

Really Great Reading for English Language Learners



Really Great Reading's Phonics Suite contains three research-based programs for emerging and beginning readers: *Countdown* (Kindergarten), *Blast Foundations* (Grade 1), and *HD Word* (Grades 2-12). The Phonics Suite also contains two programs specifically designed for older readers: *Phonics Boost* (Grades 3-12) and *Phonics Blitz* (Grades 4-12) are for students that require a slower teaching pace and more targeted practice with both phonemic awareness and phonics concept tasks. *HD Word* is also appropriate for older students who need to quickly fill in gaps in their decoding skills.



At Really Great Reading, we wholeheartedly believe that strong foundational reading skills instruction can help all students become strong, fluent readers. English Language Learners can benefit greatly from these foundational skills as fluency and comprehension can only come after students are able to decode words with ease. August and Shanahan (2006) state that "for students to develop efficient word recognition skills, for example, they must first have good decoding and orthographic, or spelling, skills.

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Without fast and accurate word recognition skills, they cannot achieve satisfactory levels of reading comprehension."

Tutor, Aceves, and Reese (2016) likewise summarize a body of research that has demonstrated that "interventions should include foundational skills (e.g., phonological awareness, decoding) along with other literacy and language skills" (p. 18).

Our explicit, systematic, engaging, multisensory, and developmentally appropriate programs teach English

Our explicit, systematic, engaging, multisensory, and developmentally appropriate programs teach English Language Learners the key skills they need to become efficient and accurate decoders.

Language Learners the key skills they need to become efficient and accurate decoders, which ultimately leads to their success not only in word identification, but also in comprehending what they read. We

know that "instruction that provides substantial coverage in the key components of reading—identified by the National Reading Panel (NRP) (NICHD, 2000) as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension—has clear benefits for language-minority students. Focusing on these key components of reading has a positive influence on the literacy development of language-minority students, just as it does for native English speakers" (August & Shanahan, 2006). Really Great Reading lessons focus heavily on phonemic awareness

and phonics; however, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension are also addressed in most of the programs.

Although they quickly progress to include phrase, sentence, and passage reading, all Really Great Reading programs begin with phonemic awareness; students learn to segment, blend, and manipulate the individual sounds in words. Students are then taught letter-sound fluency before moving on to encoding and decoding. This approach aligns beautifully with research such as Stuart's (2004), who found that "early phoneme awareness and phonics training efficiently accelerates the word recognition and spelling skills of first and second language learners alike." In their study, Brice and Brice (2009) concluded that early reading intervention for bilingual kindergarteners must focus on "phoneme and grapheme identification" to reduce or eradicate the learning achievement gap between this group and their monolingual peers.

In all Really Great Reading programs, instruction is presented to address and stimulate multiple senses: aural, visual, and kinesthetic. According to Robertson (n.d.), the use of manipulatives and pictures is particularly helpful for English Language Learners. Students use manipulatives when segmenting and blending both sounds and whole

In Countdown, students are given informal vocabulary lessons as almost all of the words used in each activity are matched with images on the screen. In all other programs, many of the example words are delivered with contextual sentences.

words, they use hand movements to help them remember syllable types and vowel phonemes, and they see animations that reinforce the phonics concepts and visual representations of those concepts on the screen. In *Countdown*, students are given informal vocabulary lessons as almost all of the words used in each activity are matched with images on the screen. In all other programs, many of the

example words are delivered with contextual sentences. Research supports this approach; Nelson, Vadasy, and Sanders (2011) found that combining decoding and vocabulary instruction was "effective for increasing word knowledge of vocabulary words and decoding words."

In addition to containing the key components of reading, as established by the NRP, Really Great Reading lessons

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often include options for differentiation for English Language Learners. One of those suggestions is to spend additional time instructing students in and allowing ample time for practice of English-specific phonemes.

Robertson (n.d.) offers that this strategy is helpful for the phonemes in the English language do not exist in some other languages at all.

We have been refining our approach for the last 10 years, and even teachers with a great deal of experience with other programs are often quick to recognize that our approach is more succinct, efficient and digestible than many other approaches. We know it works well with all students, including ELL students. By explicitly teaching students to play with the sounds in spoken words and then to analyze and attack those words on paper in developmentally appropriate ways, *Countdown*, *Blast Foundations*, *HD Word*, *Phonics Boost*, and *Phonics Blitz* lessons set students on the path to becoming successful decoders of English and, ultimately, successful and fluent readers.

References

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