



Provincial Outreach  
Program for the Early Years

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# *Building Strong Literacy Foundations*

Bringing together the reading brain and foundational literacy skills

Presenter:

Jen Kelly



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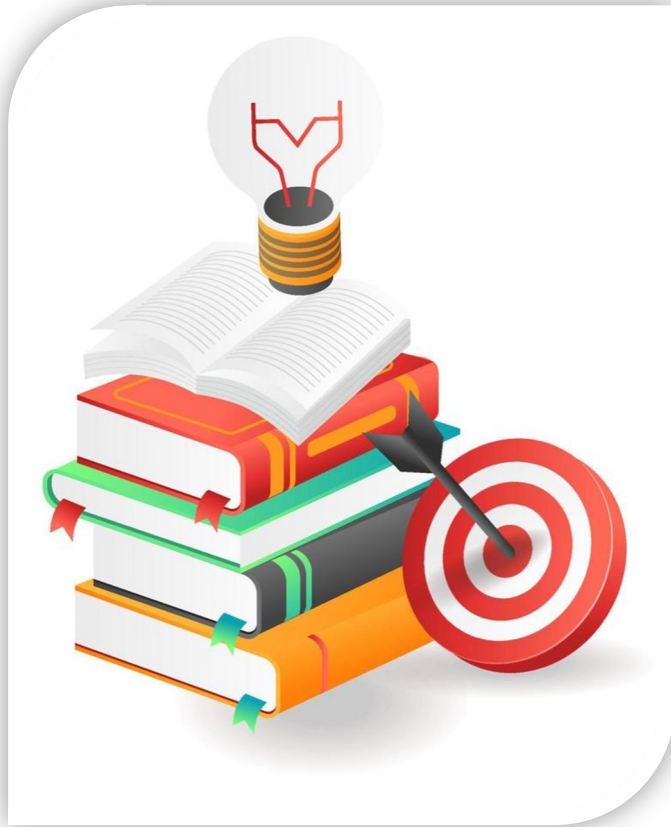
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# Learning Objectives



- Understand how the brain learns to read
- Explore foundational skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.
- Gain practical tools to enhance literacy instruction



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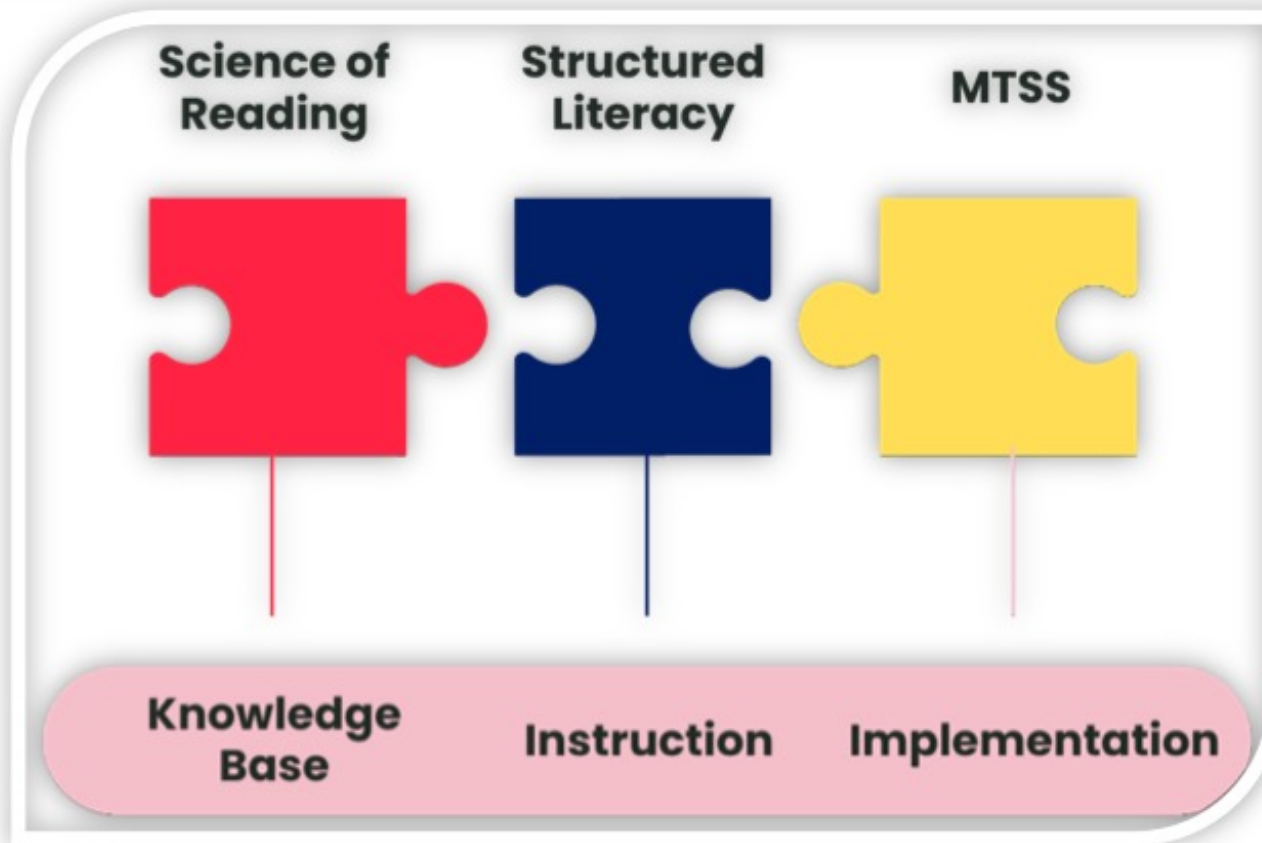


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# Let's Clarify Some Terms



# De-mystifying the Science of Reading

## The Science of Reading Is **NOT**:

- An ideology or philosophy
- A fad, trend new idea or pendulum swing
- A political agenda
- A one-size-fits-all approach
- A program of instruction
- A single, specific component of instruction such as phonics





# Science of LEARNING

## The Science of Reading



### IS:

- A vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing.
- Based on research that has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies in multiple languages.
- An abundance of evidence to inform:
  - how proficient reading and writing develop;
  - why some have difficulty; and
  - how we can most effectively assess and teach ...therefore, how to improve student outcomes through **prevention** of and **intervention** for reading difficulties.



# Structured Literacy: Meeting the Needs of All Learners

## Structured literacy:

- an evidence-based instructional approach
- comprehensive – addressing listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- characterized by what content is taught and how content is taught



A comprehensive approach that meets the needs of all learners



## Structured Literacy: an approach that meets the needs to all learners

**WHAT is taught:** • Both foundational skills & Higher-level literacy skills

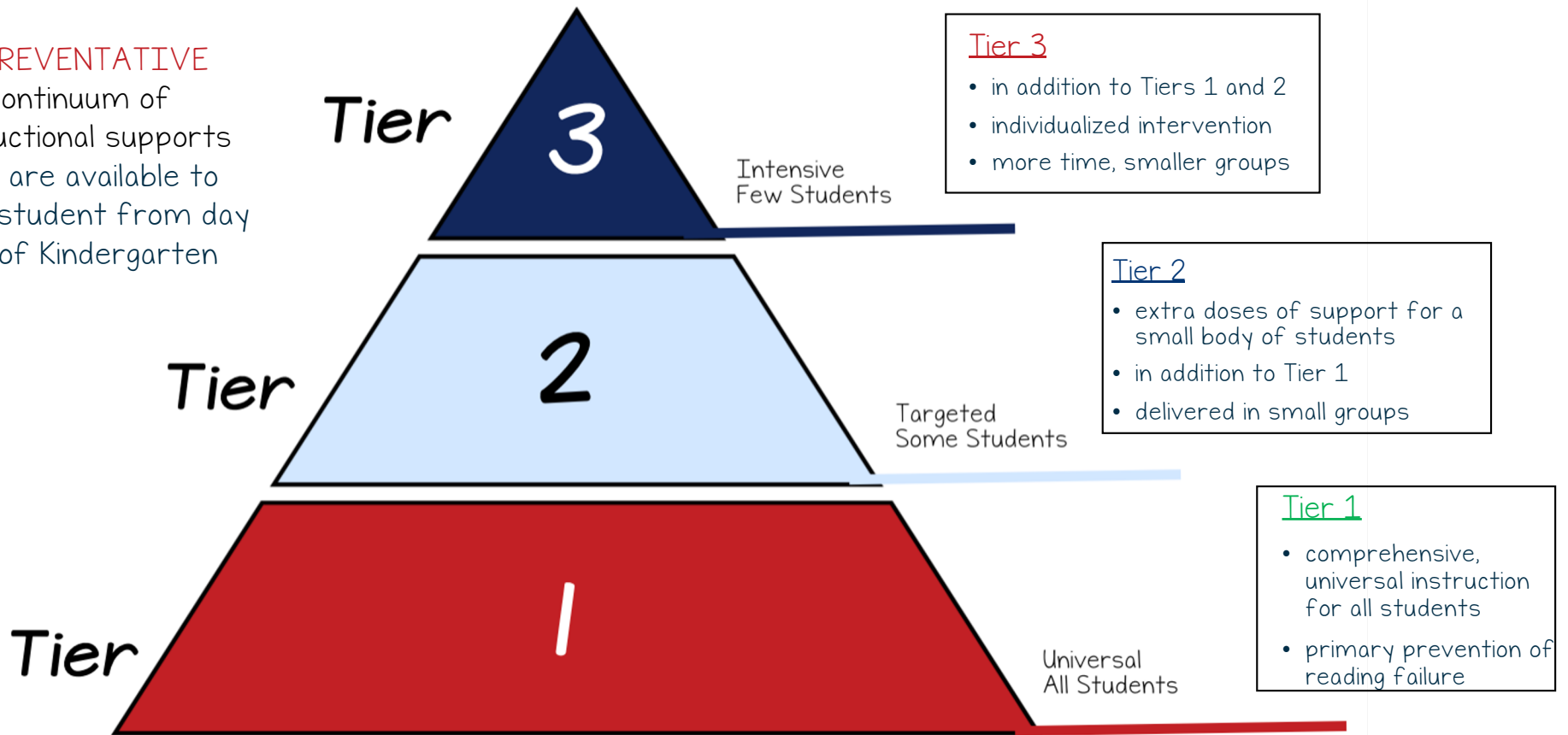
### HOW it is taught:



- Systematic and Cumulative: simple to complex/follows a scope and sequence
- Explicit
  - Direct instruction
    - “Today we are learning to...”
- Continuous student-teacher interaction
- Not assuming all students can infer concepts
- Careful and considered practice
- Prompt and specific feedback (corrective if needed)

