family Engagement Advisory Board, the International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council's Board of Directors, and the board of The Reading League NJ. She is also a founding parent member of Decoding Dyslexia-NJ.*

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BEING ABLE TO READ IS THE SUPERPOWER!

By Nancy Chapel Eberhardt

At a time when the media frequently reports on the latest super moon, superfood, or super hero, an article in the popular press about Richard Branson caught my eye. In the article, Branson refers to his dyslexia as his *superpower*. He and many other successful people with dyslexia have attributed their struggle to learn to read with sparking their entrepreneurial spirit and creative thinking. But the reality is that a minority of people with dyslexia ever experience the level of success that Branson and others have. The outcome for too many with reading difficulties is undereducation, under or unemployment, and an unfulfilled life.

For the vast majority of struggling readers, many of whom are described in the October 2022 issue of *Perspectives on Language and Literacy* (*Perspectives*, Vol. 48, No. 2) as the underserved students of historically marginalized groups, the inability to read is far from an advantage. The theme editors of this issue, Nicole Patton Terry, Astrid Pohl Zuckerman, and Peggy McCardle, state that "reading achievement in school is tied to systems that exist beyond classroom instruction." While we know a great deal about teaching how to read, the editors note that we don't know how to use legislative actions to achieve the desired outcome. Whether we are addressing the disproportionality in special education, inequitable implementation of evidence-based practices, or ineffective use of existing systems such as Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), we need to direct our collective efforts to improving our use of these important legislative actions.

If you are member of IDA, you can access this issue of *Perspectives* at portal.dyslexia.org (select "Publications" from the "Member Resources" menu after you log in) to deepen your awareness and knowledge about the steps we can take to bring about meaningful, intentional, and strategic action to create systems for equitable reading achievement. If you are not a member of IDA, please consider joining IDA today to read the most current issues of *Perspectives* and access useful resources, such as "Free, Publicly Available Resources to Learn More about Issues Related to Equitable Implementation of Evidence Based Practices, Programs, and Policies."

For the majority of those individuals who are poor readers, learning to read will be their superpower. Let's join forces to empower all students by teaching them to read.

***Nancy Chapel Eberhardt** is currently an educational consultant and author. She has experience as a special education teacher, administrator, and professional development provider. Nancy contributed as author and co-author to the development of the literacy intervention curriculum LANGUAGE! More recently she collaborated with Margie Gillis to develop the Literacy How Professional Learning Series. Nancy is the co-author of Sortegories 3.0, a web-based app that provides practice with decoding, vocabulary, and syntax to improve decoding, reading comprehension, and fluency. She serves as a member of IDA's Perspectives and the Examiner editorial boards.*

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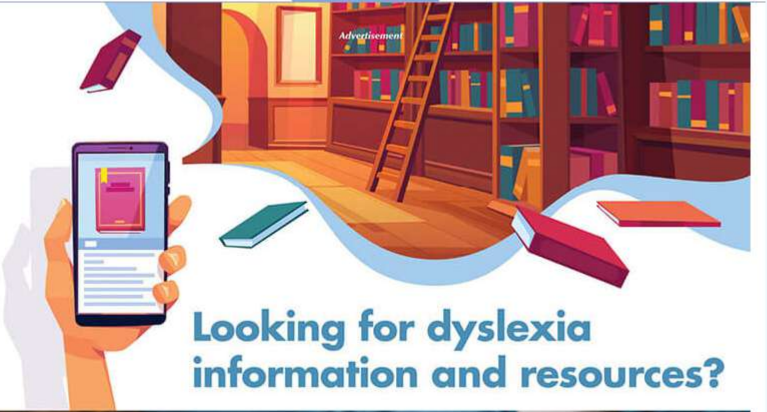
OGA certifies teachers and accredits instructional and training programs that meet these standards. The Academy also promotes public awareness of the needs of individuals with dyslexia and of the Orton-Gillingham Approach for the treatment of dyslexia. It is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.



