WELCOME!
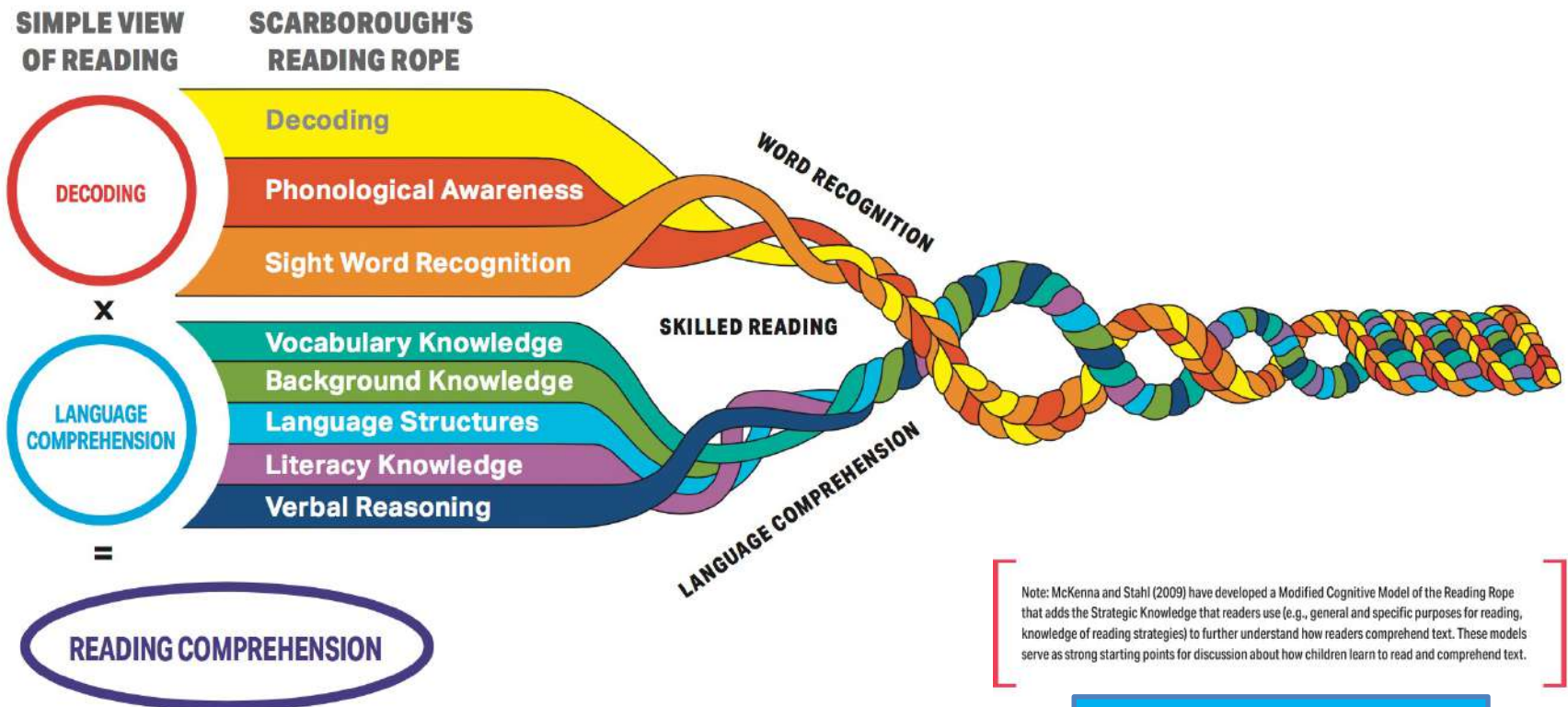
Wiley Blevins

Choosing and Using Decodable Texts

Science(s) of Reading

- It is a body of information that continues to grow and evolve as we learn more.

- Is is not about doing phonics ONLY; it is about doing phonics BETTER.

Models of Reading

Theoretical Models That Underpin the Science of Reading

SIMPLE VIEW OF READING

DECODING

×

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

=

READING COMPREHENSION

SCARBOROUGH'S READING ROPE

Decoding
Phonological Awareness
Sight Word Recognition

WORD RECOGNITION

SKILLED READING

Vocabulary Knowledge
Background Knowledge
Language Structures
Literacy Knowledge
Verbal Reasoning

LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

Note: McKenna and Stahl (2009) have developed a Modified Cognitive Model of the Reading Rope that adds the Strategic Knowledge that readers use (e.g., general and specific purposes for reading, knowledge of reading strategies) to further understand how readers comprehend text. These models serve as strong starting points for discussion about how children learn to read and comprehend text.

Active View of Reading
(Duke and Cartwright)

Renewed Interest in This Instructional Tool

- What Are Decodable Texts?

- Why Are They an Important Early Learning Tool?

- How Can We Enhance Their Use in Our Phonics Instruction?

7 Characteristics of Strong Phonics

1 **Readiness Skills**
2 **Scope and Sequence**
3 **Blending**
4 **Dictation**
5 **Word Awareness Activities**
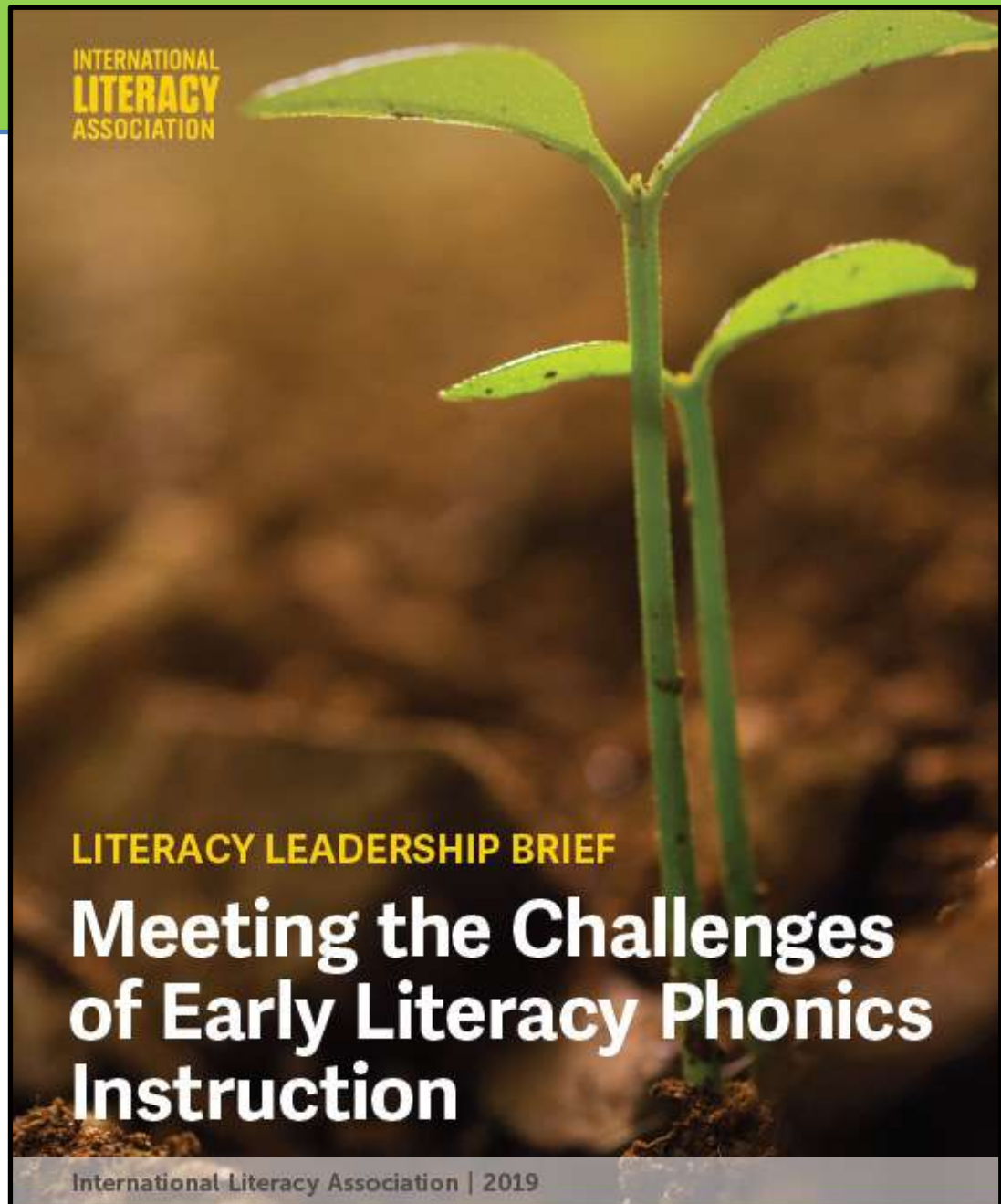6 **High-Frequency Words**
7 **Reading Connected Text**