# MTSS - Multi-Tiered System of Supports

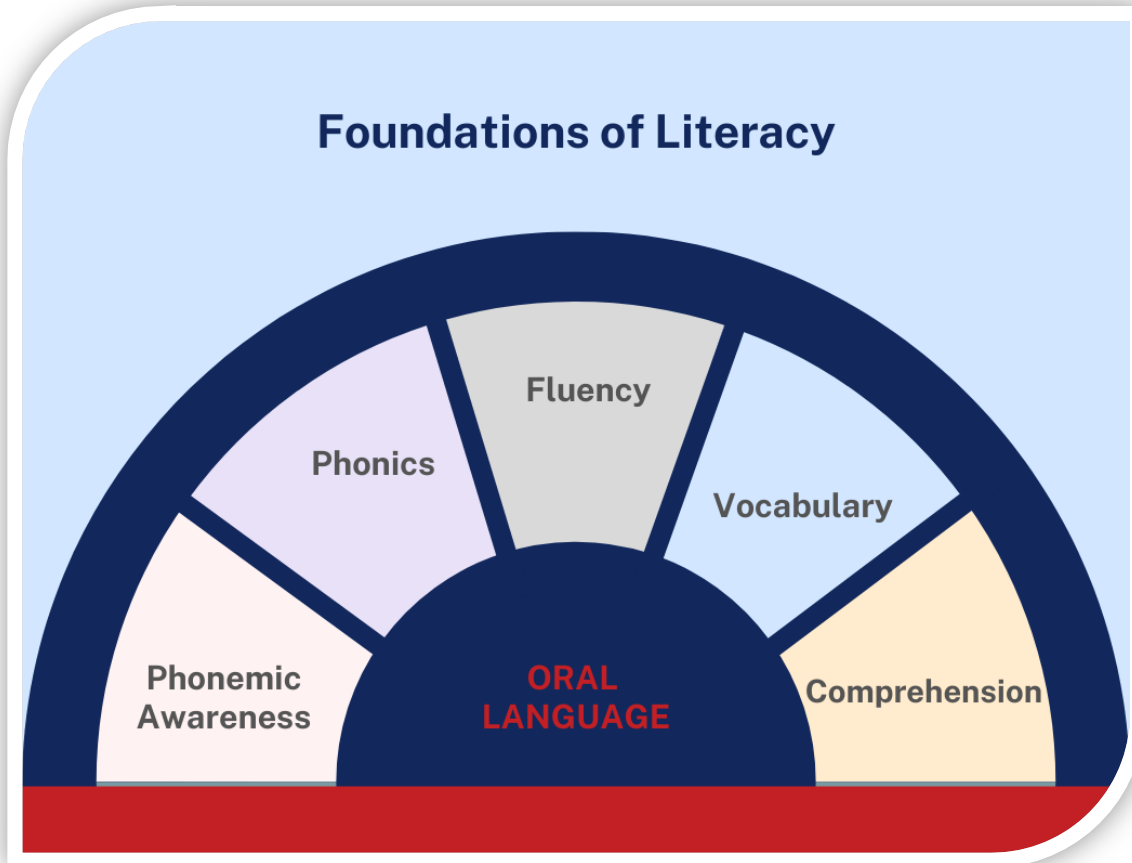
A **PREVENTATIVE** continuum of instructional supports that are available to every student from day one of Kindergarten







# Foundational Skills for Reading

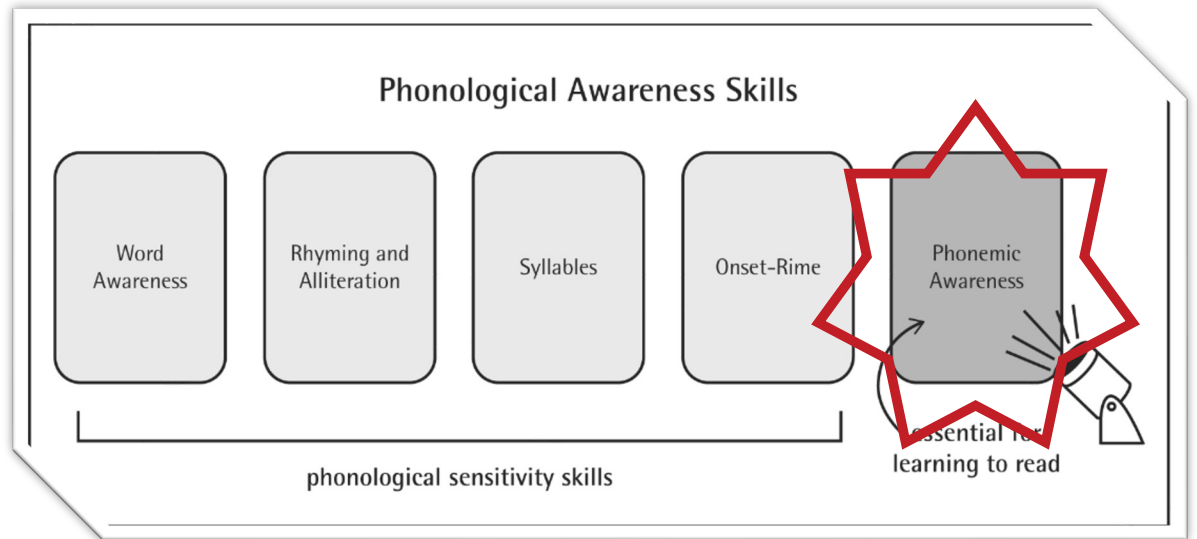


Proficiency in these foundational skills is necessary to all students to be reflective, critical and independent readers



# Phoneme Awareness

Is the awareness that words are made up of individual sounds



\* Can be taught without students first mastering phonological sensitivity skills (rhyme, segmenting syllables) \*

## *Reminder*

“Phonemic awareness is the most potent predictor of success in learning to read”

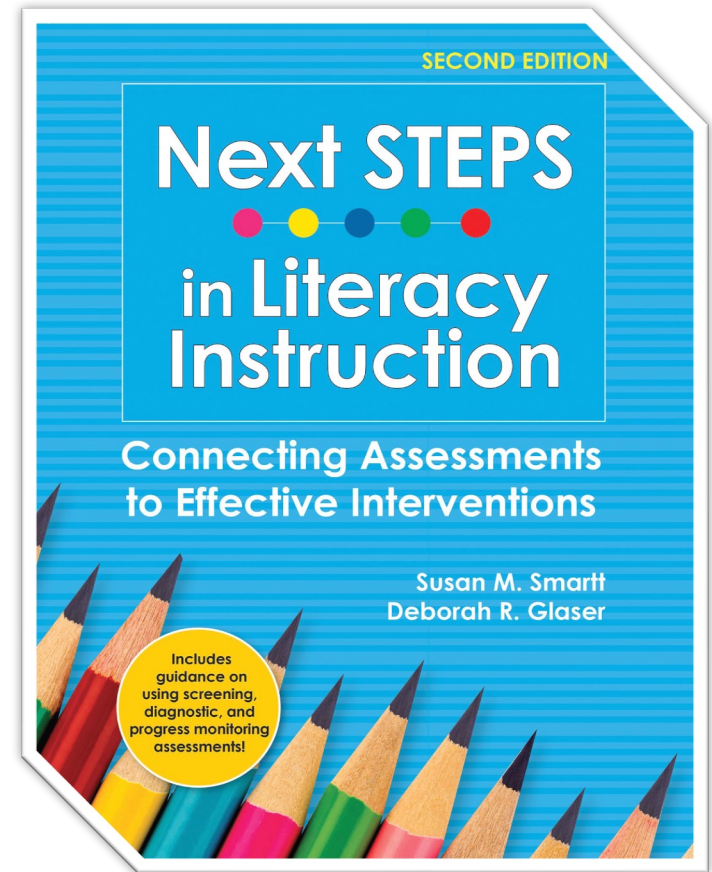
It is more highly related to reading than tests of general intelligence, reading readiness, and listening comprehension.”





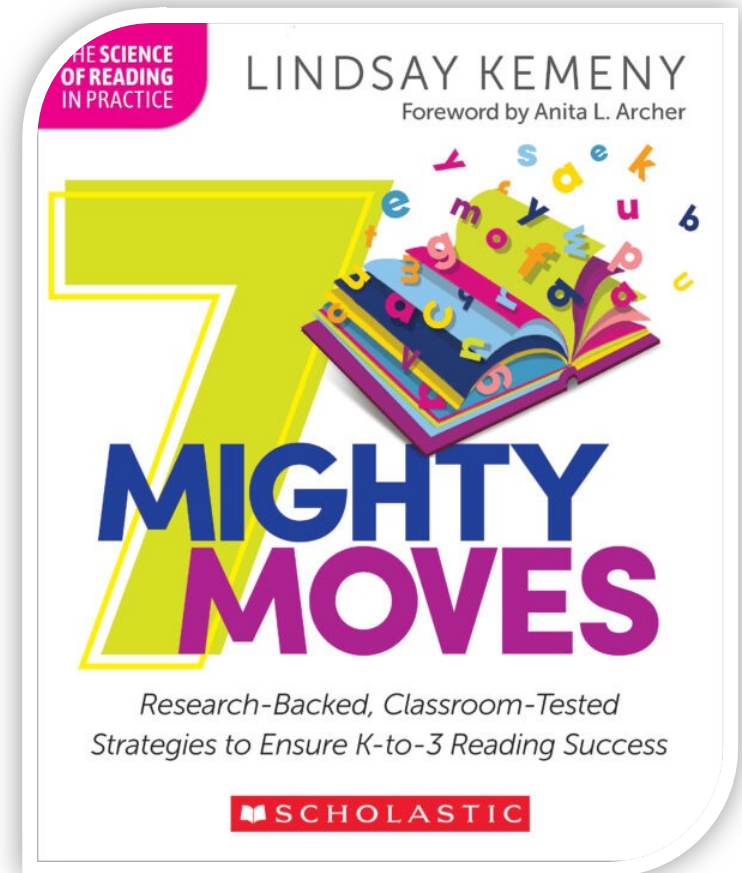
“Teaching phonemes along with letter names and letter formation supports students’ development of phoneme awareness.

This combined instruction is more **effective** than teaching awareness solely through segmenting and blending auditorily.” (p. 55)



# Guiding Principles - How?

- Explicit, systematic, nothing to chance/discover
- Multiple opportunities throughout day – sprinkling
- Model & support
- Abundance of practice
- Brief (max 20 hours per year, or less than 30 minutes/week)  
(Tied to PHONICS)



# Ideas for Instructional Strategies:



## Use manipulatives to keep it playful

- Elkonin boxes + bingo chips
- Pop It fidget toys
- Race cars + tracks
- Unifix cubes

## Encourage gestures

- Hand choppers
- Tap down arm
- Finger/thumb tap

**Word Chains** – build phonemic awareness and phonics skills at the same time

## Reminder...



Erhi et al. suggest that “phonemic awareness is not taught for its own sake but rather for its value in helping children understand and use the alphabetic system to read and write”.

Further, that it ought not to be taught “**blindly in isolation ad nauseam without any connection to reading and writing**” (2001).

# Sources of Insight

- **Screening:**
  - Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) – Kindergarten to early 1st grade
  - Measures a student's ability to break a spoken word into its individual phonemes.

