



Silvia Linan-Thompson, Ph. D.



Lada Kratky

# Building Foundational Skills

by Silvia Linan-Thompson and Lada Kratky

Learning to read can be a very easy one for some students, while for others, reading will be one of the most difficult tasks they will undertake. Typically, a classroom is made up of students with varying strengths and backgrounds, and the teacher will have to orchestrate instruction to meet the needs of all.

The report of the National Reading Panel in 2000 identified five key components of reading instruction: phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. These components are inter-dependent and mastering them all will lead to reading success. The foundational skills—phonological awareness and decoding skills—are critical for reading success.

Foundational skills do not, however, function in isolation. As students are building foundational skills, they must also attend to word meaning and comprehension. Strong instruction in foundational skills and consistent connections of these skills to all areas of reading is a key to building long-term reading success.

## Phonological awareness

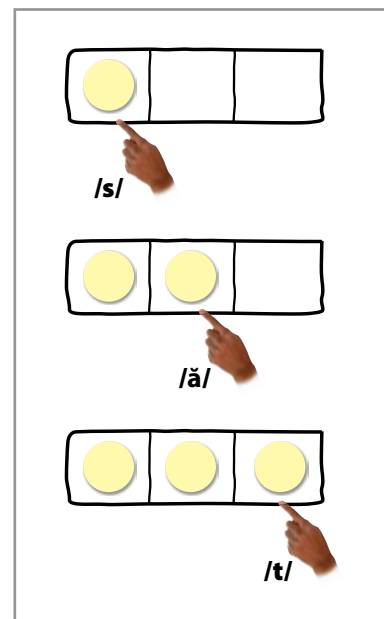
Phonological awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate sounds in words. It is an essential skill for emergent readers: children must be able to distinguish sounds in words before they can link the sound to the letters that represent them. Explicit instruction in phonemic awareness improves students' reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). For very young learners with little awareness of the sounds they articulate when speaking, Yopp (2000) recommends starting with activities that focus on rhyme. Playful poems and chants, as well as songs, will naturally engage young learners and encourage them to focus on sounds in words.



◀ Sing with Me Phonics Songs engage students with rhymes.

Phonological awareness then continues developing sound awareness tasks like isolating and substituting initial, medial, and final sounds, as well as segmenting and counting sounds in words. These activities, at the phoneme level, are the most predictive of later reading success.

Through activities at the phoneme level, children begin to recognize the sequence of sounds in a given word. An effective way for learners to develop this skill is through Elkonin—or sound—boxes. Elkonin was a Russian psychologist who devised the practice of showing a picture and a series of boxes corresponding to the number of sounds in the word the picture represents. The task of the learner is to say the word slowly while pushing a chip into each box as its corresponding sound is being said. By this method, the learner becomes aware quite graphically of the initial, medial, and final sound in a word. Eventually, children will be able to segment words without the support of the Elkonin boxes.



Children's phonemic awareness skills will continue to develop as they acquire knowledge of the alphabet. Phonemic awareness begins but does not fully develop until children learn to read and spell. It is learning the correspondence between sounds and printed letters that allows children to develop and automatize the full representation of sounds (Goswami, 2006).

## Phonics

Explicit and systematic phonics instruction is an essential part of a successful classroom reading program (National Reading Panel, 2000). Phonics instruction teaches students sound-symbol correspondence and then teaches to blend sounds to decode words. To read, children must learn to map sounds to print. As they learn grapheme-phoneme correspondences, children are building an alphabetic schemata, or map, into which they fit and store the letter/sound relations they encounter.

*National Geographic Reach for Reading* includes consistent routines for phonics. Using these routines, children are taught first to blend using the sound-by-sound blending routine; additional routines (vowel-first blending, whole word blending) are included for children needing additional support. Consistent, systematic classroom routines are provided to help students acquire knowledge and automaticity in reading and spelling words.

Typical English texts include a large number of High Frequency Words. These are common words that appear very frequently and are often phonetically irregular, such as *a*, *are*, *one*, *of*, and *the*. Children must learn to read these words, as well as write them. To achieve this most efficiently, students use a High Frequency Word routine and a variety of review and practice games that provide multiple opportunities to read as well as write those words.


After learning and practicing phonics skills and High Frequency Words in individual words and sentences, children read the Read On Your Own Books, which have decodable informational texts and stories. Accurate reading of words is only the first step in efficient reading. In order to develop automatic recognition of words, students must have multiple exposures to words in a variety of contexts. Read On Your Own Books have been designed with the idea that children can learn content even as they are learning to read, debunking the traditional thinking that in kindergarten through second grade, students learn to read, and not until third grade do they start to read to learn content.

Research shows children love science, and the books in this program abound with science stories, illustrated with outstanding National Geographic photographs. Children practice new phonics skills as they learn all about animal look-alikes, animals huge and small, bodies, fins and stripes, and so many other wonders of nature and culture.