Reasons Why Your Phonics Instruction Sometimes Fails

1. Inadequate or non-existent review and repetition cycle
2. Lack of application to real reading and writing experiences
3. Inappropriate reading materials to practice skills
4. Ineffective use of the gradual release model
5. Too much time lost during transitions
6. Limited teacher knowledge of researched-based phonics routines and linguistics
7. Inappropriate pacing of lessons
8. No comprehensive or cumulative mastery assessment tools
9. Transitioning to multisyllabic words too late
10. Overdoing it (especially isolated skill work)

Summary

ILA website
Free and downloadable

International Literacy Association

LITERACY LEADERSHIP BRIEF

Meeting the Challenges of Early Literacy Phonics Instruction

International Literacy Association | 2019

Daily Application to Reading and Writing

It's in the application where the learning STICKS!

Which Schedule?

Schedule A

10 minutes: Action Rhyme Review

10 minutes: Phonemic Awareness (rhyme: Reutzel, 2015)

5 minutes: Introduce Letter-Sound and Model Blending

5 minutes: Read Story

Schedule B

5 minutes: Review warm-up (cumulative)

5 minutes: Phonemic Awareness (oral segmentation)

5 minutes: Introduce Letter-Sound and Model Blending

10 minutes: Read Story

5 minutes: Writing Follow-Up

The Impact of Schedule

Schedule A

5 minutes a day

25 minutes a week

900 minutes a school year **(15 hours)**

Schedule B

15 minutes a day

75 minutes a week

2,700 minutes a school year **(45 hours)**

The efficiency of our teaching matters.

Why Decodable (Accountable) Texts?

I

see

▲ = a

■ = t

◉ = c

I see ▲ ◉▲■.

Why Decodable Texts?

I
see
▲ = a
■ = t
◉ = c

v▲◗ ◉▲✳ see ▲ ◐▲◻◻●◼.

What Are Decodable Readers?

Phonics Readers

- most of the words can be sounded out based on the phonics skills taught
- each book usually focuses on one target phonics skill
- the books are organized using a specific scope and sequence
- designed to help students achieve phonics mastery
- used for a limited period of time

Beginning Texts: The Battleground

New Findings

Recent Brain Research (Stanford)

- Beginning readers who focus on letter-sound relationships, or phonics, instead of trying to learn whole words, increase activity in the area of their brains best wired for reading.

- That is, words learned using letter-sounds activate the left side of the brain. This is where the visual and language regions of the brain reside. (characteristic of skilled readers)

- Words learned using a whole-word method activate the right side of the brain. (characteristic of children and adults who struggle with reading)

faster start, but hit a wall
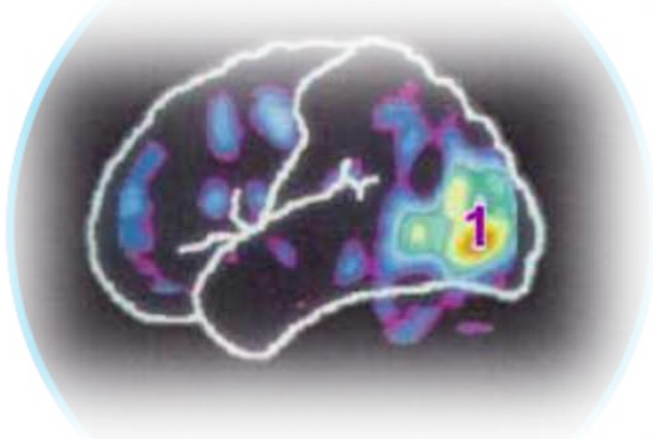
Decodable Text: A Criteria

Turn These Into POWERFUL, IMPACTFUL Learning Tools

Becoming a Nation of Readers
1985

Bees make honey that is so sweet on toast! Bees help people in more ways. Let's see how bees help us.

Most bees live in hives. Each bee has a job. The queen has a big job. She lays lots and lots of eggs.

Bees, Bees, Bees!

What Is It?

This has six legs.
It is little.
It can hop.
What is it? (grasshopper)

Instructive
Comprehensible
Engaging

My History with Decodable Texts

My Decodable Text Study

Phonics Group	Control Group
Phonics Follow-Up **100% controlled for phonics and h-f words** **Sam sat.** **Sam sat in the sand.** **Sam sat and sat and sat.**	**Phonics Follow-Up** **Patterned/Predictable Text** **Sam sees a sandwich.** **Sam sees a snake.** **Sam sees a sailor.** **Sam sees a lot!**
Major Reading 80% controlled for phonics and h-f words -specially written and illustrated --some simple trade books "Cat on the Mat", "Frog and Toad", "Little Bear"	**Major Reading** Simple, trade literature -popular Grade 1 books and authors --13% decodable, 35% controlled (decodable and h-f words) according to Stein, Johnson, and Gutlohn study

Four Important Findings

1 **<u>Woodcock Reading Mastery Test</u>**

Students On-Level

	September	February
Phonics Group:	28%	72%
Control Group:	40%	54%

Four Important Findings

2 **Phonics Assessment**

Students Achieving Mastery

	September	February
Phonics Group:	N/A	87%
Control Group:	N/A	48%

Four Important Findings

3 **Spelling Assessment**

Students Achieving Mastery

	September	February
Phonics Group:	11%	92%
Control Group:	23%	66%

Four Important Findings

4 **<u>Affective Survey</u>**

Students Who Don't Like Reading

	September	**February**
Phonics Group:	14%	3%
Control Group:	6%	11%

7 The Importance of Decodable Text in Early Reading

Wiley Blevins
USA

This article examines the role of decodable text in early reading instruction and its importance in decoding, spelling, and reading motivation for young learners. A study of U.S. first graders showed the experimental group (decodable text readers) significantly outperformed students in a control group (patterned book and trade literature readers) on the WRMT with W-score differences at $F_{(1,69)}=12.954$. The Effect Size was determined to be $E=.16$, 72% of decodable text readers were determined to be on-level by mid-year as opposed to 54% in the control group. Further tests of decoding transfer abilities showed 87% mastery by decodable text students versus 54% by patterned book readers, and spelling mastery revealed 92% mastery for decodable text readers versus 66% in the control group. A reading attitudes survey revealed significantly fewer students reading decodable text reported a dislike of reading or identified themselves as ... t is an important component of