## First Sound Fluency (FSF) – Beginning of Kindergarten

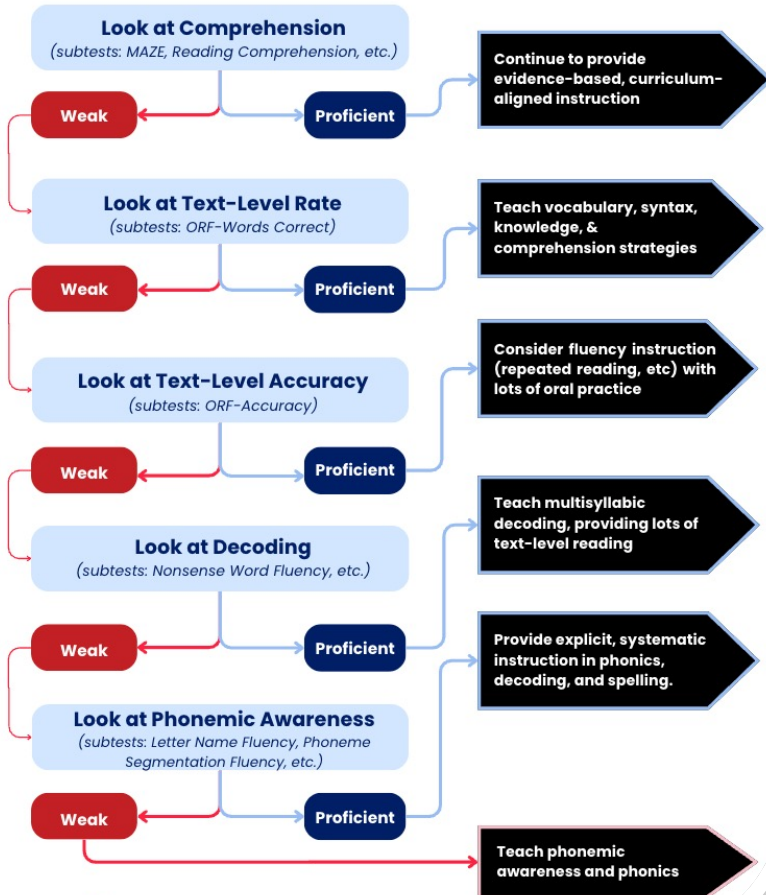
- Measures a student's ability to isolate and pronounce the first sound in a spoken word.
- **Spelling samples** also provide insight into how well students are segmenting phonemes in words







## Making Sense of Screening



A weakness in the area of phoneme awareness may exist for older struggling readers, and needs to be addressed.

## Quick Share

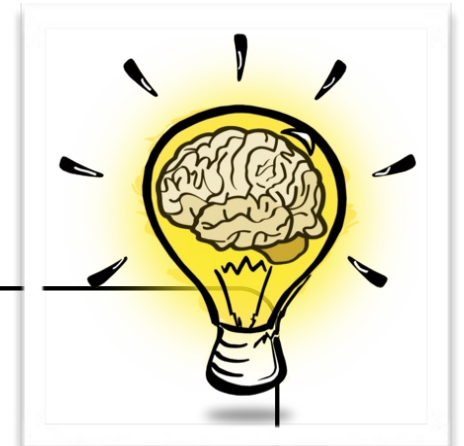
Turn and talk at your table groups:

- What are you currently doing to develop **phonemic awareness** for your students?
- What is one thing you might get started with right away?



# Readiness Skills

The two best predictors of early reading success are phonemic awareness and a student's understanding of the alphabetic principle.



## Alphabetic Principle

The understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between sounds and letters.

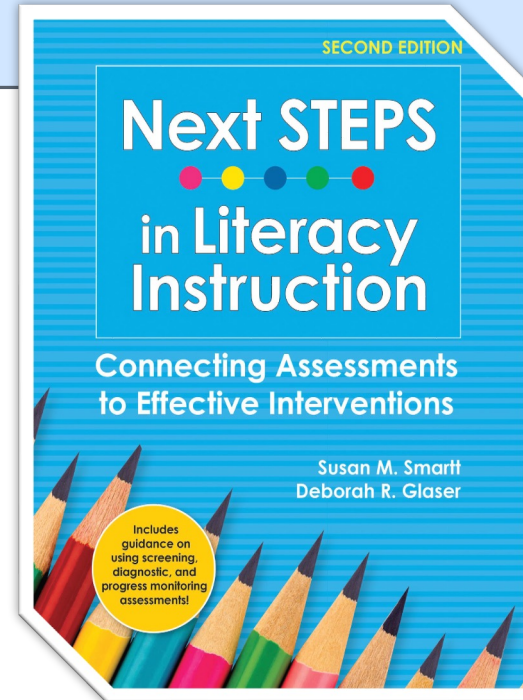
“these skills open the gate for reading.” – Wiley Blevins



# Phonics

“Phonics is the **linchpin**, embracing elements of print to represent oral language within a highly dependable, systematic structure.”

– Smartt & Glaser, 2023, p. 83

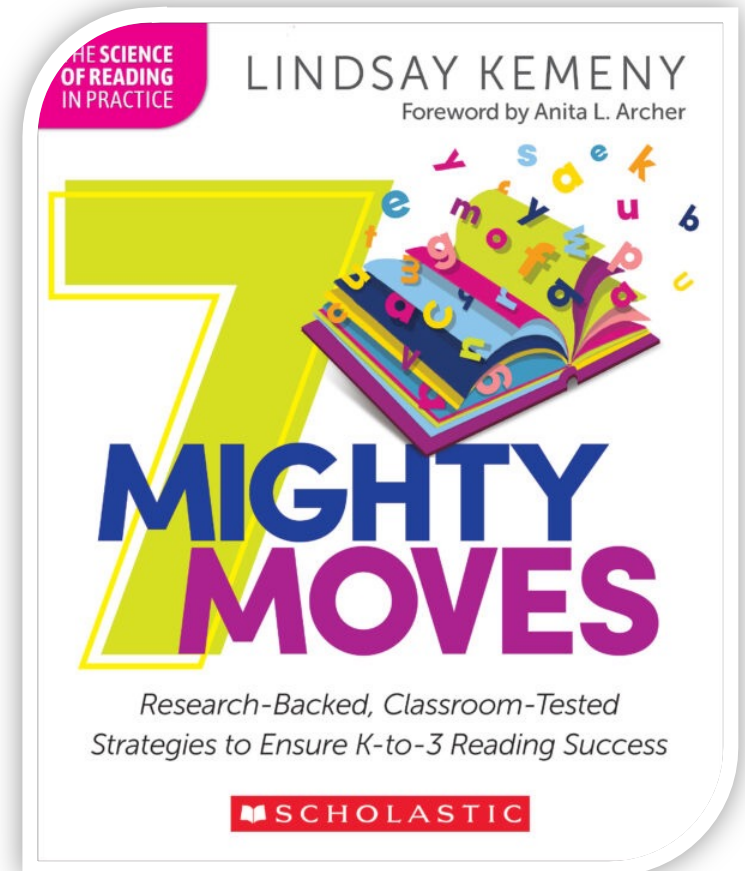


Phonics refers to knowledge of letter sounds and the ability to apply that knowledge in decoding unfamiliar printed words.

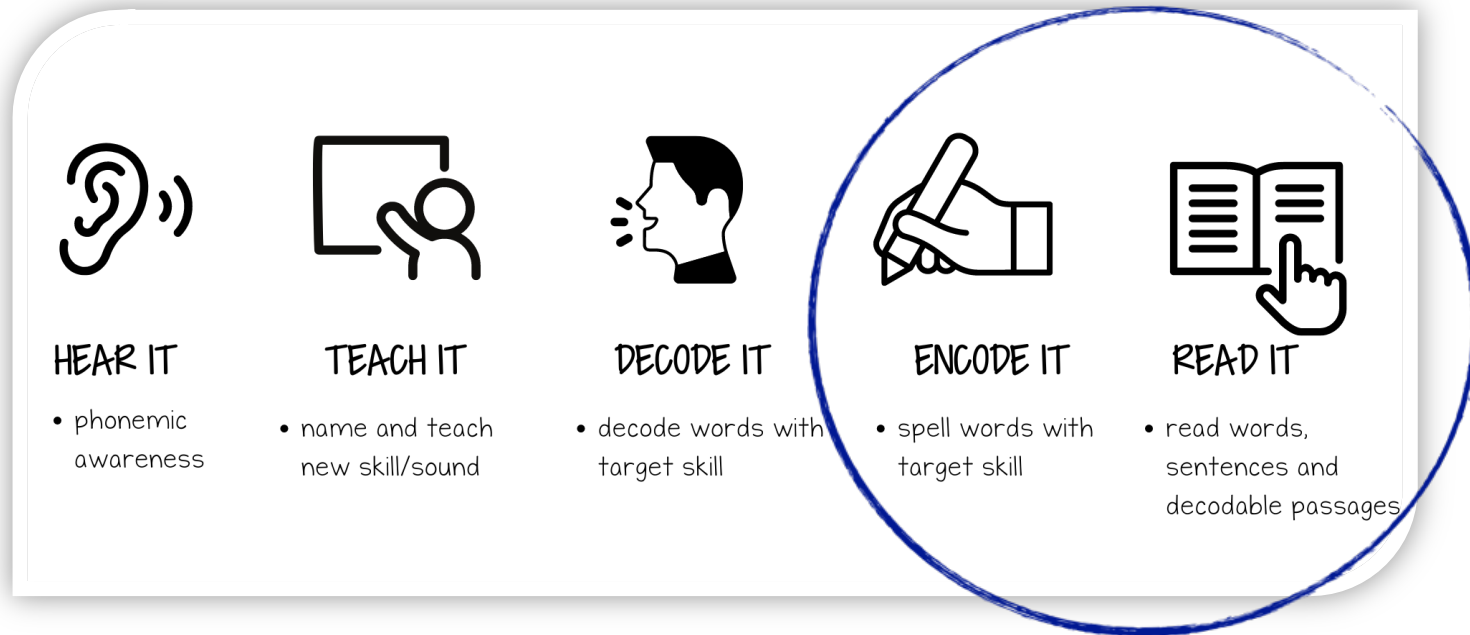
# Phonics: Instruction

## Keep in mind:

- Systematic: Move from simple to complex
  - \*\*\* Following a scope and sequence
- Explicit: “Today I want to teach you...”
- Keep students engaged by:
  - Inviting student responses
  - Have students come to the board to find a word, highlight a phonics skill in a word