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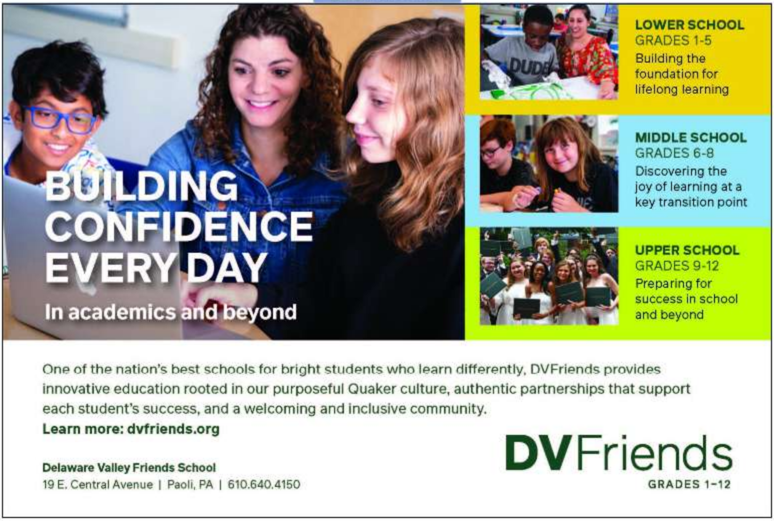
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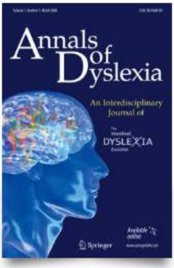

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Read the latest papers in *Annals of Dyslexia,* IDA's peer reviewed journal! Two of the papers are open access–just click on the links below.

Free access to all issues of *Annals of Dyslexia* and bonus access to the journal *Reading and Writing* are just two of the benefits of IDA membership. Click here to log in to your account and select "Publications" from the "Member Resources" menu. Not a member? Click here to join today!

- **Open Access!** Writing proficiency in English as L2 in Spanish children with dyslexia *by Marta Álvarez-Cañizo, Olivia Afonso, & Paz Suárez-Coalla*
- Examining fidelity reporting within studies of foundational reading interventions for elementary students with or at risk for dyslexia *by Katlynn Dahl-Leonard, Colby Hall, William J. Therrien*
- **Open Access!** Exploring reading profiles of rural school students *by Johny Daniel & Amy Barth*
- Tracking reading skills and reading-related skills in dyslexia before (age

- 5) and after (ages 10-17) diagnosis *by Elise Lefèvre, Eddy Cavalli, Pascale Colé, Jeremy M. Law, & Liliane Sprenger-Charolles*
- Longitudinal predictors of French word reading difficulties among French Immersion children *by Elizabeth MacKay, Xi Chen, & S. Hélène Deacon*

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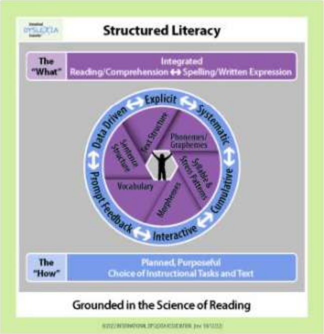
IDA'S NEW INFOMAP CONNECTS THE WHO, WHAT, AND HOW OF STRUCTURED LITERACY



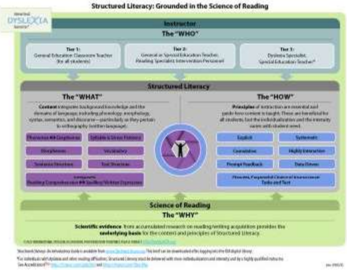
The term *Structured Literacy* (SL) is new to many, but the practices it references are not. SL is both WHAT to teach (the content) and HOW to teach it (the methods or principles of instruction). IDA coined the term in the early 2000s to provide a brief, descriptive, name for approaches rooted in Orton-Gillingham-based programs and Multi-Sensory Structured Language Education (MSLE).

Science of Reading (SOR) is another relatively new term, but it describes work that IDA and others have championed for a long time—research on reading (both the WHAT and the HOW). Sometimes SL and SOR are used interchangeably, but they are not the same. SL is informed by the SOR, which is all the research on reading to date. That's why IDA's new infomap is called "Structured Literacy: Grounded in the Science of Reading."

IDA developed this infomap to clarify the distinction between SL and SOR, add more layers (for example, writing) to earlier IDA infographics, and emphasize the importance of integrating all these elements during instruction, as illustrated by the wheel. We're calling this new, detailed version an infomap because it will link to other resources to more fully support new and experienced educators in delivering instruction to struggling readers, including those with dyslexia.

This new infomap was created to support educators trained in programs aligned with IDA's Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading (KPS) and to inspire other educators to seek that training. It is not a comprehensive scope and sequence for intervention; however, it does provide examples and supplemental materials to support educators (the Who) implementing interventions based on the KPS.

Download the infomap and infographic here and share it with your colleagues. You'll also find it in IDA's digital library, ShopIDA.org, and IDA's website:DyslexiaIDA.org



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Vocabulary
Sentence Structure
Text Structure
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Science of Reading
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Scientific evidence from accumulated research on reading/writing acquisition provides the **underlying basis** for the content and principles of Structured Literacy.