... tion, text, instruction, phonics, ... nent, activities, effectiveness
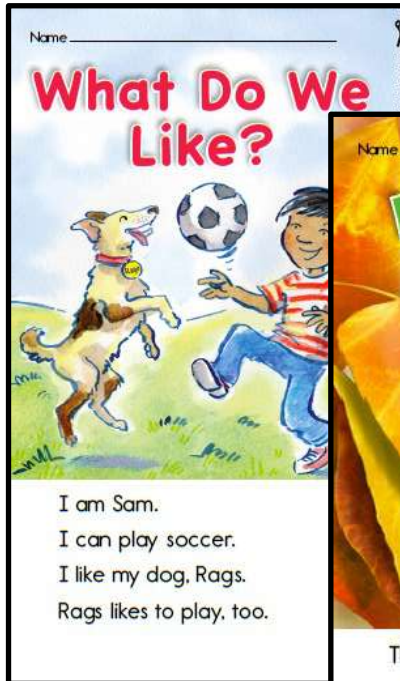
BACKGROUND

The goal of phonics instruction is to develop students' ability to read connected text independently (Adams, 1990). That is, we teach phonics to give students access to words so that they can comprehend text. Phonics instruction is designed to teach students how to map sounds onto spellings—to teach them that these strange squiggles and lines we call letters represent the sounds in our spoken words. This mapping of sound-spellings enables students to decode, or sound out, words while reading. The more opportunities students have to decode words, the more their word recognition skills improve because they

The more times a student encounters a word in text, the more likely the student will recognize it by sight and avoid making reading errors. Reading fluency is linked to reading comprehension. Improvements in reading fluency improve

**Both groups made progress, but . . .
the efficiency of our instruction matters!**

My Decodable Text Studies

Choose Accountable Texts Worth Reading

What Do We Like?

I am Sam.
I can play soccer.
I like my dog, Rags.
Rags likes to play, too.

Sadlier
From Phonics to Reading

What Is It?

This has six legs.
It is little.
It can hop.
What is it? (grasshopper)

Bees, Bees, Bees!

Bees make honey that is so sweet on toast! Bees help people in more ways. Let's see how bees help us.

Most bees live in hives. Each bee has a job. The queen has a big job. She lays lots and lots of eggs.

A Frog Can Jump

It has no tail.
It is a frog!

A frog can jump up
It can get a fat bug

Benchmark Education
Decodable Texts

Fiction and Informational

Decodable texts could be far more impactful.

Read and Focus on Modeling Decoding

Before Reading

Introduce the Skill

(including Handwriting)

Model Blending

Teach High-Frequency Words

O o

octopus

o

Introduce and Model Blending
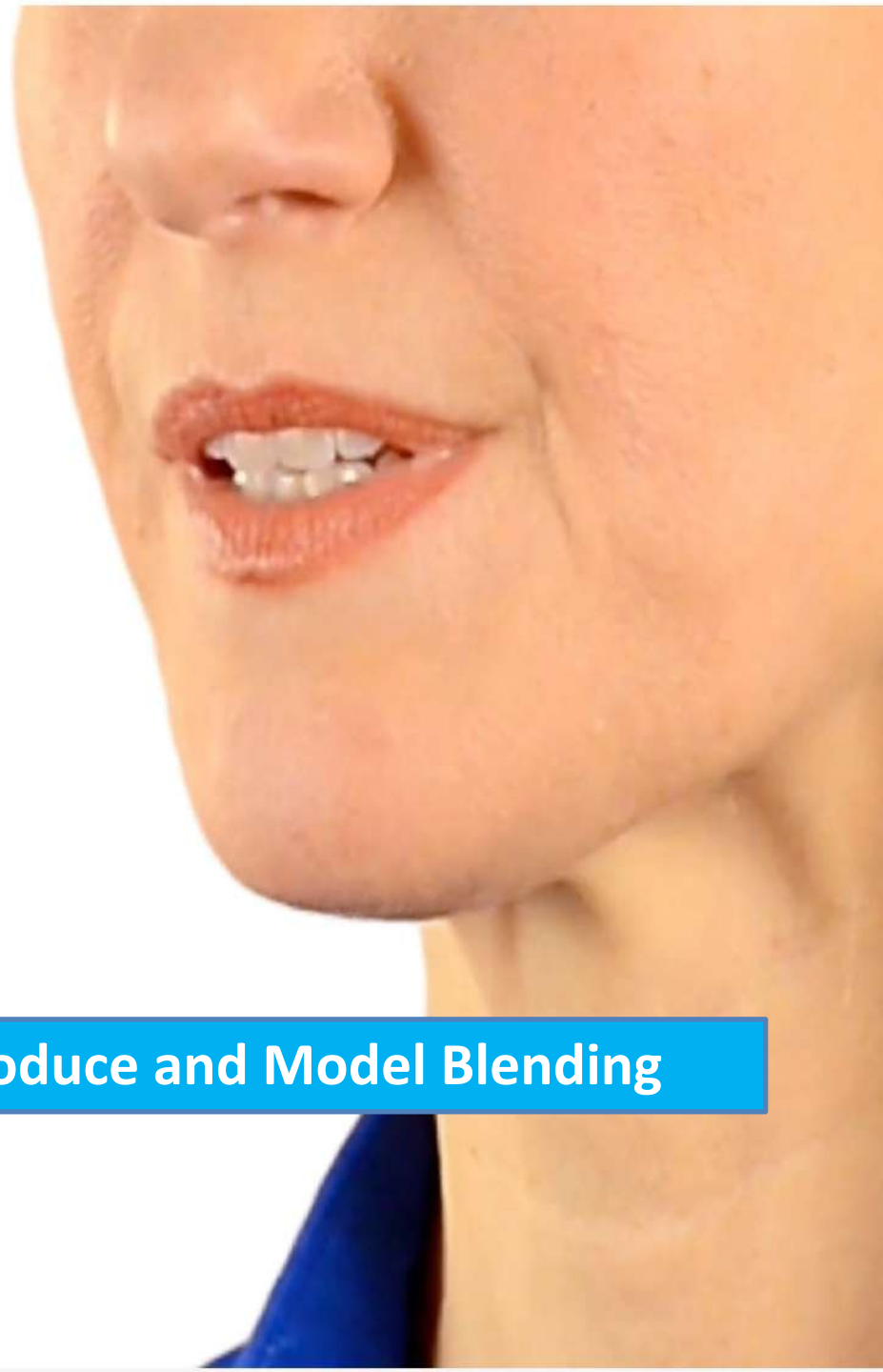
Introduce and Model Blending
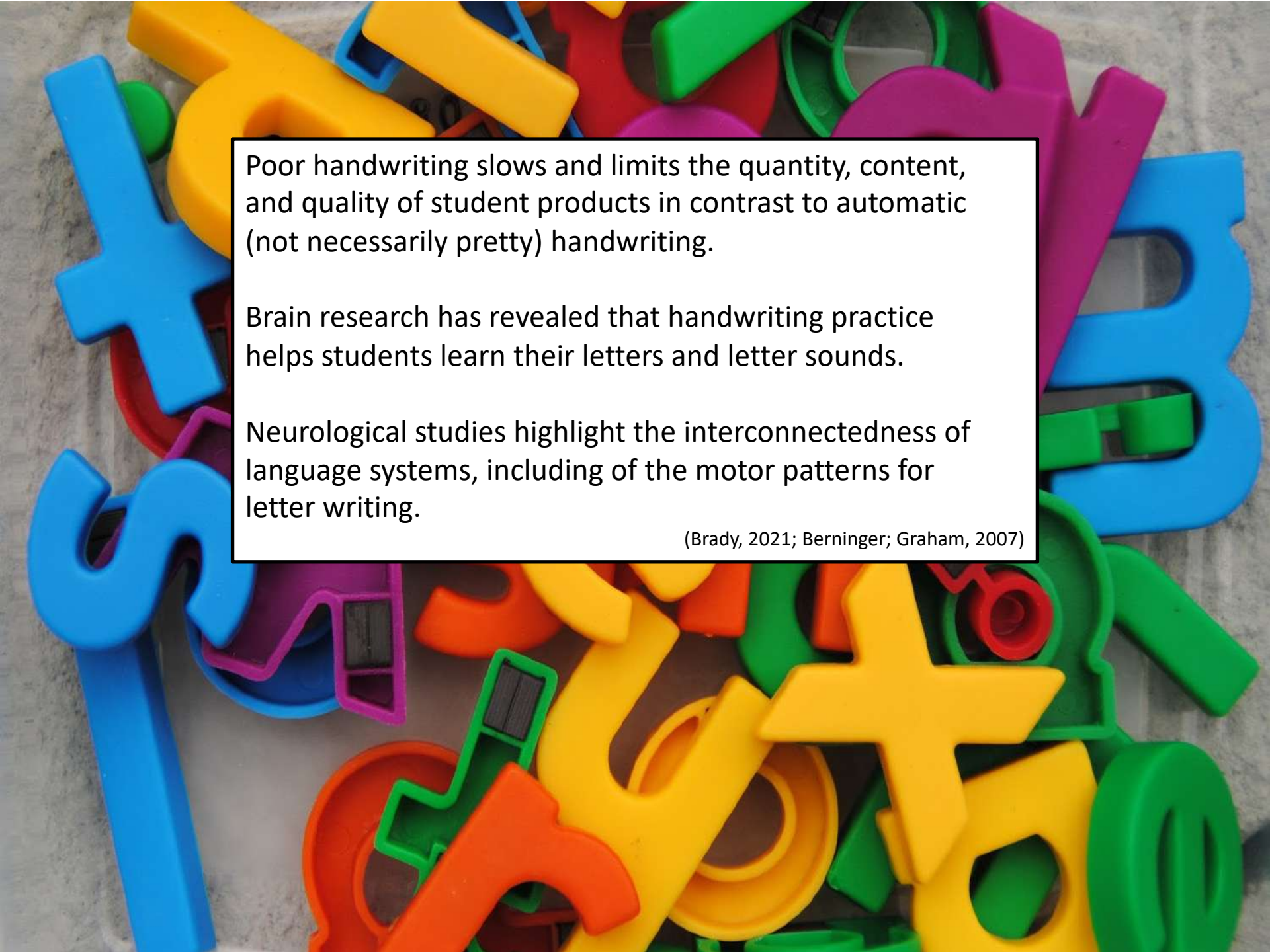
Trace and Write