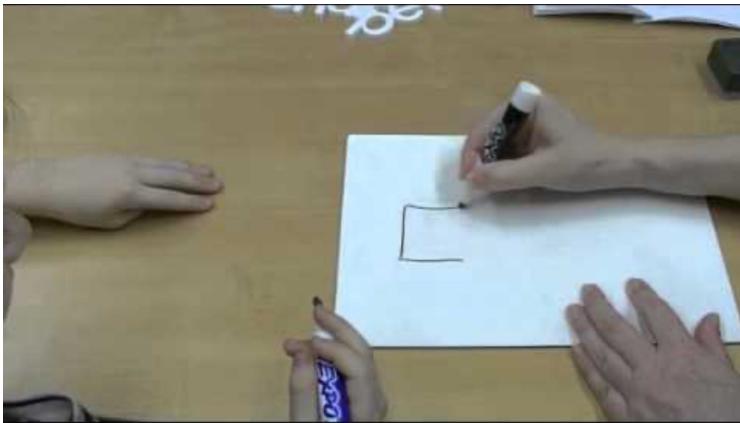
# Phonics Instruction



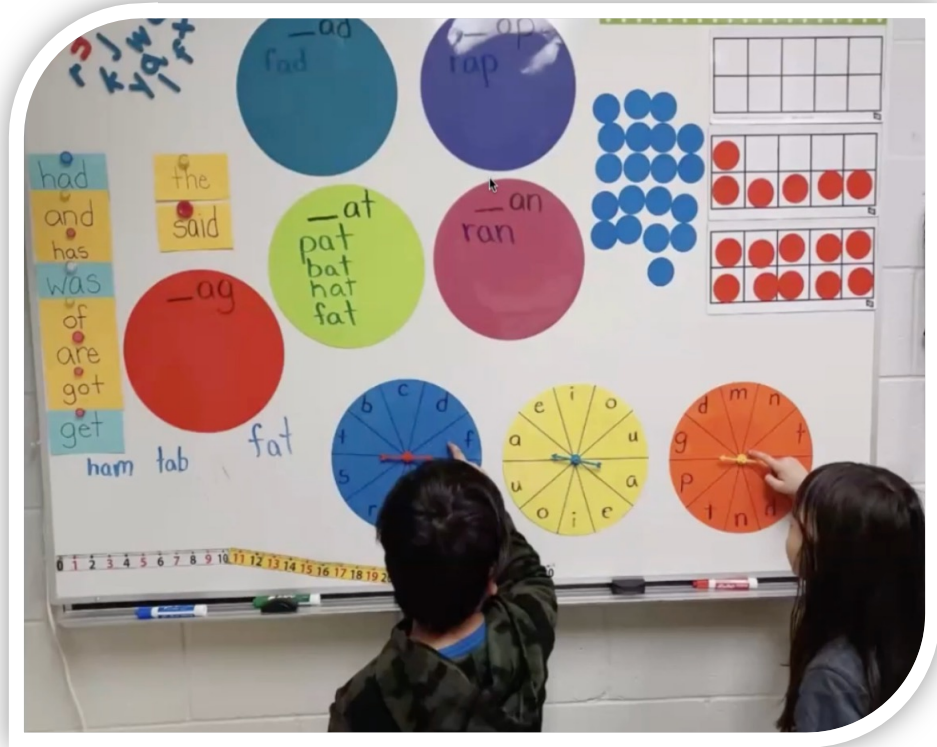
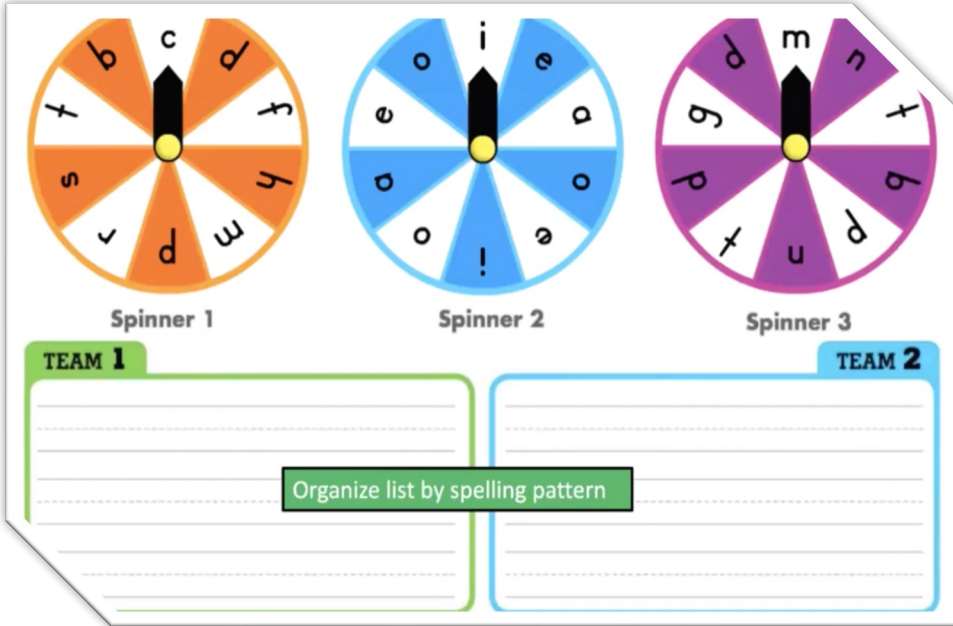
The last two steps should be approximately 50% of your lesson time. Blevins states “students progress at a much faster rate in phonics when the bulk of instructional time is spent on applying the skill to authentic reading and writing experiences” (2017).

# Ideas for Instructional Strategies:

- Understand “the code” yourself
- Consider using a Systematic and Explicit phonics program
- White boards will be your best friend!
- Keep lessons lively (Perky Pace), and stick to suggested times
- Don’t forget to unpack word meaning
- Try multi sensory methods
- Use Elkonin (sound) boxes to support encoding



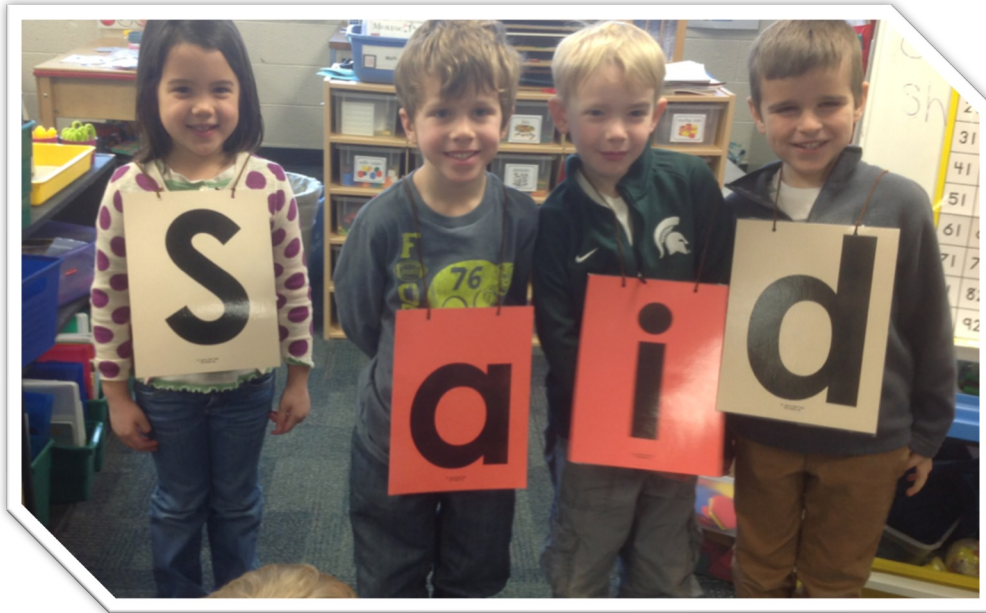
# A Phonics Centre Activity - Spin It







## Living Words - Make a Word



“With the help from some awesome volunteers, we now have a set of “letter vests” in our classroom! The students wear these vests to make sight words (words that go on the word wall). They really enjoy “scrambling up” and asking another child to “unscramble” them to make the sight word correct again.” (Mrs. Haxhiqj)

# Word Chains

## Teacher Language

(Begin with mat.) Change mat to sat.

Change the S to an F.  
Now tell me what word you have?

Change fat to fit.

Change the F to an S. What word is that?

What letter do you need to change sit to lit?

Now add an S to the beginning of lit.  
What word do you get?

## Skill

encoding

decoding

encoding

decoding

encoding

decoding



# Sources of Insight

- **Screening:**

Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) - Kindergarten & 1st Grade

- Though not a direct phonics skill, it is a strong predictor of early reading success.

Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) - Mid-K to 2nd Grade

- Assesses knowledge of letter-sound correspondences and blending skills.

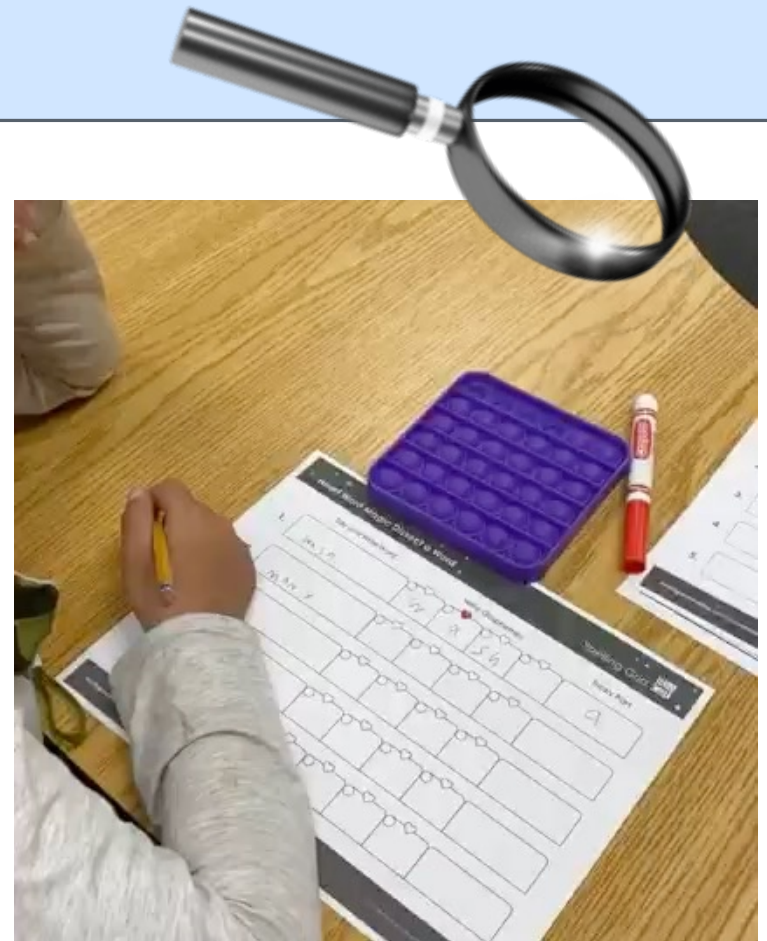
Two scoring types:

Correct Letter Sounds (CLS) and Whole Words Read (WWR)

Word Reading Fluency (WRF) - 1st to 3rd Grade

- Measures a student's ability to read real words accurately and fluently within one minute.
- Assesses automaticity in recognizing common phonics patterns.