Cover up all spellings except *i, e* on **Sound/Spelling Card 34**. Then use **Decoding Routine 1** to connect sound and spelling */i, e* and to blend words.

Step 1 Develop Phonological Awareness	/i, e
1. Tell children: <i>This word has /i/ at the beginning. These words have /i/ in the middle.</i>	ice slide, price, shine
2. Tell children: <i>I will say a word. Listen for /i/. If you hear it, tug your ear. If you don't hear it, do not tug your ear. (chin and plate do not have the /i/)</i>	diver, pile, chin, plate, slice, knife

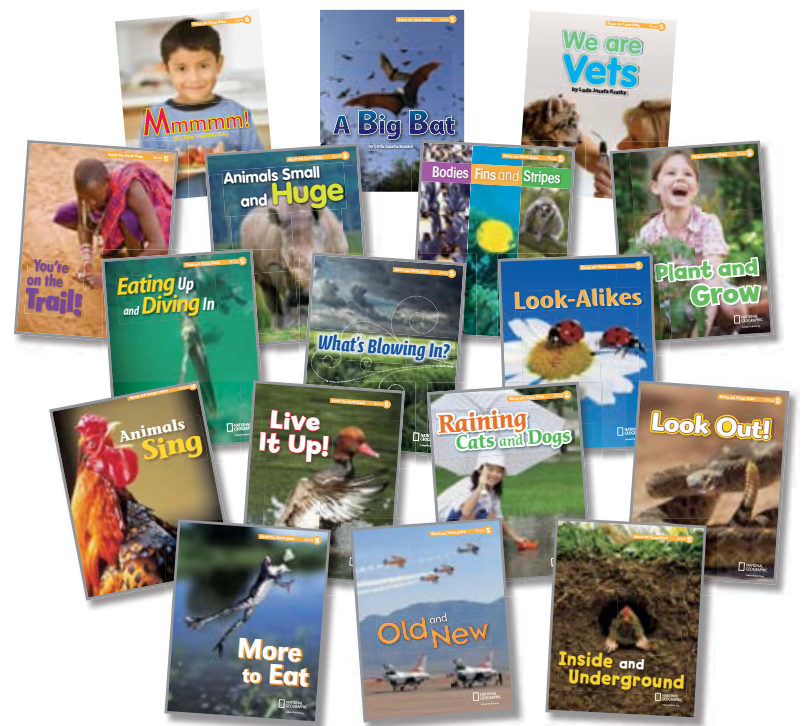
  

Step 2 Introduce the Sound/Spelling	
1. Display the picture-only side of <b>Sound/Spelling Card 34</b> . Say: <i>ice</i> . Have children repeat.	
2. Say: <i>ice</i> . Have children repeat.	
3. Turn the card over. Point to the <i>i, e</i> spelling. Explain that one way to spell /i/ is with an <i>i</i> followed by a consonant followed by an <i>e</i> . The <i>e</i> comes at the end of each word. The <i>e</i> is silent. The sound for vowel <i>i</i> is its own name, /i/.	

Step 3 Blend Sound-by-Sound	
1. Write <i>f</i> . Say /f/ and have children repeat.	f
2. Add <i>i, e</i> . Remind children that the <i>e</i> is silent and the sound for /i/ is its own name. Say /i/, sweeping your hand beneath the spellings. Have children blend the sounds with you.	fi e
3. Add <i>n</i> between the <i>i</i> and <i>e</i> . Model blending the whole word and then have children blend with you.	fine
4. Write and blend other words with /i, e.	nine, bike, smile, dime, prize

For Decoding Routine 1, see page BP32.  
See Differentiate



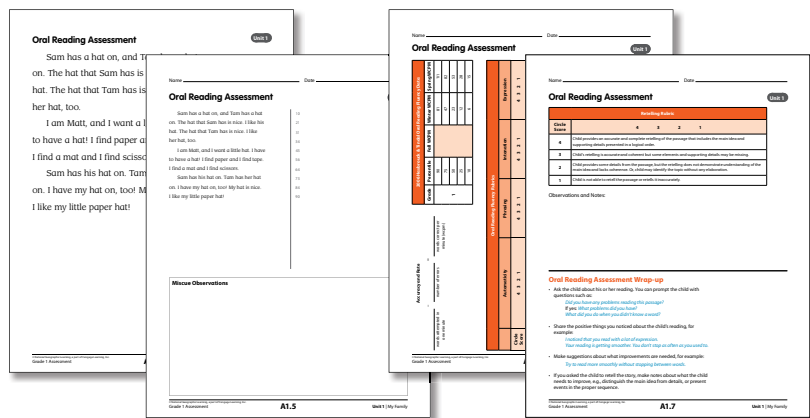
Read On Your Own Books are not simplistic decodable texts. They present grade-level science and social studies concepts, topics that relate to real life, and texts that are worth reading and are interesting to students. Beginning readers read for meaning and are then asked to think about their reading. They give opinions, hold discussions, ask questions, and answer them. With National Geographic photographs, texts can be both decodable and content-rich.