Directions: Trace and write the letters S and s. These letters stand for /s/. Say the sound each time you write the letter.
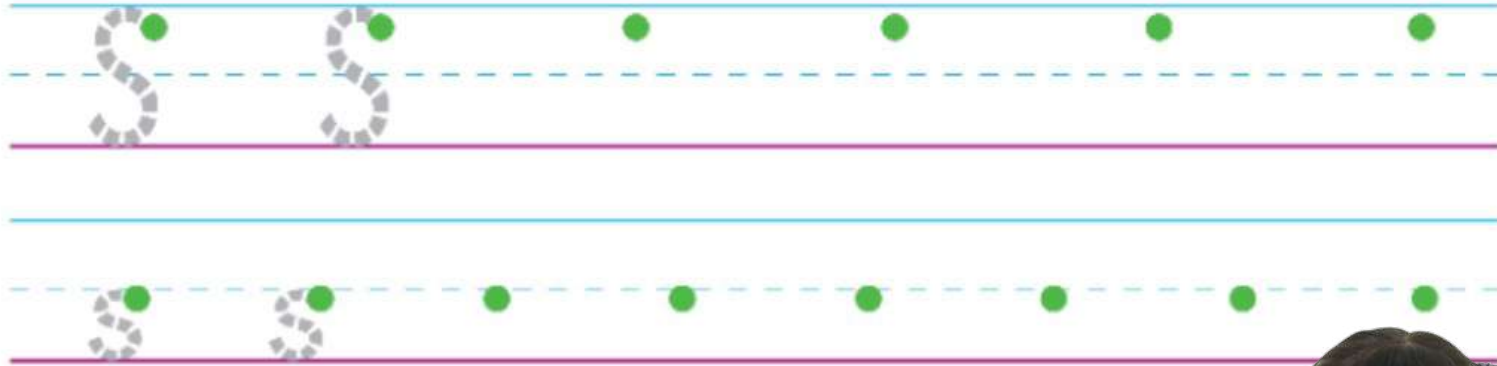
Teach Handwriting

Poor handwriting slows and limits the quantity, content, and quality of student products in contrast to automatic (not necessarily pretty) handwriting.

Brain research has revealed that handwriting practice helps students learn their letters and letter sounds.

Neurological studies highlight the interconnectedness of language systems, including of the motor patterns for letter writing.

(Brady, 2021; Berninger; Graham, 2007)

Blending Lines

1st Two Words Selected to Spark a Conversation

1.	ran	rain	plan	plain	sad	say
2.	may	pay	play	say	stay	stray
3.	pail	sail	tail	trail	train	brain
4.	chain	tray	faint	nail	paint	raise
5.	"Rain, rain, go away," yelled Gail.					
6.	I had to wait all day for the train to come.					

7.	go	she	hope	cute	ride	same
8.	bring	ranch	chop	sink	pitch	when

9.	rain	rainbow	day	birthday

Introduce High-Frequency Words?

Making Irregular English Words Really Stick

Did you know . . .

Only **13 words** account for **25%** of the words in print.
a, and, for, he, is, in, it, of, that, the, to, was, you

Only **100 words** account for **50%** of the words in print.

Traditional Teaching Routine

I <u>see</u> a cat.

Orthographic Mapping
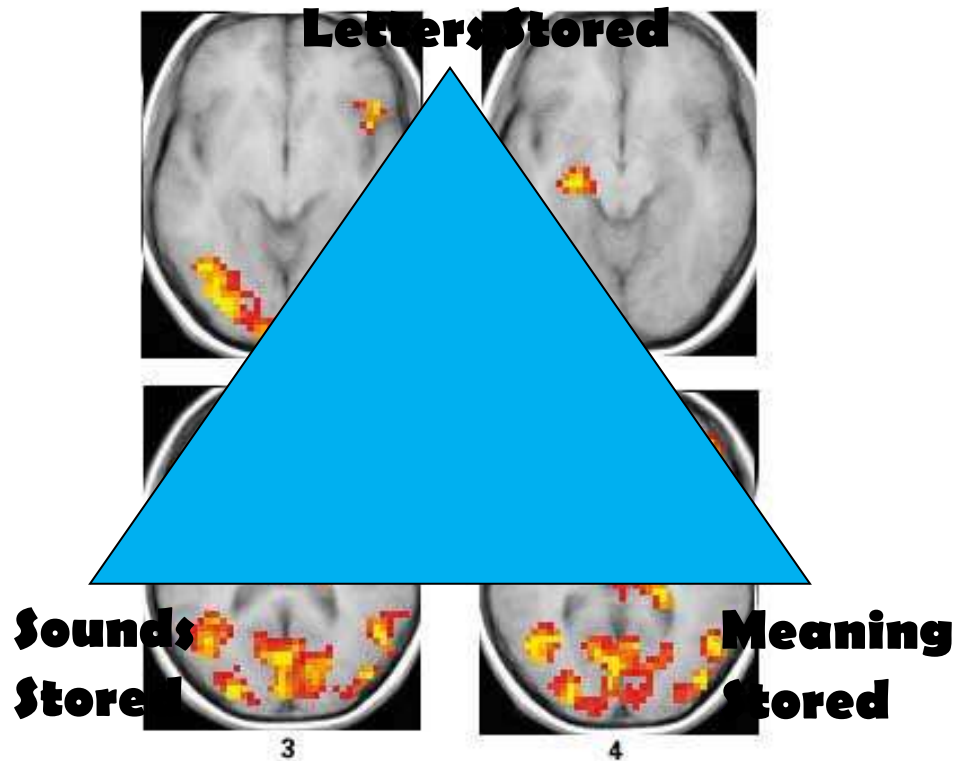
Stronger Routine

STEP ❶ **Introduce in Context**

"I see a cat," <u>said</u> Pam.