- **Word mapping** reveals a child's phonics skills by assessing their ability to segment sounds, match them to letters, blend them into words, and spell accurately.



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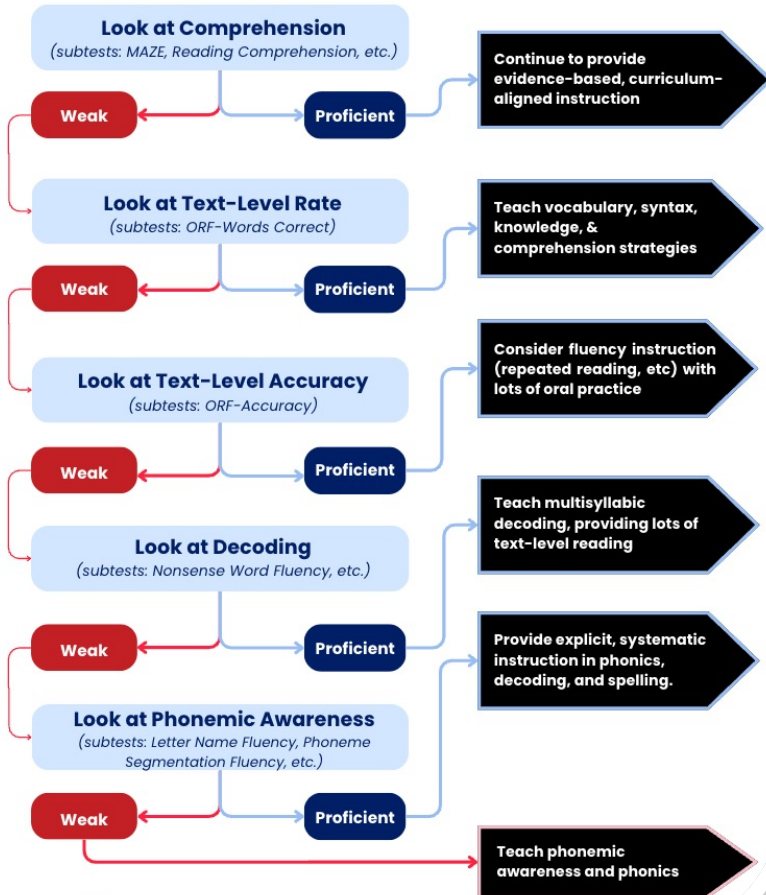


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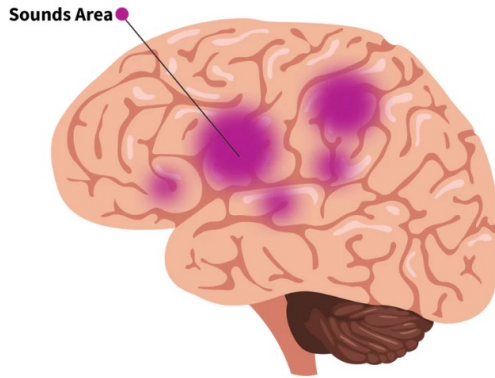


## Making Sense of Screening



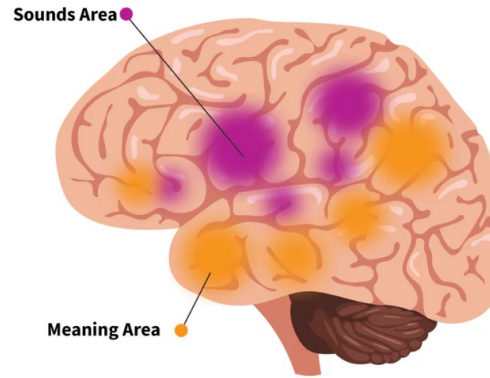
A weakness in the area of phonics may exist for older struggling readers, and needs to be addressed.

# How the Brain Learns Spoken Language



## *The Sounds Area*

As babies hear a language, their brains track sound patterns and store the most common ones on the left side (Kuhl, 2011, 2015).



## *The Meaning Area*

After coding sounds, babies start learning words. Their meanings are stored on the left side of the brain, near the sound area.



## *Listening*

As we hear language, the left side of the brain processes sounds and meaning.

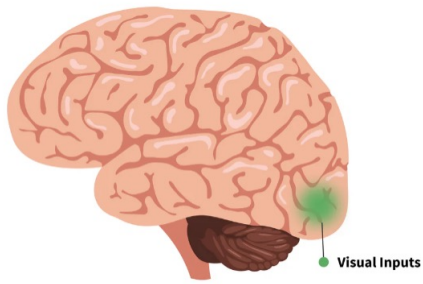
## Skilled Reading



Skilled readers use the same left-brain areas as listening does.

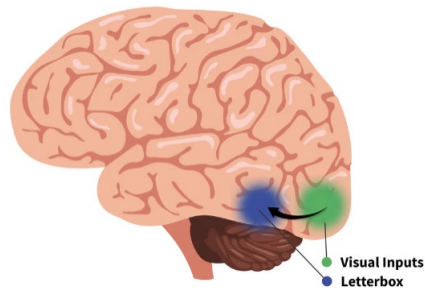
(Dehaene, 2013b)

# The Reading Brain



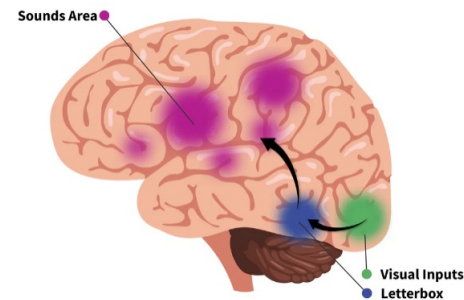
## Visual Input

Reading begins as a visual input.



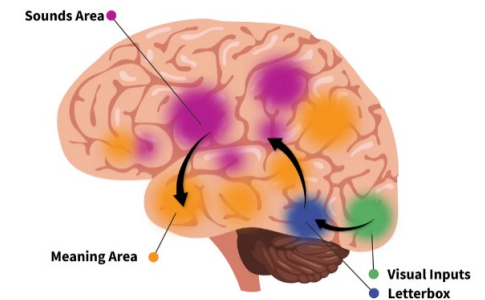
## Letterbox

When the brain sees a letter that represents a sound, the letter box is activated.



## Sounds Area

Next, the “sounds area” of the brain is activated.



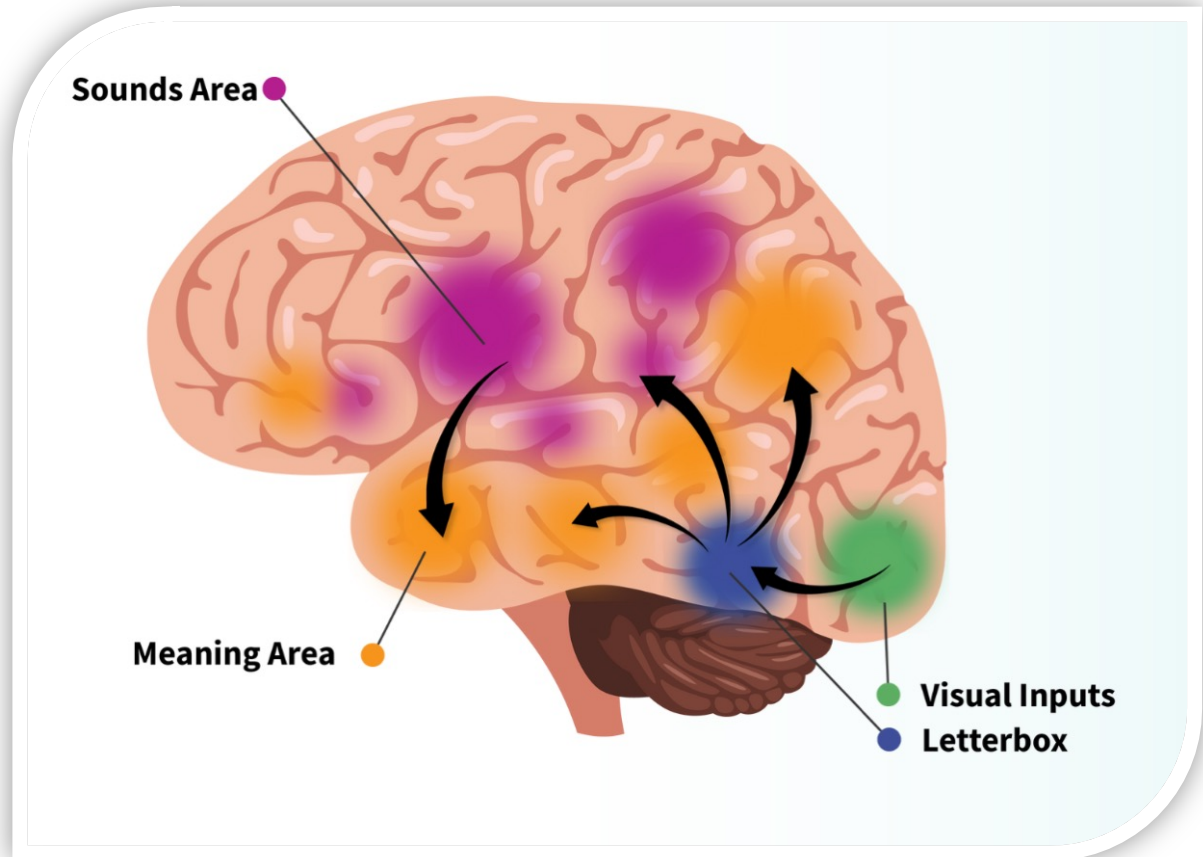
## Meaning Area

Students then use their auditory mental dictionaries (lexicons) to recognize the meaning of the word, and the “meaning area” of the brain is activated.

## *Fluent Reading: A Second Pathway Is Formed*

With practice sounding out words, the brain develops a second pathway directly from the letterbox to the meaning area.