In third grade and beyond, the Common Core Standards indicate that students have acquired most foundational phonological awareness, decoding, and spelling skills. In *Reach for Reading*, Daily Spelling and Word Work helps reinforce and build automaticity for all learners. Additionally, resources are provided for older learners who may need to build any prerequisite skills. An intervention kit, *Reach into Phonics* for grades three through five, provides age-appropriate lessons and texts to build foundational reading skills. To help students transition from the primary grades to this more rigorous intermediate-level expectation, additional games and activities are provided in the grade three Teacher's Edition for daily phonics intervention.

## Fluency and comprehension

All children should learn to read accurately and without effort. Fluent reading, the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and prosody, is essential to reading comprehension. Students' oral reading provides insight into their fluency. If they are still developing decoding skills, their reading will be labored as they sound out words, and their reading of text may resemble reading a list of unrelated words—reading in a monotone.

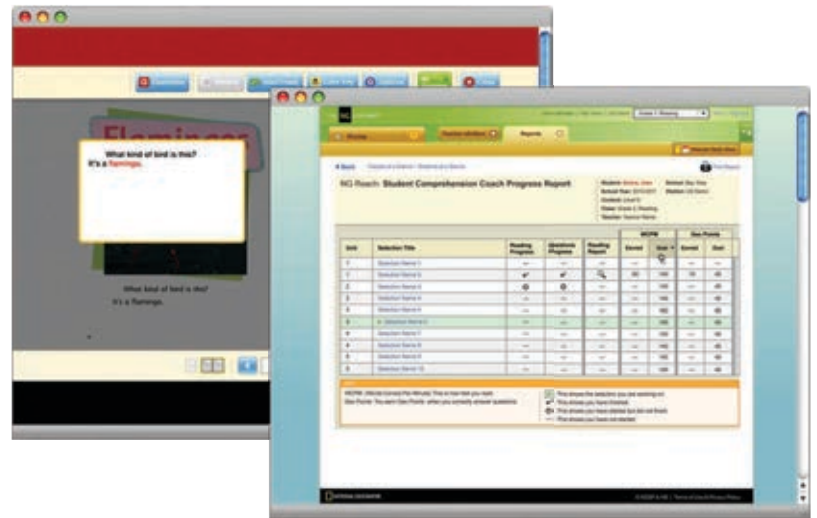
If students pause appropriately, use correct phrasing, or change their intonation and expression in response to the text, they may not need fluency practice. Furthermore, we can usually assume that they understand what they are reading. Their response to the text is a reflection of their processing of the text as they read. These students may not need additional fluency practice. However, to be sure, assess students' oral reading fluency to ensure they are meeting grade-level benchmarks. Oral reading assessments focus on accuracy, rate, and comprehension to reinforce the importance of reading to understand, rather than simply calling out words.



- ▲ Oral reading assessments include resources for measuring accuracy, rate, and comprehension.

*Reach for Reading* has high-interest books at various reading levels to ensure that students have numerous opportunities to read text at their independent levels. Additionally, there are several activities every week that focus on building fluency in addition to activities that build decoding skills, language, and automaticity for students that also need that support. Consistent fluency practice routines and practice passages provide support for building fluency and comprehension. The Comprehension Coach is an interactive software resource that provides a risk-free and private individualized opportunity for repeated reading. Literature selections from the anthology and Read On Your Own decodable books are included in the program. Students can read silently or listen to a model of the selection being read fluently. They can also record and listen to their own reading of the selection. After reading a section, the software automatically calculates and graphs their reading rate in words correct per minute

(WCPM). This frequent and individualized opportunity for repeated readings helps students build fluency in a risk-free environment. The inclusion of rich texts and comprehension questions supports the connection between smooth reading and understanding.



- ▲ Speech recognition technology is built into the online Comprehension Coach so individual students can record multiple readings and track improvement in their words correct per minute (WCPM).

## Conclusion

It is important to see the five components of reading instruction as being interdependent, and that mastering them will lead to reading success. Through poems and chants, students are naturally engaged, focus on sounds in words, and learn that words are made up of a sequence of sounds and that you can manipulate those sounds. Through explicit phonics instruction and multiple exposures to words in a variety of contexts, students learn to read accurately and without effort. Students are given engaging, content-rich text to help them continue to learn to read by reading for information. Fluent reading is essential to reading comprehension, and providing reading material that is worth reading and high interest to students will ensure that they read for meaning and think about what they are reading.