ORTHOGRAPHIC MAPPING

STEP ❷ **Read** (SEGMENT, then discuss known sound-spellings)

/s/ = s   /d/ = d   ai = irregular

SAME AS "HEART WORDS"

STEP ❸ **Spell**

s a i d

Sounds Stored

STEP ❹ **Write**

said

Meaning Stored   Letters Stored

STEP ❺ **Extend (Writing, Connect to Known Words)**

(oral and written sentence frames or sentence starters)
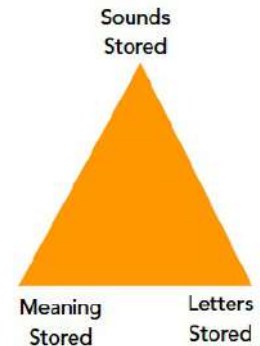
What else?

Build Vocabulary
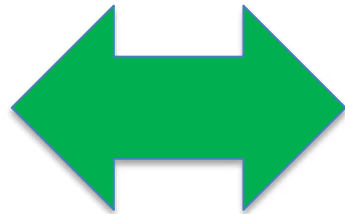
Build and Reinforce Vocabulary

habitat
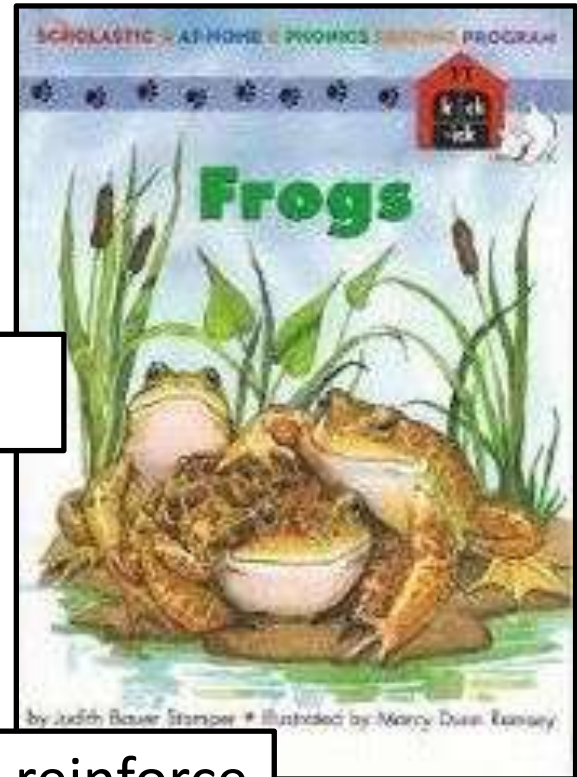
Preteach 1 word "about" the story and reinforce during and after the reading.

Define/Example/Ask Routine
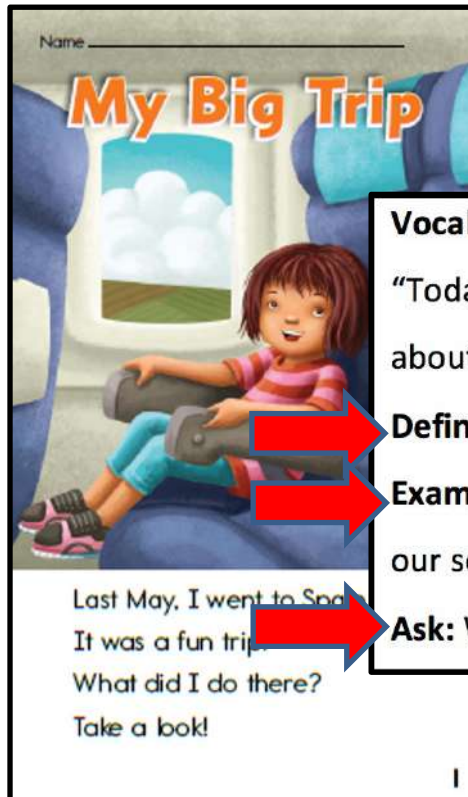
explore

Vocabulary for "My Big Trip"

"Today we're going to read a story about a girl who travels to a new place and learn about all the things she explored."

Define: Explore means "to find out more about something."

Example: In science today, we will explore the plants and animals living in the pond near our school.

Ask: What new place would you like to explore, or find out more about?

Name _____

My Big Trip

Last May, I went to Spa...
It was a fun trip...
What did I do there?
Take a look!

Elevate the conversation and language in classrooms

During Reading

Provide Corrective Feedback

Options for Reading

- Whisper read
- Choral read
- Echo read

Provide Targeted Corrective Feedback

sat

❑   Point to missed sound-spelling.

❑   State spelling and sound.

❑   Have children repeat.

❑   Have children go back to the
start of the word and blend again.

Options for Reading

❑ **Whisper Read**
(circulate and listen in)

Orthographic mapping

❑ **Choral Read**
(read together)

❑ **Echo Read**
(provide extra support and/or model an aspect of fluency)
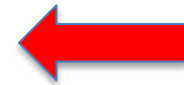
After Reading

Reread to Build Fluency

Focus on Comprehension

Writing Follow-Up ⬅
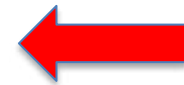
Encoding

Word Building ⬅

Encoding

Dictation ⬅

Encoding

Focus on Decoding and Comprehension

Develop Early Reading Behaviors

My Big Trip

Last May, I went to Spain.
It was a fun trip.
What did I do there?
Take a look!

Check Comprehension Ask questions about the story. Allow children to discuss answers with a partner before you call on a volunteer to answer. Prompt children to answer in complete sentences and find details in the text or illustrations to support their answers.

- Where did the girl go on a trip? Point to the country's name in the story.

- What did the girl do in Spain? Find the sentences that tell this.

- What problems did the girl have on her trip? Circle them.

- Where might the girl go on her next trip? Why do you think this?

- What kind of big trip would you like to go on?

1. Focus on word with new phonics skill.
2. Prompt students to find detail and support with text evidence.
3. Ask higher-level question.
4. Make Inference.
5. Connect to students' lives.

What would you like to explore there?

Sentence Comprehension

Develop Early Reading Behaviors
- Address Propositional Density
- Address Phrasal Chunking

My Big Trip

Name _____

Last May, I went to Spain.
It was a fun trip.
What did I do there?
Take a look!

One day, Pam rode in a train.
She paid a lot for it.
She went to see a museum.
She had to wait in a long line to get inside it.

| Where? | | Why? |

Pam had to wait.
Pam had to wait in a long line.
Pam had to wait to get inside the museum.
Pam had to wait in a long line because she wanted to get inside the museum.

Where?

Why?