**Fluent readers** process sounds and meaning in parallel.

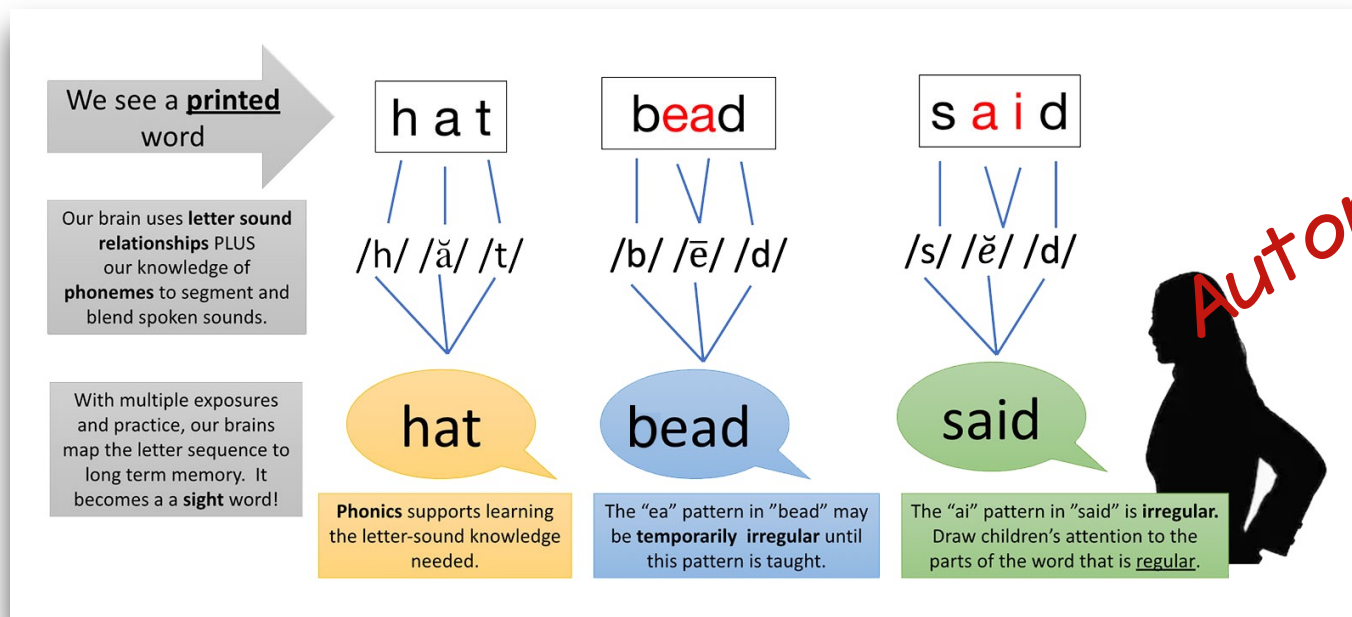






# The role of Orthographic Mapping - "Sight Words"

The **process** of storing a word permanently in memory for instant retrieval is called **orthographic mapping**.





Creating a sight word involves **forming permanent connections** between a word's **letters**, its **pronunciation**, and its **meaning** in memory.

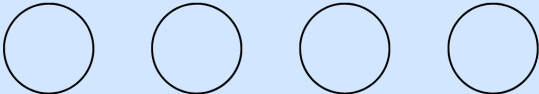
# Word Mapping: Supporting the Cognitive Progress

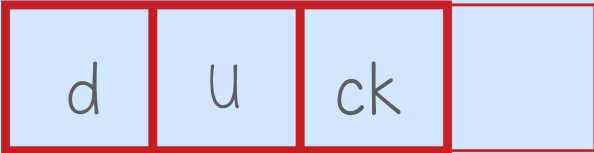
Word mapping is a physical way to represent the relationship between the phonemes and graphemes.

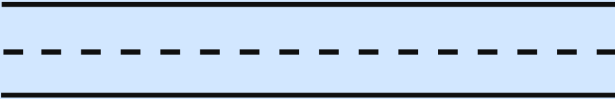
**WORD MAPPING**


 Say the word


 Tap the word

 Map the word

 Graph the word

 Write the word

 Check for meaning

 Check for context



# Decodable Text: A teaching tool to support Phonics Instruction

“

"Without aligned texts, readers are at risk of formulating the misguided hypothesis that reading is simply using pictures, and maybe a few letters, to infer the words. Worse yet, readers can begin to think that reading is just memorizing the text."

-Shifting the Balance 6 Ways to Bring the Science of Reading into the Balanced Literacy Classroom- Page 141



# Patterned, Leveled Text: Whole Word



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## Decodable Text: letter sound



Is the cap on a mat?  
No! It is not on the mat.



Is Zac's cap on a can?  
No! It is not on the can.



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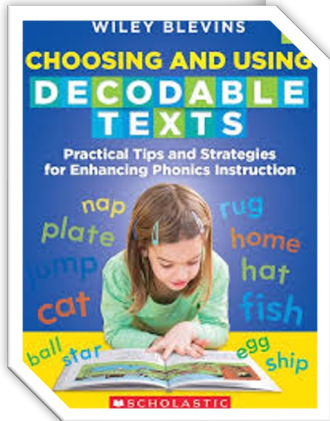
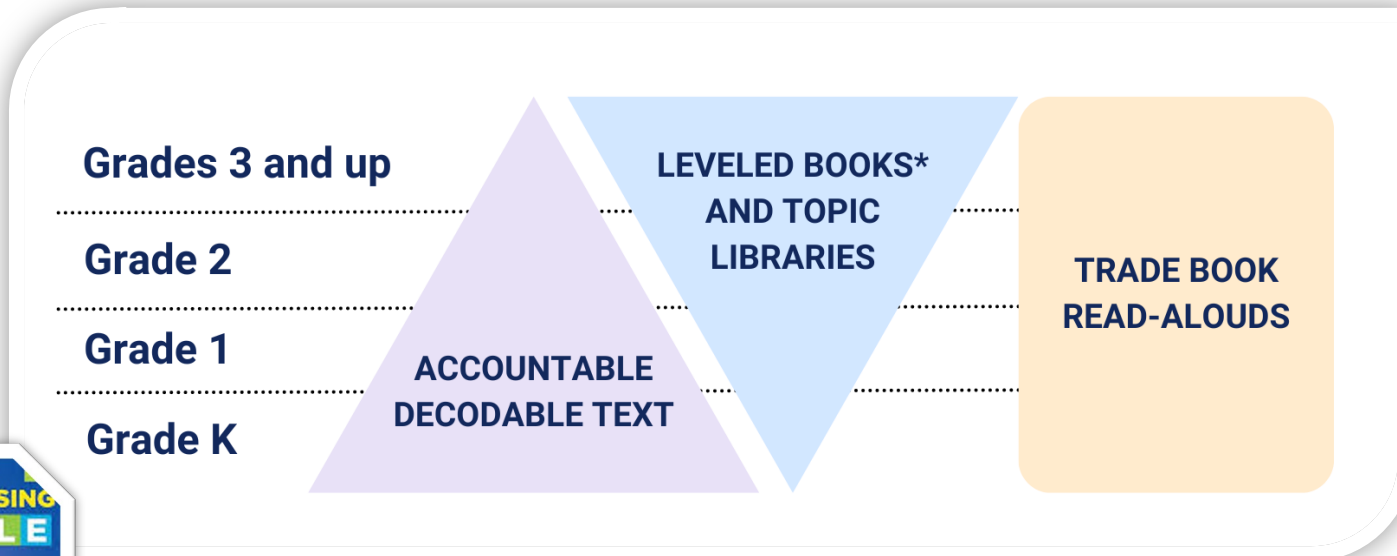


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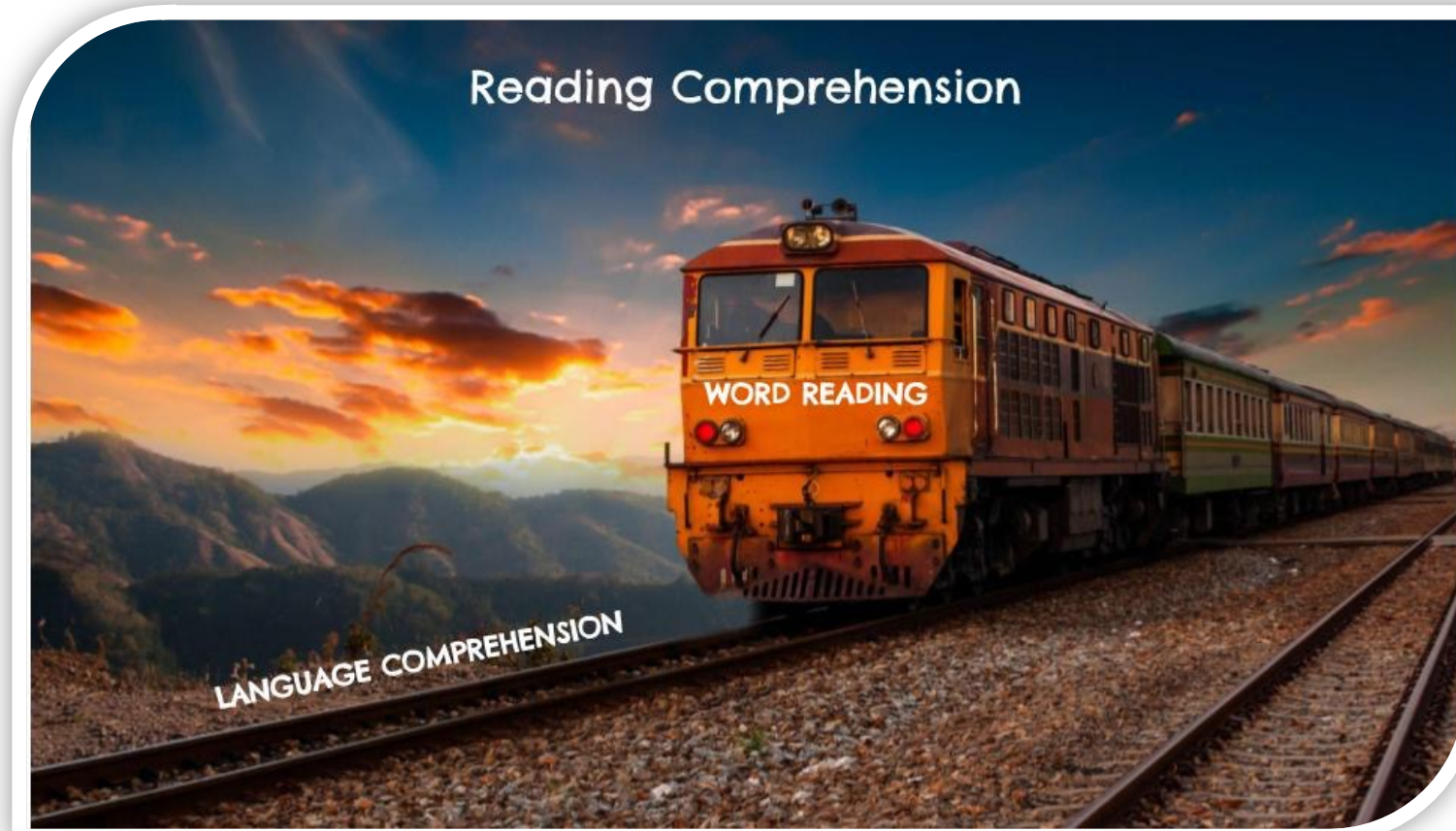
# Decodable Text



Important to remember that students need access to a variety of texts for different instructional purposes



# Laying the Language Track for the Word Reading Train



# Why Teach Vocabulary?

- A rich vocabulary supports learning about the world, new ideas, and enjoying the beauty of language
  - A rich vocabulary enhances what an individual wants to say and write



Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency and tightly related to reading comprehension: primary, intermediate, high school and adults.



