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5 Shifts for True Science of Reading instruction

Key Science of Reading practices to implement for effective literacy instruction

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Reading

For classrooms and districts making the shift, understanding what an authentic Science of Reading-aligned curriculum looks like can be challenging. How do you know which instructional practices to adopt, which to avoid, and whether they're the real deal?

To guide your efforts, we've outlined five incremental changes you can make today as you explore and implement true Science of Reading instruction.

1 Use decodable readers, not leveled readers.

Why it's important:

- Students need regular practice with grade-level text.
- Texts that are connected to each day's phonics instruction help students apply what they've learned.

You'll know it's true Science of Reading if:

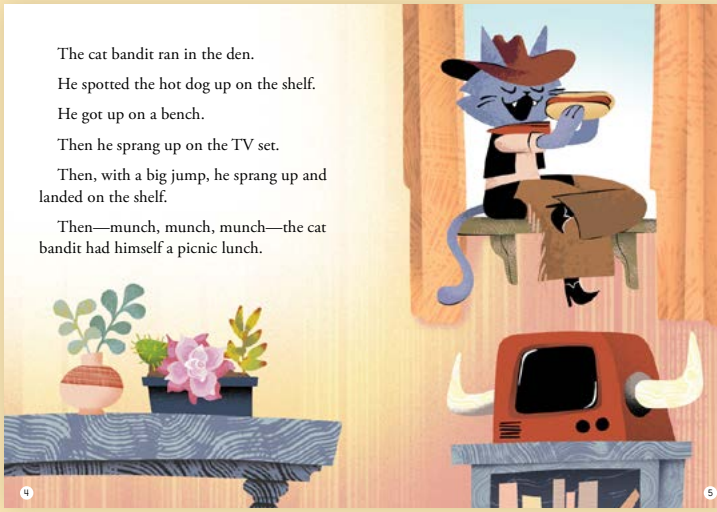
- There are direct connections between a phonics lesson andthe text.
- Students receive frequent practice with sounds and spellings they've been taught.

You'll be able to shift away from:

- A workshop model with guided reading and leveled readers or predictable text.
- Decodable readers that don't follow a phonics scope and sequence aligned to instruction.

A resource to guide you:

- ***What Should We See in Classrooms?*** by Margaret Goldberg and Lani Mednick.



2 Provide all students with dedicated phonics instruction, not mini-lessons.

Why it's important:

- Learning to read is not innate and must be taught through explicit, systematic instruction.
- Effective phonics instruction requires time for teaching, application, and practice with measurable objectives.

You'll know it's true Science of Reading if:

- Every student receives phonics instruction—not just some students.
- At least 60 minutes each day is devoted to foundational skills development.

You'll be able to shift away from:

- Phonics instruction that is given only on an as-needed basis. When phonics is on an as-needed basis, students don't get what they need to prevent reading difficulty. It is only when they struggle that they receive direction instruction.
- Mini-lessons where students alternate among limited phonics, guided reading, writing, and vocabulary practice.

A resource to guide you:

- Achieve the Core's **Foundational Skills Mini-Course**

3 Help students with phonics-based scaffolds, not three-cueing or word guessing.

Why it's important:

- Learning to decode builds neural pathways that are critical to automatic reading.
- Students need practice, not guesswork, sounding out words.

You'll know it's true Science of Reading if:

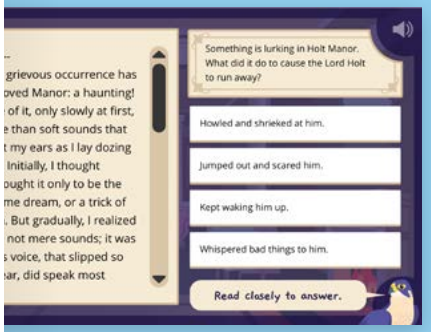
- Students are asked to "sound it out," not simply "Does it make sense?"
- Students are provided with phonics-based scaffolds to help recall spellings they've been taught.

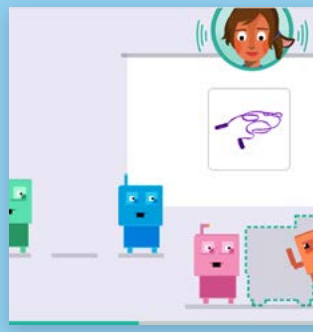
You'll be able to shift away from:

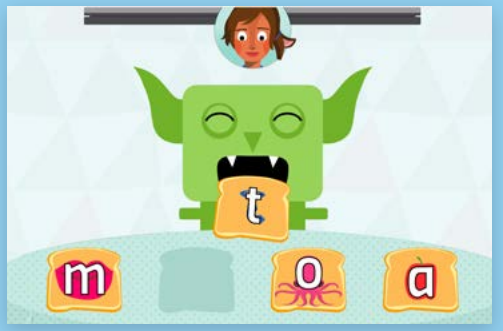
- Prompts that encourage students to guess through three-cueing (e.g., "What word would make sense?" or "What's in this picture?").
- Predictable books that enable pattern memorization.