Combine

Sentence Comprehension

Connect It!
(referents)

Unpack It!
(complex ideas)

Add Writing to Follow-Up Work

1. **Write story retelling or extension.**
2. **Use characters in a new setting.**
3. **Write what you learned.**

<u>SENTENCE FRAMES or</u>
<u>SENTENCE STARTERS</u>
For English Learners

The girl went to _____.
She went on a _____.
In Spain, she _____.
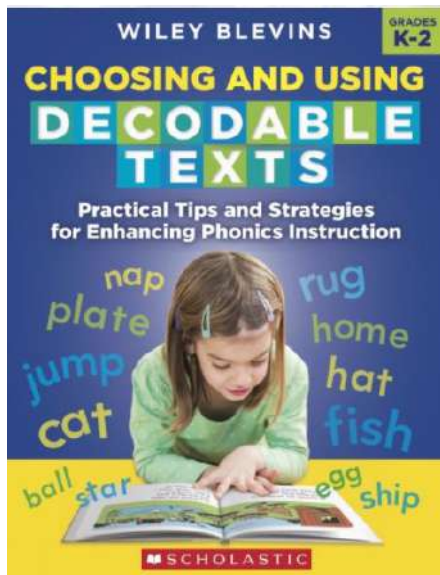
Provide Challenge Word Bank

Revisit and connect to writing goals.

Decodable Text Lesson Planner

Decodable Text Lesson Planner

Book Title:

Focus Phonics Skill:

Decodable Words With Phonics Skill:

New High-Frequency and Story Words:

BEFORE READING

Academic Vocabulary Word About the Book:

- Define:
- Example:
- Ask:

English-Learner Supports (e.g., vocabulary to preteach):

DURING READING

Technique (choral read, echo read, whisper read):

AFTER READING

Comprehension Questions:

1. (focus on word with phonics skill)

2. (detail with text evidence)

3. (higher-level question)

4. (higher-level question)

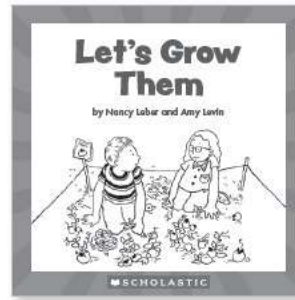5. (connect to children's lives)

Writing Prompt:

Fluency Plan:

WILEY BLEVINS
GRADES K-2

CHOOSING AND USING
DECODABLE TEXTS

Practical Tips and Strategies
for Enhancing Phonics Instruction

nap plate jump cat ball star rug home hat fish egg ship

SCHOLASTIC

Let's Grow Them (page 87)

Focus Phonics Skill: Short *e*

Decodable Words With Phonics Skill: *Jess, red, Ben, ten, get, wet*

New High-Frequency and Story Words: *are, grow, let's, yes, you*

Let's Grow Them
by Nancy Leber and Amy Levin

SCHOLASTIC

BEFORE READING

Academic Vocabulary Word About the Book: *patient*

- **Define:** waiting quietly for something
- **Example:** The kids were patient as they waited for the recess bell to ring.
- **Ask:** When have you had to be patient?

English-Learner Supports (e.g., vocabulary to preteach): *seeds, grow, dig, red, can* (noun)

DURING READING

Technique (choral read, echo read, whisper read): Have ch[ildren]
the story while you listen in and offer feedback. Then, echo[-read]
modeling how the end mark affects how you read each sen[tence]
question mark, exclamation point.

AFTER READING

Comprehension Questions:

1. **(focus on word with phonics skill)** How many seeds does Ben have? (*ten*) Find the word in the story.
2. **(detail with text evidence)** What did Ben and Jess do to help the seeds grow? Find the sentences that support your answer.
3. **(higher-level question)** Why did Ben and Jess have to wait so long?
4. **(higher-level question)** Do you think Ben and Jess were patient? Why or why not?
5. **(connect to children's lives)** Have you ever planted seeds or watched a plant grow? If so, what did you observe, or see?

Writing Prompt: Have children make a list of the steps to grow tomatoes.

Fluency Plan: Have children reread the story to a partner on the following day. On a later day, have them reread the story to find (circle or list) words with -*en* and -*et*.

Lesson Plan

Choosing and Using Decodable Texts

Give the Gift of Reading

It is an **honor** and **responsibility** to give the gift of reading to children.

Thank you for all that you're doing!

What to Look For in Key Phonics Instructional Routines
CHECKLIST

ROUTINE or ASPECT OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION	TEACHER ALERTS (Things to Consider)	PRINCIPAL LOOK-FORS
Blending (Modeling how to sound out words)	☐ Spend more time decoding words in connected text rather than in isolation. ☐ Make sure words in blending lines are high utility, i.e., words students are likely to encounter in reading or use in writing. ☐ Don't overdo the modeling. Model 1–2 words, then have students do the work. Provide quick corrective feedback, as needed.	☐ Quick-paced activities are being used. ☐ The teacher models only 1–2 words, then has students chorally do the rest the first time. ☐ Blending lines are quickly revisited, calling on individual students, pairs, tables/rows, etc. ☐ Blending lines are revisited multiple times throughout the week (e.g., used as quick review or lesson warm-up, small-group work). ☐ Copies of blending lines can be used for independent and at-home work.
Dictation (Guided spelling)	☐ Model by thinking aloud each week how you write words using the new phonics skill. ☐ Make sure spelling is linked to phonics and students' needs based on analysis of their writing. ☐ Provide increased opportunities for students to write words with the new phonics skills (e.g., writing follow-up to decodable text readings). ☐ Don't start dictation too late—start at the beginning of K. ☐ Spelling words and sentences should be cumulative. Fold in review skills over an extended period of time. Monitor students' writing for information on which skills need the most work.	☐ Does dictation begin in Kindergarten? ☐ Does the teacher extend Elkonin box (sound box) activities by having students replace counters with letters? ☐ Does the teacher analyze student writing for evidence of use of taught phonics skills and adjust dictation exercises as needed?

ROUTINE or ASPECT OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION	TEACHER ALERTS (Things to Consider)	PRINCIPAL LOOK-FORS
Reading Connected (Decodable) Text	☐ Make sure accountable text is a part of the *daily* phonics instruction and independent or partner follow-up work. ☐ Make sure you are using strong, accountable texts, i.e., comprehensible, engaging, and filled with enough words students can decode based on the phonics skills they have been taught. ☐ Strengthen connection between phonics lessons and small-group lesson reading, especially if using guided reading leveled texts (which may contain few words with the target phonics skill). ☐ Build comprehension (through rich questioning) AND vocabulary (through pre-teaching of words about the selection to use in discussions). ☐ Use decodable texts as springboards for writing.	☐ Are decodable/accountable texts a daily part of phonics lessons? ☐ Does the reading of these texts focus on decoding strategies, checking comprehension, and building vocabulary?
High-Frequency Words	☐ Go beyond introductions with only context sentences. ☐ Reteach and review those words that are more challenging. Many require repetition at intervals throughout the year. One week is NOT enough. ☐ Teach "irregular" words as word families, where possible.	☐ Are teachers using a research-based routine like Read/Spell/Write/Extend to accelerate mastery? ☐ Are more challenging words cycled through the year and assessed more frequently?
Word Awareness Activities (Words sorts, word building)	☐ Remember that word sorts are far more than moving cards into piles—it's all about the talk about how words work. ☐ Use high-utility words in the sorts and word-building activities to increase student capacity when reading and writing. ☐ Create review transition activities when distributing and collecting materials for word building and word sorts.	☐ Do the word sorts include follow-up discussions about what students learned about how words work (not an independent activity)? ☐ Is word building done every week? Is it used in small groups for students needing more support?

ROUTINE or ASPECT OF PHONICS INSTRUCTION	TEACHER ALERTS (Things to Consider)	PRINCIPAL LOOK-FORS
Readiness Skills (Phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition)	☐ Don't overdo rhyme; instead, focus on the power skills (oral blending and segmentation). ☐ Be precise in your language of instruction. ☐ Add instructional supports (e.g., sound boxes, picture cards, ABC cards). ☐ Include letters in more sophisticated tasks like manipulation. ☐ Sequence activities from easier to more complex and as needed in reading and writing. ☐ Assess alphabet knowledge—accuracy and automaticity.	☐ Is there more focus on the "power skills" in K–1? ☐ Are the skills taught in a progression and are multiple levels in an activity provided if teaching a whole group? ☐ Are supports like sound boxes and counters, tapping, and others provided? ☐ Does the instructional language result in confusion (e.g., rhyme)? ☐ Does the alphabet sequence enable students to make words early on?
Professional Development	☐ Become a teacher researcher. ☐ Engage in group planning and analysis of student work. ☐ Videotape, videotape, videotape.	☐ How can you build capacity to bring back some teacher control to reading instruction? ☐ How can you restructure professional development to differentiate for teacher needs?