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NEW IDA FACT SHEETS

One of our favorite things to do here at IDA is to share information. IDA fact sheets are free, downloadable sources of expert information for every step of the dyslexia journey. We truly have something for everyone! Whether you are a parent, educator, researcher, or advocate, our fact sheets are a great place to start.

IDA's newest fact sheet, English Learners and Dyslexia, offers important considerations when evaluating English learners for dyslexia. Classroom teachers may find it helpful as they observe students for possible referral for further assessment. It also includes guidelines for assessment specialists who may provide screening and assessment support.

Another new fact sheet from IDA, Building Phoneme Awareness: Know What Matters presents guiding principles for instruction informed by what we know from research today. In it you will find tips for effective practices to build children's phoneme awareness in kindergarten, first grade, and beyond. Dr. Stephanie Stollar, founder of Stephanie Stollar Consulting, LLC, offers an excellent video summary of the fact sheet.

These fact sheets and more are available on the IDA website, the Dyslexia Digital Library, and our store. We encourage you to download them and share them with your colleagues. Let us know what you think. We want to provide the tools and resources you need to implement Structured Literacy for all students!

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Our Condolences to the Family of Will Baker

In Memorium

The IDA community is deeply saddened by the recent loss of Will Baker, a dyslexia champion and leader in translating high-quality research to support and inform the work of teachers. Will's connection to the International Dyslexia Association (IDA—then known as the Orton Society) began early—when he first worked in the field of dyslexia. "In my experience with him over so many years," says Examiner Editor-in-Chief Nancy Cushen White, Will was the quintessential kind, warm-hearted man who did his best to make the world a better place—especially for those with dyslexia and related challenges." Click here for the obituary published in New Bedford Standard-Times and posted online on December 03, 2022.