# Approaches to Instruction: Active Processing in Action



**Explicit Instruction:** Teaching specific words through direct explanation.

**Incidental Learning:** Fostering vocabulary growth through exposure to language.



## Active Processing Looks and Sounds Like...

Children are more likely to learn when they can actively engage with a word and its meaning, rather than passively receiving information from the teacher



- Discussing images related to a new word
- Discussing and exploring objects ie. a thermometer
- Using movement – demonstrating migration by walking from one side of the room to the other
- Thinking of real-life examples – a time when you felt exuberant
- Discussing multiple meanings of a word – season (your food), season (winter, spring)
- Thinking about/noticing meaningful parts of words (morphology) – tricycle, triangle, tripod
- Using new vocabulary in writing





## How do we Learn New Words?

When we engage in conversation

What can this look like in the classroom?

- Regularly and intentionally using sophisticated language throughout the day for students of all ages
- The more interesting words we use around students the more words they will pick up and use themselves



# What it Means to Really Know a Word...

- I can share an informal explanation
- I can use a synonym or antonym
- I can give categorical information
- I can recognize nuances between similar words
- I can recognize word parts (morphological understanding)
- I can connect to personal experience
- I can recognize multiple meanings – bark/bark



# Effective Strategies: Frayer Model

What does it feel like:

1. ice cube
2. snow
3. winter day

The word in a sentence:

Brrr! It is getting cold.

**c** **o** **l** **d**

Write three synonyms:

1. freezing
2. chilly
3. icy

Draw a picture of the word:



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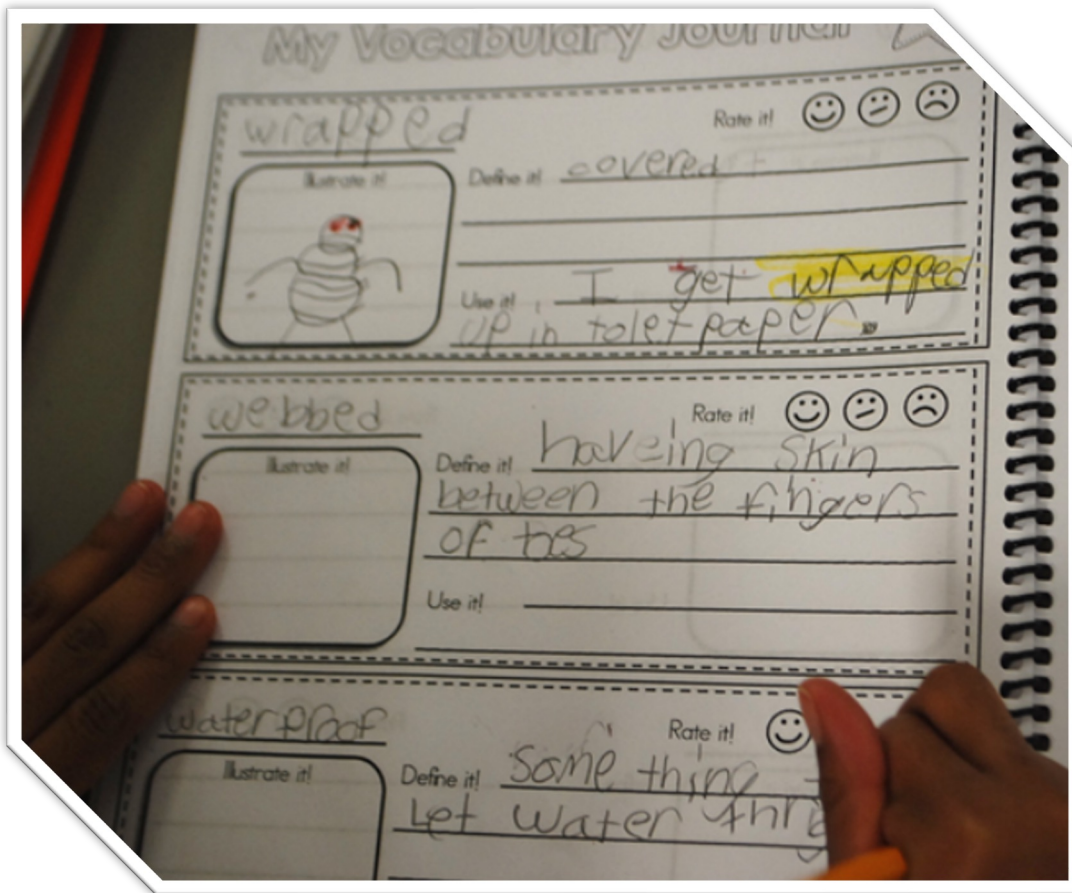
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# Practical Tips and Activities



- Word of the Day.
- Vocabulary Journals.
- Interactive games (e.g., vocabulary bingo, word associations).



# Creating a Word Rich Environment

- Labeling items in the classroom.
- Integrating new vocabulary into daily conversations.
- Encouraging curiosity about words.





# Read Aloud



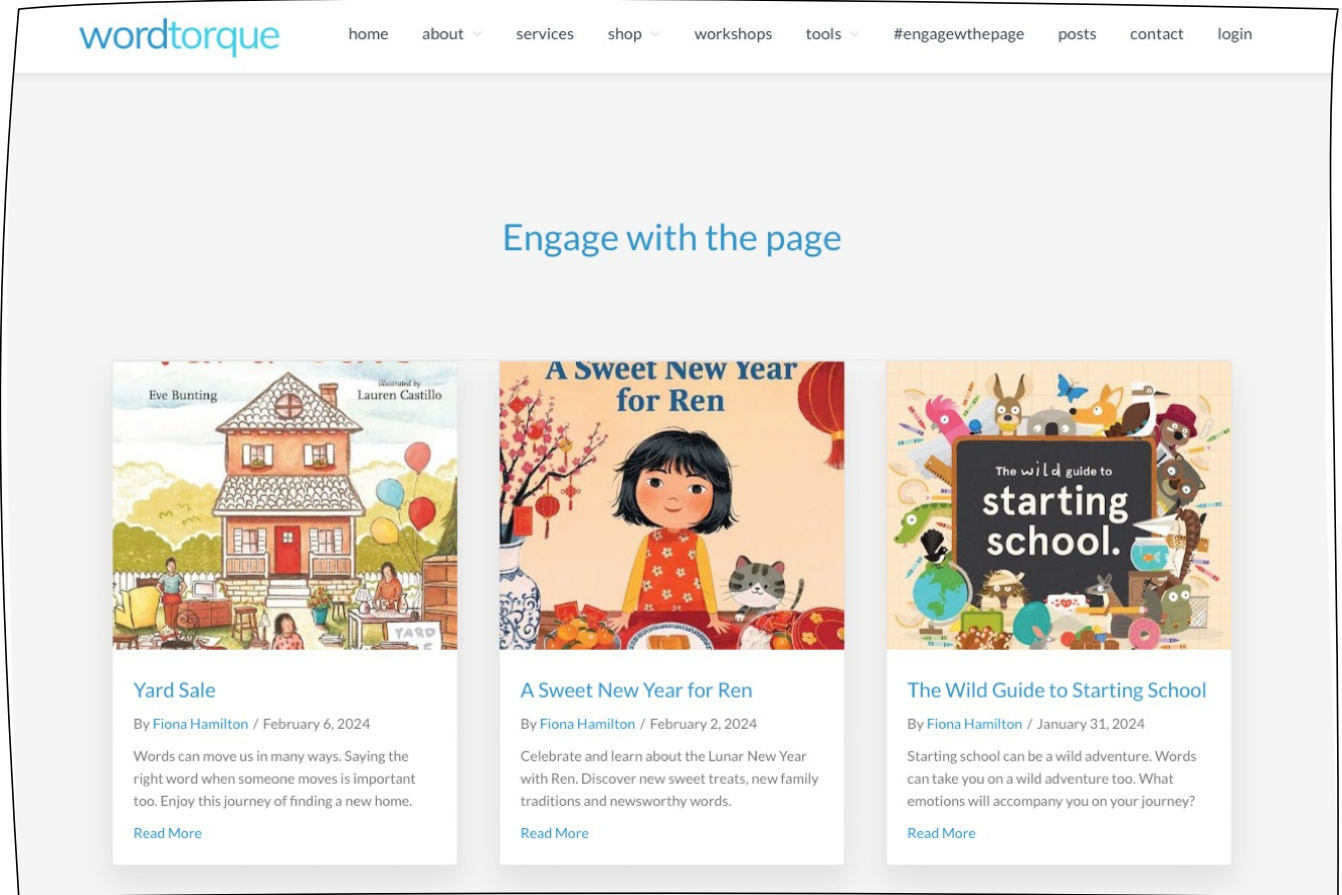
There are more rare words found in children's picture books than in the average conversation between two college educated adults.

Hays and Ahrens (1988)




# Into the Classroom...

To inspire  
WORD STUDY




wordtorque home about services shop workshops tools #engagewiththepage posts contact login


## Engage with the page



**Yard Sale**  
By Fiona Hamilton / February 6, 2024  
Words can move us in many ways. Saying the right word when someone moves is important too. Enjoy this journey of finding a new home.  
[Read More](#)



**A Sweet New Year for Ren**  
By Fiona Hamilton / February 2, 2024  
Celebrate and learn about the Lunar New Year with Ren. Discover new sweet treats, new family traditions and newsworthy words.  
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**The Wild Guide to Starting School**  
By Fiona Hamilton / January 31, 2024  
Starting school can be a wild adventure. Words can take you on a wild adventure too. What emotions will accompany you on your journey?  
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# Into the classroom...

## ReadWorks Article-A-Day™

Build knowledge, vocabulary, and stamina with a routine that students love.



Sets of 6 to 9 articles that are related by topic



Nonfiction topics to build knowledge



For grades Kindergarten to 8<sup>th</sup>



Research-based classroom routine with writing & oral sharing

All you need is 10 minutes each day for the routine. Students will gain the most by reading **4 or more articles** from an Article-A-Day set each week and doing the routine for **15 or more weeks** in the school year. Article-A-Day can be done digitally, printed, or projected!

Plan an entire year with our **K-6 Scope & Sequences**: <https://www.readworks.org/scope-and-sequence>

### Step 1: Set the purpose for the routine

- "Words are where humans store knowledge. So we will build our knowledge by reading these articles. We will also increase our vocabulary, improve our reading stamina, and enjoy reading every day."

### Step 2: Students read or listen to an article

- If students cannot read independently, they can listen to the audio, or you can read the article aloud.

### Step 3: The "Book of Knowledge"

- Students write or type two or three things that they learned from the article and would like to remember in their Books of Knowledge.
- If students cannot write yet, they can draw their responses.