Meeting the Challenges of Early Literacy Phonics Instruction

Learning to read can, at times, seem almost magical. A child sits in front of a book and transforms those squiggles and lines into sounds, puts those sounds together to make words, and puts those words together to make meaning.

But it's not magical.

English is an alphabetic language. We have 26 letters. These letters, in various combinations, represent the 44 sounds in our language. Teaching students the basic letter–sound combinations gives them access to sounding out approximately 84% of the words in English print. Of course, equal amounts of time need to be spent on teaching the meanings of these words, but the learning of these basic phonics skills is essential to becoming a fluent reader.

Research has shown the power of this early instruction in phonics for young students' reading and writing development. Government-funded documents have shown that phonics instruction is helpful for all students, harmful for none, and crucial for some. A recent brain research study out of Stanford explained how beginning readers who focus on letter–sound relationships, or phonics, instead of trying to learn whole words, increase activity in the area of the brain best wired for reading. And the meta-analysis work has detailed the significant effect size of phonics instruction on students' early reading growth.

So why is there a debate when the research evidence has been consistent for decades? It's because how we translate that research into instructional practice varies widely, resulting in practices that are sometimes ineffective or unbalanced and instructional materials that too often have serious instructional design flaws. Some phonics instruction is random, incomplete, and implicit. Other instruction is overdone and isolated, devoid of the extensive application to authentic reading and writing needed for mastery. Neither is as effective as it needs to be.

Explicit and Systematic Phonics Instruction

The question of whether to include phonics instruction has been resolved. The answer is yes.

The question of whether to include phonics instruction has been resolved. The answer is *yes*. The discussion now should be how to include phonics instruction as part of an overall literacy plan that is efficient, effective, and timely for all students. What does that instruction look like? And how do we overcome

the common obstacles teachers often face in delivering that instruction?

Although phonics can be taught in different ways, research supports instruction that is explicit and systematic. *Explicit* means that the initial introduction of a letter–sound relationship, or phonics skill, is directly stated to students. For example, we tell students that the /s/ sound is represented by the letter **s**. This is more effective than the discovery method because it does not rely on prerequisite skills that some students might not have.

Being explicit, however, does not mean that students cannot play with letters and sounds during the instructional cycle. In fact, word awareness activities like word building and word sorts allow students to become flexible in their knowledge of sound-spellings and solidifies that learning.

Being *systematic* means that we follow a continuum from easy to more complex skills, slowly introducing each new skill. Systematic instruction includes a review and repetition cycle to achieve mastery and goes from the known to the new in a way that makes the new learning more obvious and easier for students to grasp. For example, after students learn to read simple short-vowel CVC words like *run*, *cat*, and *hop*, they are often introduced to the skill final-*e* as in the words *hate* and *hope*. This is a conceptual leap for young students where, often for the first time, they learn that two letters can work together to make a sound and these letters are not even beside each other in the word. Not easy!

In systematic instruction, teachers display a known word and compare it to the new to highlight this new concept, as in *hop–hope* or *hat–hate*. This side-by-side minimal contrast makes the learning of the new concept more obvious and easier to grasp. The discussion that teachers can have with students about the two words increases students' word awareness and understanding of how words work. This exemplifies strong phonics instruction: active, engaging, and thought provoking.

Key Characteristics of Effective Phonics Instruction

In addition to being explicit and systematic, strong phonics instruction has the following seven key characteristics.

Systematic instruction includes a review and repetition cycle to achieve mastery and goes from the known to the new in a way that makes the new learning more obvious and easier for students to grasp.

Readiness Skills

The two best predictors of early reading success are alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness. These skills open the gate for reading. Alphabet recognition involves learning the names, shapes, and sounds of the letters of the alphabet with fluency. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are made up of a series of discrete sounds, called phonemes. A range of subskills is taught to develop phonemic awareness, with oral blending and oral segmentation having the most positive impact on reading and writing development in kindergarten and grade 1 and phonemic manipulation tasks playing a crucial role up to grade 3.

Scope and Sequence

A strong scope and sequence builds from the simple to the complex in a way that takes advantage of previous learning. The sequence allows for many words to be formed as early as possible and focuses on teaching high-utility skills. Although there is no "right" scope and sequence, programs that strive to connect concepts and move through a series of skills in a stair-step way offer the best chance at student success.

Blending

This is the main strategy for teaching students how to sound out words and must be frequently modeled and applied. It is simply the stringing together of letter-sounds to read a word. It is the focus of early phonics instruction but still plays a role when transitioning students from reading monosyllablic to multisyllabic words.

Dictation

To best transfer students' growing phonics skills to writing, dictation is critical and begins in kindergarten.

To best transfer students' growing phonics skills to writing, dictation (i.e., guided spelling with teacher think-alouds) is critical and begins in kindergarten. Although not a spelling test, this activity can accelerate students' spelling abilities and understanding of common English spelling patterns and assist students in using these phonics skills in writing. Used in combination with word building and structured and unstructured writing experiences in phonics instruction, students have increased opportunities to "try out" their developing skills to express ideas in written form.

Word Awareness

Word building and word sorts are key activities to increase students' word awareness. In word building, students are given a set of letter cards and asked to create a series of words in a specific sequence. This increases students' ability to work with letter-sounds flexibly and fully analyze words for their component sounds and spellings. In word sorts, students look for common spelling patterns, engage in discussions about what they learn about words from this examination, and increase their ability to notice larger chunks in words (an important skill as students transition from monosyllabic to multisyllabic words).

High-Frequency Words

High-frequency words are the most common words in English. Some are irregular; that is, they do not follow common English sound-spellings. Others are regular and needed by students during reading before they have the phonics skills to sound them out. The top 250–300 words are generally taught in grades K–2. Past grade 2, when the majority of the key high-frequency words have been introduced, students need to be continually assessed on their mastery of these words, as a lack of fluency can impede comprehension. Some words are more difficult to master (e.g., reversals like *no/on* and *was/saw*, *of/for/from*, and words that begin with *wh* or *th*). More instructional time and assessment needs to be given around these words.

Reading Connected Text

The goal of phonics instruction is to develop students' ability to read connected text independently. Controlled, decodable text (also known as accountable text) at the beginning level of reading instruction helps students develop a sense of comfort in and control over their reading growth and should be a key learning tool in early phonics instruction. The tight connection between what students learn in phonics and what they read is essential for building a faster foundation in early reading. This is especially critical when students encounter less-controlled leveled readers during small-group lessons. These accountable (phonics-based) texts need to be reread to build fluency, discussed to develop comprehension, and written about to provide opportunities for students to apply their growing phonics skills in writing.

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The success of these key characteristics of phonics instruction rests both on the shoulders of highly trained teachers with a background in phonics routines and linguistics and in instructional materials that aid teachers in meeting a wide range of students' phonics needs.

Common Causes of Phonics Instructional Failure

The reality is that the hard work of teaching phonics begins after all these characteristics are in place. Why? Common obstacles related to instruction and instructional materials too often stand in the way of maximizing students' learning of basic phonics skills. These range from a lack of application to authentic reading and writing experiences (where the learning "sticks") to a lack of review and repetition resulting in decayed learning. The following are the 10 most common phonics instructional obstacles or pitfalls, all of which teachers have some degree of control over.