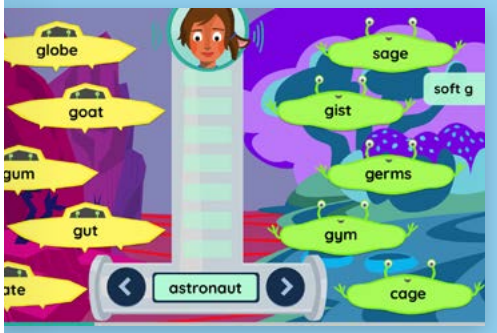
A resource to guide you:

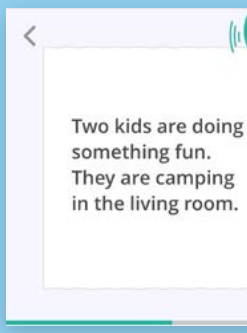
- ***At a Loss for Words*** by Emily Hanford

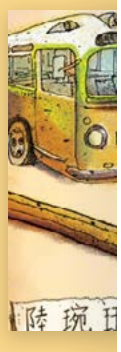


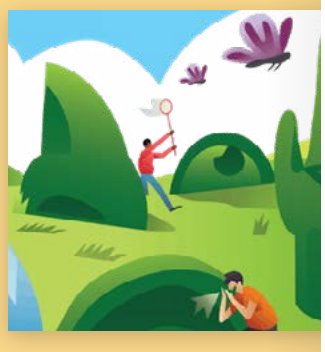












4 Teach content, not isolated comprehension strategies.

Why it's important:

- Language comprehension is as important as decoding.
- The more background knowledge students receive, the more prior knowledge and vocabulary they can bring to texts.

You'll know it's true Science of Reading if:

- You spend two or three weeks on focused domains covering a diverse range of literary, social studies, and science topics.
- Topics build on each other and make connections within and across grade levels, deepening students' understanding and vocabulary.

You'll be able to shift away from:

- Spending limited time on each topic, or introducing isolated topics that don't connect to one another or don't fall under relevant knowledge domains.
- Practicing comprehension skills without the foundation of content (e.g., asking students to "find the main idea" or "determine the author's purpose" in disconnected texts).

A resource to guide you:

- ***The Knowledge Gap*** by Natalie Wexler

5 Follow a clear instructional path, not a “choose your own adventure” model.

Why it’s important:

- It offers explicit guidance and a cohesive structure, the most beneficial—yet overlooked—element of teaching reading effectively.
- It gives every student the support they need now, without waiting for intervention.

You’ll know it’s true Science of Reading if:

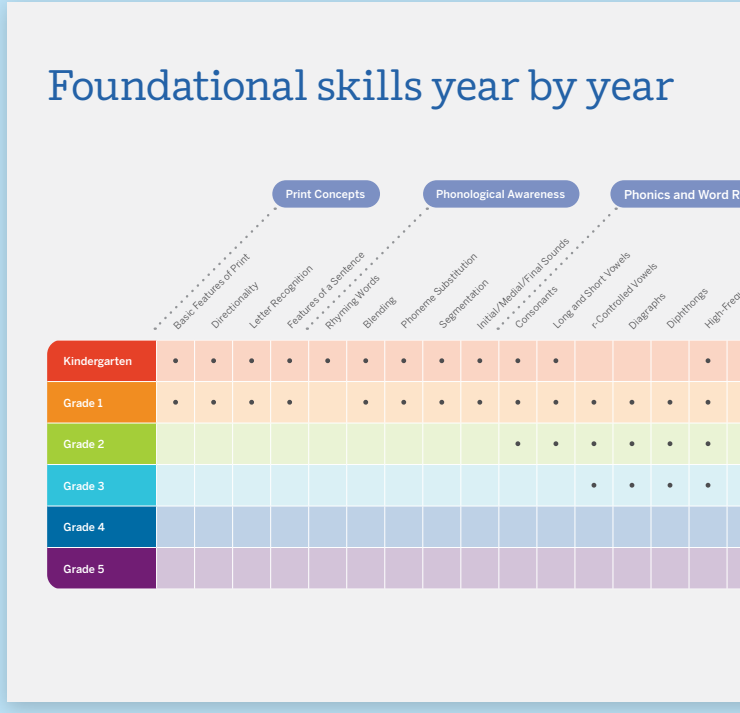
- You’re following a definitive instructional path, not a patchwork, with each component working with or building upon the others.
- You understand the purpose of each component and have clear guidance on how to implement effectively.

You’ll be able to shift away from:

- A “choose your own adventure” model that provides multiple instructional pathways, leading to inconsistencies.
- Programs with so many pieces, it’s unclear how to implement each effectively.

A resource to guide you:

- Achieve the Core’s **Foundational Skills Observation Tool**



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