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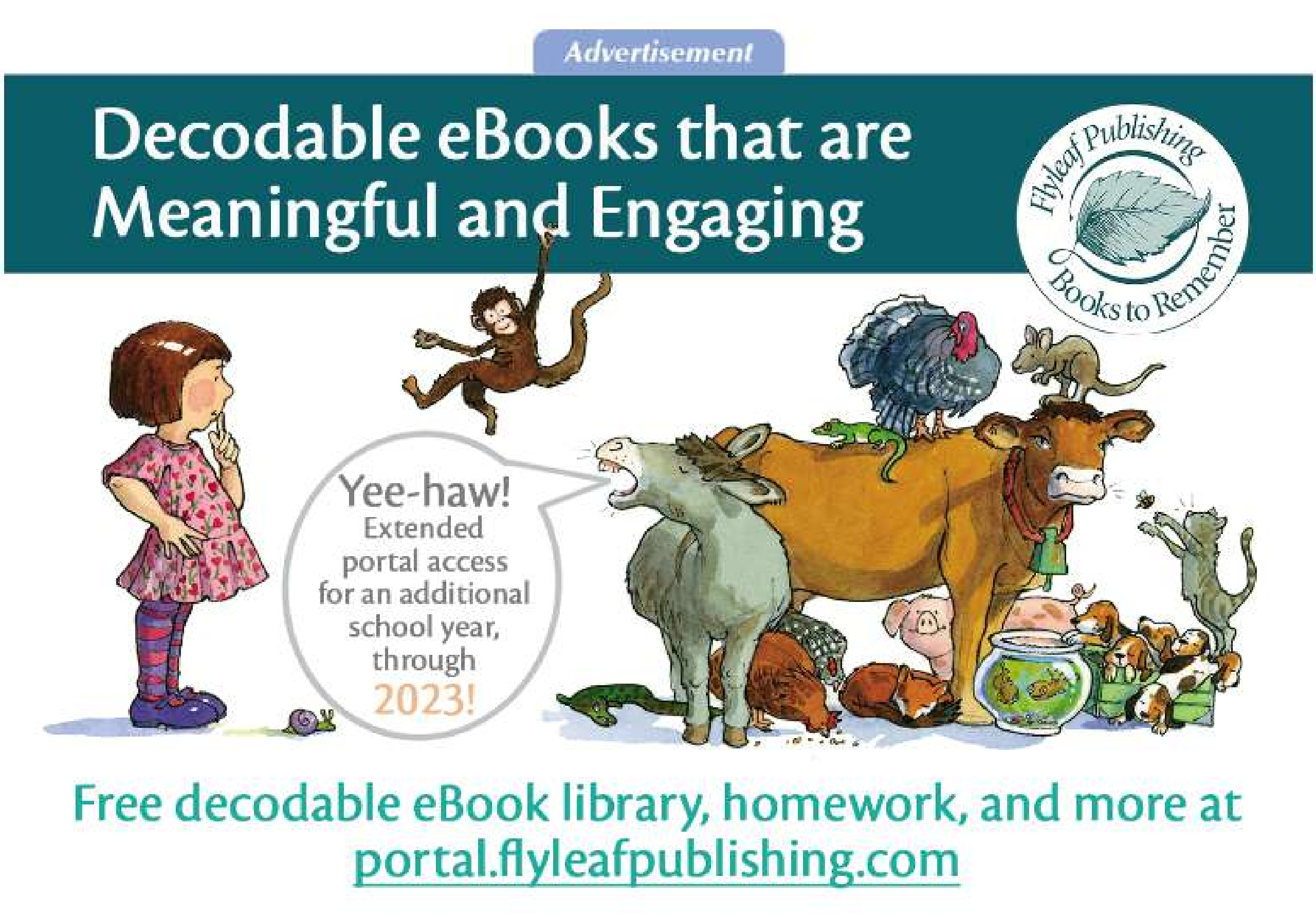
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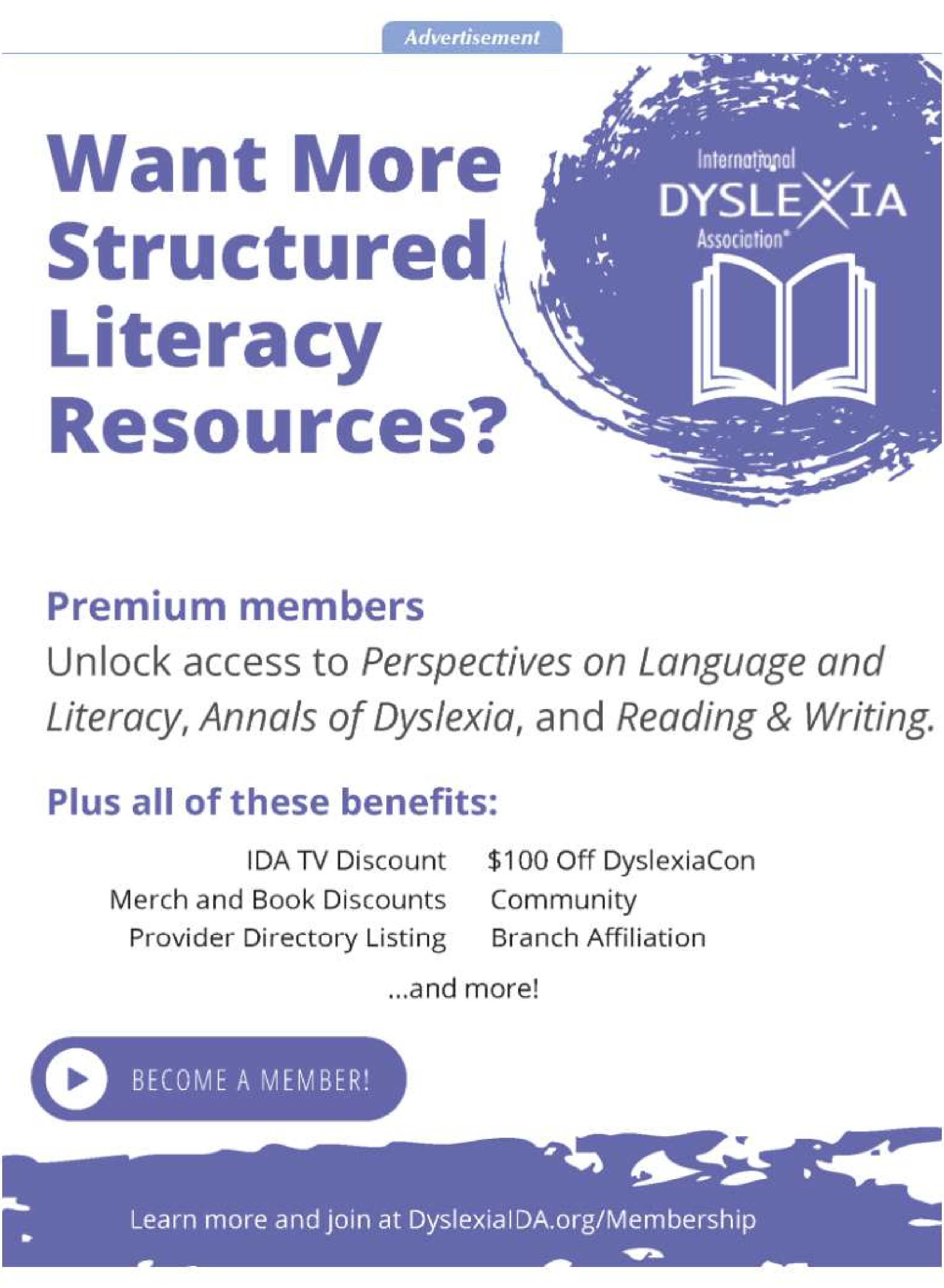
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A lively, thought-provoking group activity, Experience Dyslexia® is a popular simulation kit from the International Dyslexia Association of Northern