Inadequate or Nonexistent Review and Repetition Cycle

We underestimate the amount of time it takes young learners to master phonics skills. When a new skill is introduced, it should be systematically and purposefully reviewed for at least the next 4–6 weeks. The goal must be to teach to mastery rather than just exposure. Only then can students transfer the skill to all reading situations. With the fast pacing of most curricula, a more substantial review and repetition cycle often must be added. This can be achieved through increased opportunities to practice previous skills in blending work, dictation, and the repeated readings of previously read accountable texts.

Lack of Application to Real Reading and Writing Experiences

Students progress at a much faster rate in phonics when the bulk of instructional time is spent on applying the skills to authentic reading and writing experiences, rather than isolated skill-and-drill work. At least half of a phonics lesson should be devoted to application exercises. For students who are below level, the amount of reading during phonics instruction must be even greater.

Students progress at a much faster rate in phonics when the bulk of instructional time is spent on applying the skills to authentic reading and writing experiences.

Inappropriate Reading Materials to Practice Skills

The connection between what we teach and what we have young learners read has a powerful effect on their word reading strategies and their phonics and spelling skills. It also affects students' motivation to read. Having accountable texts as part of the daily phonics lessons provides more substantial decoding practice and helps to scaffold the leap from most phonics lessons to the reading of leveled texts, which are far less controlled for phonics skills. The amount of control (e.g., decodability) and the amount of time needed in this type of text varies on the basis of student needs. Adherence to a specific percentage of decodability is problematic.

Ineffective Use of the Gradual Release Model

Some teachers of struggling readers spend too much instructional time doing the "heavy lifting," such as overmodeling and having students simply repeat (e.g., "parrot" activities). Whoever does the thinking in a lesson does the learning. Students might struggle, but they must do the work and the teacher's role is to provide timely corrective feedback and support.

Too Much Time Lost During Transitions

Phonics lessons often require a lot of manipulatives and materials. Transitional times when materials are distributed or collected should be viewed as valuable instructional moments in which review skills can be addressed (e.g., sing the ABC song, do a phonemic awareness task, review letter–sound action rhymes to focus students' attention on an instructional goal). Every minute of a phonics lesson must be instructive. Planning these transitions is critical for their effectiveness.

Limited Teacher Knowledge of Research-Based Phonics Routines and Linguistics

Teachers with a background in phonics or linguistics are better equipped to make meaningful instructional decisions, analyze student errors, and improve the language and delivery of instruction. Also, teacher attitudes toward phonics instructional materials (e.g., decodable text) and routines (e.g., sorts, word building, blending) matter.

Inappropriate Pacing of Lessons

Some teachers spend too much time on activities they enjoy or are easier for students and less time on the more challenging or substantive activities that increase learning. Lessons should be fast paced and rigorous. They should focus on those activities that more quickly move the needle in terms of student learning, such as blending practice, dictation, word awareness activities, and reading and writing about accountable texts.

No Comprehensive or Cumulative Mastery Assessment Tools

Assessment of phonics skills must be done over an extended period of time to ensure mastery. Weekly assessments focusing on one skill often give "false positives." That is, they show movement toward learning but not mastery. If the skill is not worked on for subsequent weeks, learning can decay. Cumulative assessments help teachers determine which skills truly have been mastered. They are a critical phonics instructional tool.

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Transitioning to Multisyllabic Words Too Late

Most curricula focus on monosyllablic words in grade 2, yet the stories students read at that grade are filled with more challenging, multisyllabic words. More emphasis needs to be given to transitioning to longer words at this grade (e.g., going from known to new words like *can/candle* and teaching the six major syllable types). This work can begin at the end of grade 1 to provide a closer alignment between phonics instruction and reading demands.

Overdoing It (Especially Isolated Skill Work)

Some curricula overemphasize phonics (especially the isolated skill-and-drill type of work) while ignoring other key aspects of early reading needs (e.g., vocabulary and background knowledge building) that are essential to long-term reading progress. Modifying reading time to provide a better balance is important, because all these skills plant the seeds of comprehension as students encounter increasingly more complex texts.

Phonics instruction is an essential part of early reading and writing instruction. Students need to learn how to efficiently decode words to increase their word recognition skills. The more words students recognize automatically, the better their

reading fluency, which has a powerful effect on their comprehension of text. And that's the point. Phonics instruction is designed to increase students' ability to read and make meaning from text. However, it needs to be done in a way that is most effective and efficient. It is paramount that teachers and creators of curriculum materials take an objective and thorough look at how we improve that instruction to maximize student learning.

MOVING FORWARD

- Embrace early phonics instruction as integral to elementary literacy plan.
- Incorporate explicit and systematic phonics instruction that directly addresses skills, follows a continuum of skill complexity, and includes a review and repetition cycle that leads to eventual skill mastery.
- Assess phonics instruction to ensure key characteristics are in place, including blending, dictation, word awareness, and high-frequency words.

ILA RESOURCES

Advocating for Children's Rights to Read
This manual informs teachers and reading/literacy specialists, administrators, school and public librarians, families and caregivers, and policymakers how to enact the rights in classrooms, communities, and the world.

The Case for Children's Rights to Read
The goal of ILA's Children's Rights to Read campaign is ensuring every child has access to the education, opportunities, and resources needed to read. This companion resource identifies why the 10 fundamental rights were selected.

Literacy Glossary
Curated by a team of literacy experts, this interactive resource defines the shared language of literacy research and instruction.

Standards for the Preparation of Literacy Professionals 2017
This updated resource provides an evidence-based benchmark for the development and evaluation of literacy professional preparation programs.

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Decodable Text Lesson Planner

Book Title:

Focus Phonics Skill:

Decodable Words With Phonics Skill:

New High-Frequency and Story Words:

BEFORE READING

Academic Vocabulary Word About the Book:

- **Define:**

- **Example:**

- **Ask:**

English-Learner Supports (e.g., vocabulary to preteach):

DURING READING

Technique (choral read, echo read, whisper read):

AFTER READING

Comprehension Questions:

1. (focus on word with phonics skill)

2. (detail with text evidence)

3. (higher-level question)

4. (higher-level question)

5. (connect to children's lives)

Writing Prompt:

Fluency Plan:

Let's Grow Them (page 87)

Focus Phonics Skill: Short *e*

Decodable Words With Phonics Skill: *Jess, red, Ben, ten, get, wet*

New High-Frequency and Story Words: *are, grow, let's, yes, you*

BEFORE READING

Academic Vocabulary Word About the Book: *patient*

- **Define:** waiting quietly for something
- **Example:** The kids were patient as they waited for the recess bell to ring.
- **Ask:** When have you had to be patient?

English-Learner Supports (e.g., vocabulary to preteach): *seeds, grow, dig, red, can* (noun)

DURING READING

Technique (choral read, echo read, whisper read): Have child
the story while you listen in and offer feedback. Then, echo-re
modeling how the end mark affects how you read each senter
question mark, exclamation point.

Lesson Plan Sample

AFTER READING

Comprehension Questions:

1. **(focus on word with phonics skill)** How many seeds does Ben have? (*ten*) Find the word in the story.
2. **(detail with text evidence)** What did Ben and Jess do to help the seeds grow? Find the sentences that support your answer.
3. **(higher-level question)** Why did Ben and Jess have to wait so long?
4. **(higher-level question)** Do you think Ben and Jess were patient? Why or why not?
5. **(connect to children's lives)** Have you ever planted seeds or watched a plant grow? If so, what did you observe, or see?

Writing Prompt: Have children make a list of the steps to grow tomatoes.

Fluency Plan: Have children reread the story to a partner on the following day. On a later day, have them reread the story to find (circle or list) words with *-en* and *-et*.