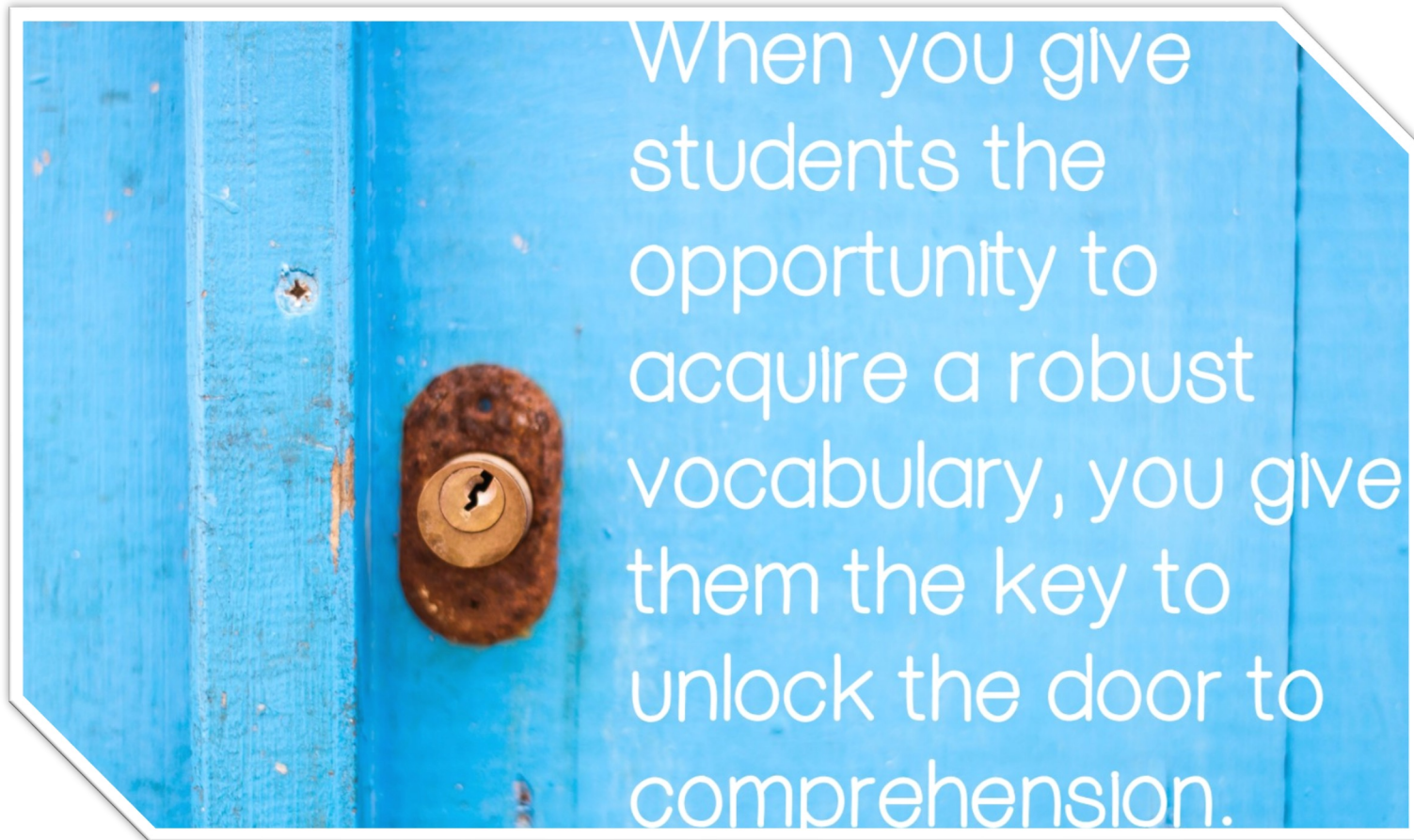
### Step 4: Share Knowledge!

- Ask a few students to share with the class what they learned from reading.
- Create a "Class Book of Knowledge" where you record this information. You can do this in Assignments & Progress or on chart paper.

To inspire  
CONTENT AREA  
READING

Build Background  
Knowledge  
&  
Vocabulary

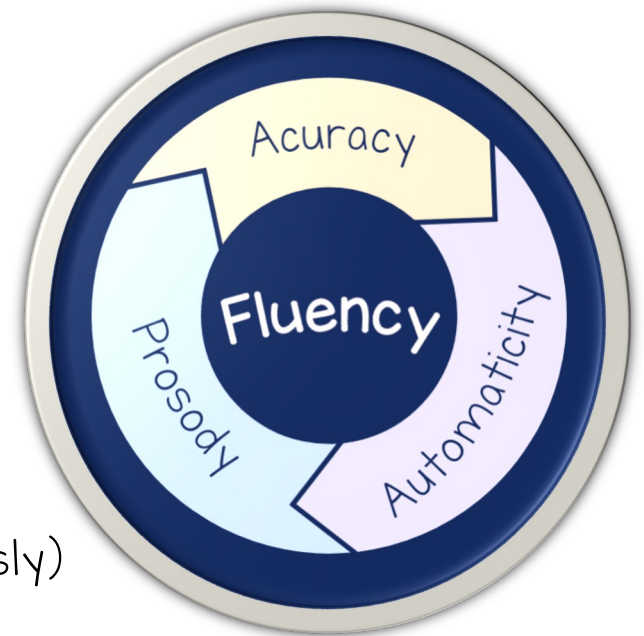
## *Key Takeaways*



# Fluency

Fluency refers to the development of three components: *accuracy*, *automaticity* and *prosody* and provides the bridge between word recognition and comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021)

1. *Accuracy* refers to identifying or reading letter names/sounds and words correctly.
2. *Automaticity* can be considered in two levels:
  - word level (ability to read words quickly and effortlessly)
  - text level (ability to read connected text including sentences, passages and books quickly and effortlessly)
3. *Prosody* refers to a readers natural voice and expression



# Building Fluency

**Accuracy:** we can build accuracy through decoding as part of explicit and systematic phonics instruction.

**Automaticity:** reading words with automaticity is a result of orthographic mapping (Ehri, 2014).

We can build **word level automaticity** through blending drills and Beat the Clock and other word reading activities including word mapping.

**Text level automaticity** is achieved through reading practice of connected text. Such practice can include repeated reading, choral reading and echo reading.

**Prosody** is built through teacher modeling of fluent reading during read alouds and can also develop through repeated reading and activities like readers theatre



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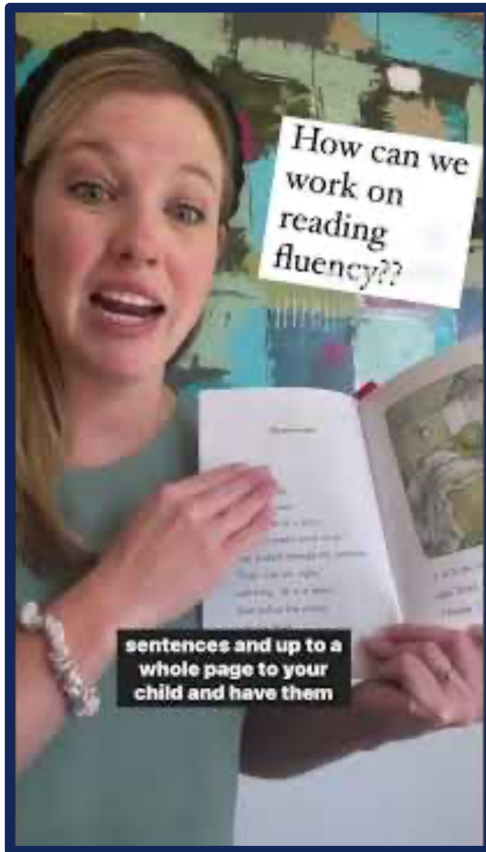
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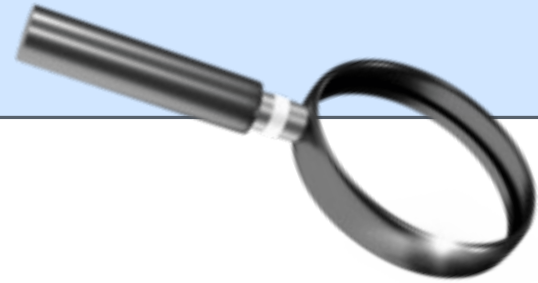
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# Ideas for instructional Strategies:








- Remember...fluency is not an isolated skill
  - subskills: phonemic awareness, sound-symbol knowledge, automaticity at letter or word level
- Small Group instruction affords specific, immediate feedback
- Model, model, model!!!
- Whole Group Reading including:
  - Read aloud, cloze reading, choral reading, echo reading
- Partner Reading
- Reader's Theatre
- Beat the Clock Timed Reading
- Repeated Reading - Fluency Triangles

# Sources of Insight



All Universal Screeners include fluency measures!

-  Bridges Decoding & Comprehension - Frees mental energy for understanding.
-  Signals Foundational Skill Gaps - Reveals phonics or vocabulary weaknesses.
-  Predicts Future Reading Success - Strong fluency links to academic growth.
-  Quick & Reliable - One-minute tests provide fast, accurate data.
-  Guides Instruction - Helps target accuracy, speed, and expression.



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# Skilled Comprehenders use these Strategies

## The 6 Most Important Comprehension Strategies



- 01 Switch on What You Know
- 02 Map the Text
- 03 Keep a Close Eye on Comprehension
- 04 Dig Below the Surface
- 05 Fill in the Missing Pieces
- 06 Sum Up What You Know

TheSixShifts.com

We can explicitly model these comprehension skills and engage students in conversations that allow them to practice comprehension.



# Reading Comprehension

“There is no comprehension strategy powerful enough to compensate for the fact that you can’t read the words” (Archer, 2001)



- Reading comprehension is complex and is **not a single “skill” or set of strategies**
- Instead, we can think of it as an **outcome**

# An Invitation

What is one thing you might:

- Start
- Stop
- Keep





# THE Reading Tree



“We envision learning to read is like growing a tree. The decoding skills of phonemic awareness and systematic phonics are akin to the roots supporting the part of the tree we see, comprehension and the joy of reading.”



## *Books & Articles*

- A Fresh Look at Phonics – Blevins, 2016
- 7 Mighty Moves – Kemeny, 2023
- A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day: Wright, 2021
- Bringing Words to Life – Beck, McKeown, Kucan
- Reach All Readers – Geiger, 2024
- Next Steps in Literacy Instruction – Smart & Glaser, 2024

## *Digital Resources*

- [The Six Shifts](#)
- [Engage with the Page](#)
- [Read Works: Article A Day](#)
- [Science of Reading Defining Guide](#)
- [Six Shifts: Are You Teaching the Key Comprehension Strategies Students Really Need](#)

## *Digital Resources: cont'd*

[Stephanie Stollar Reading Science Academy](#)

[Maryanne Wolf](#)

[Reading Rockets: The Active View of Reading](#)

[Reading Rockets: Models of Reading](#)

[Beyond the Simple View of Reading](#)

[International Dyslexia Association Ontario](#)

[Shanahan on Literacy](#)

[How We Learn To Read – Harvard Medical School](#)

[Evidence for a New Era of Reading Instruction](#)

[Logic of English](#)

[Word of the Day](#)

[Thinking Routine: Word Sentence Phrase](#)





Thank you for your dedication and  
passion!

Your hard work inspires and makes a  
lasting impact!

Thank you from the POPEY team!



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