California. Recently updated, it offers participants insight into the challenges and frustrations faced each day by people with this learning difference.
Experience Dyslexia® is available for purchase at
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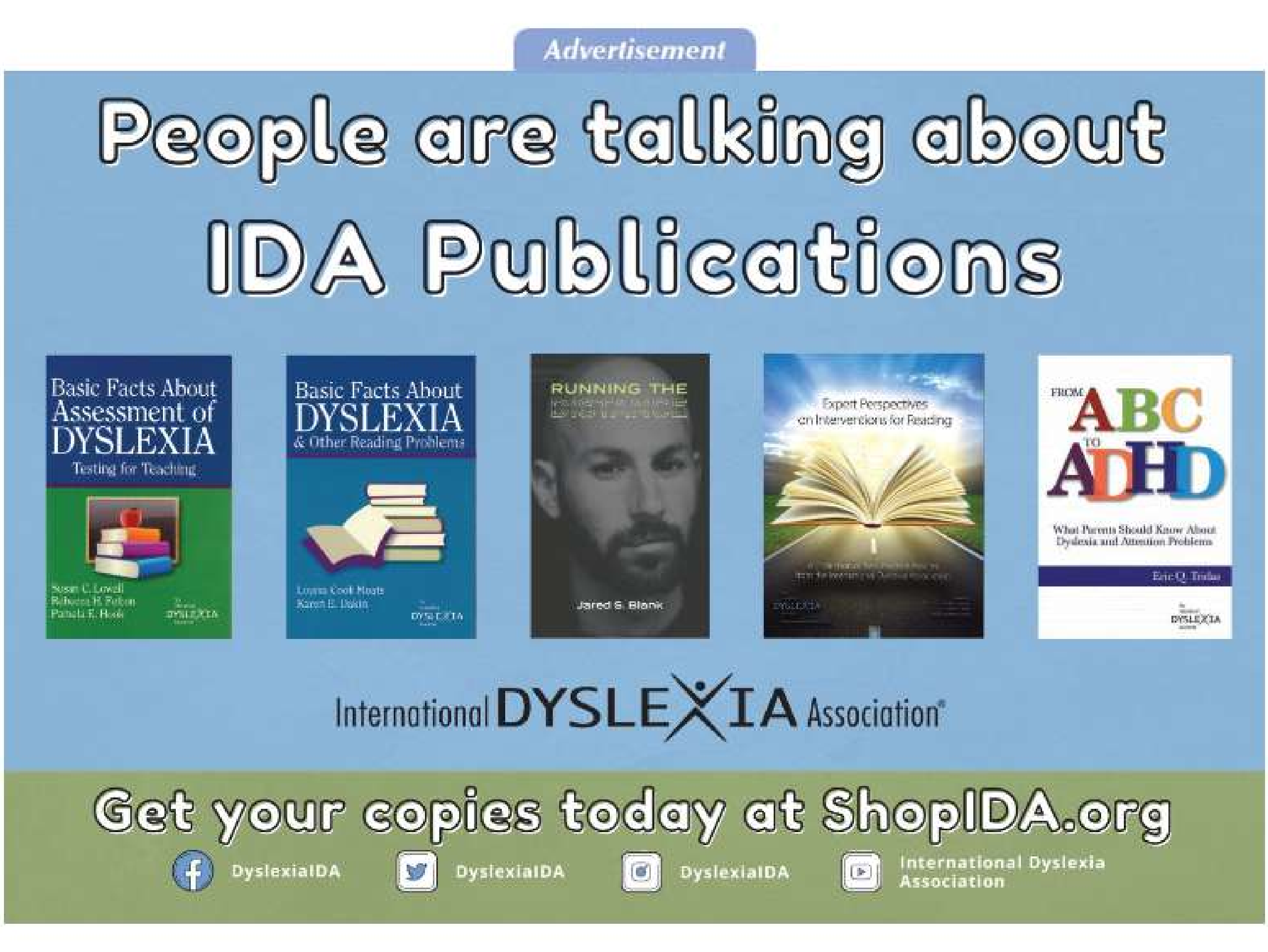
Teaching Teachers and Empowering Parents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