

Leveled Out:

What to do when kids are “stuck” on leveled texts



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Everyone Reading Conference

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Session Overview

- Introductions
- Sample student profiles
- Common myths about reading struggles
- How reading develops
- Understanding what makes a text decodable
- Analyzing sample texts
- Designing effective instruction



Balanced Literacy Says...

- Reading is a natural process
- Priority is making meaning
- Repetitive texts allow access for new readers
- Importance of pictures
- Independent reading builds readers



Balanced Literacy - Questions

- What is being balanced?
- How do we decide who gets what type of instruction and how much?
- What do we do when it doesn't work?



Student Profiles

- Maya
 - 1st grader, bilingual school in Harlem, Spanish dominant and extremely verbal
 - Reading at B/C Level
- Lewis
 - 3rd grader, dual language program in Manhattan, family speaks Spanish at home, low income
 - Level N
 - Reads to end of line rather than to end of sentence
- Sonya
 - 4th grader, East Harlem
 - Level O



Common myths for lack of progress

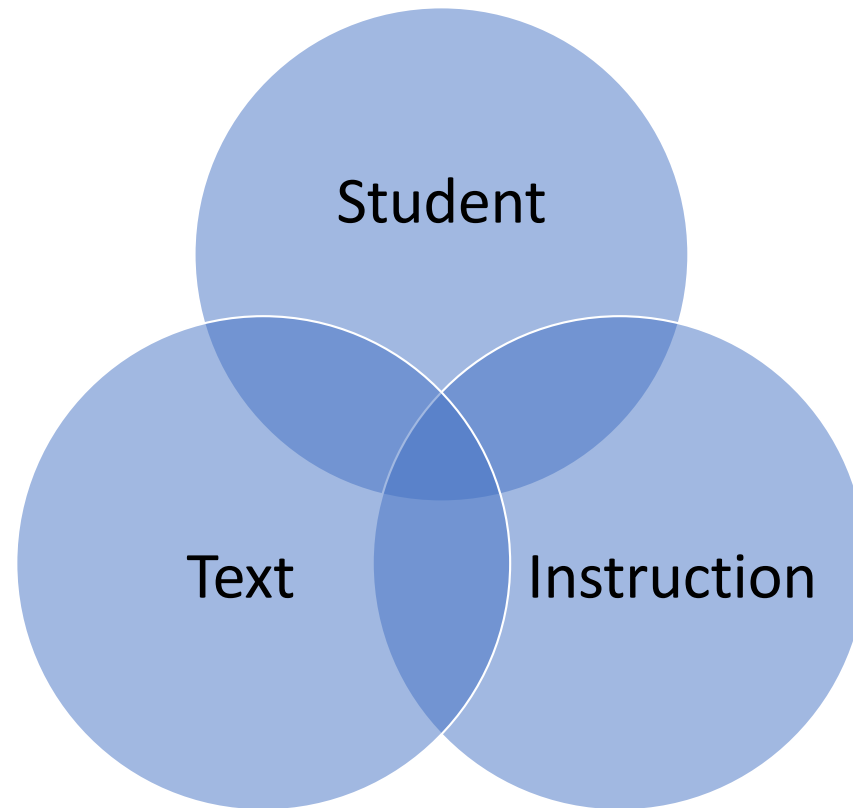
- They don't read enough at home.
- We need more books on topics they like.
- He's just not motivated to read.
- She just needs more time.



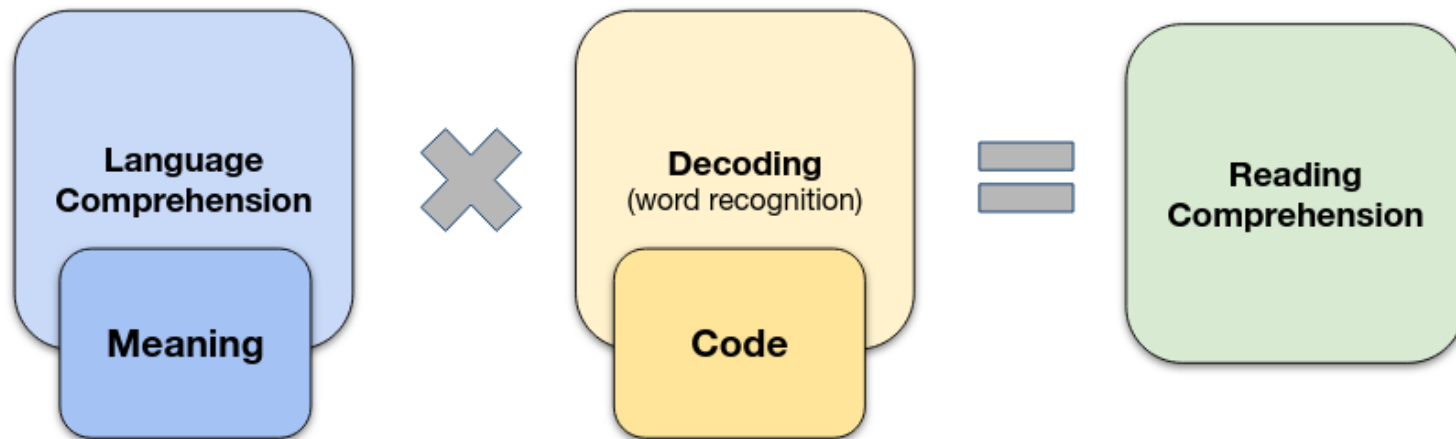
Worst of both worlds

- Leveled texts say
 - Authentic
 - Build vocab
 - Build background knowledge
 - Reading develops naturally from exposure to language and books
- Reality
 - Lower level texts provide neither deep nor broad new info
 - You *need* vocab to learn vocab
 - Reading is a group of skills that must be taught
 - Independent reading does not develop fluency
- Schools introduce phonemic awareness and phonics curricula to fill gaps, but skills need to be integrated

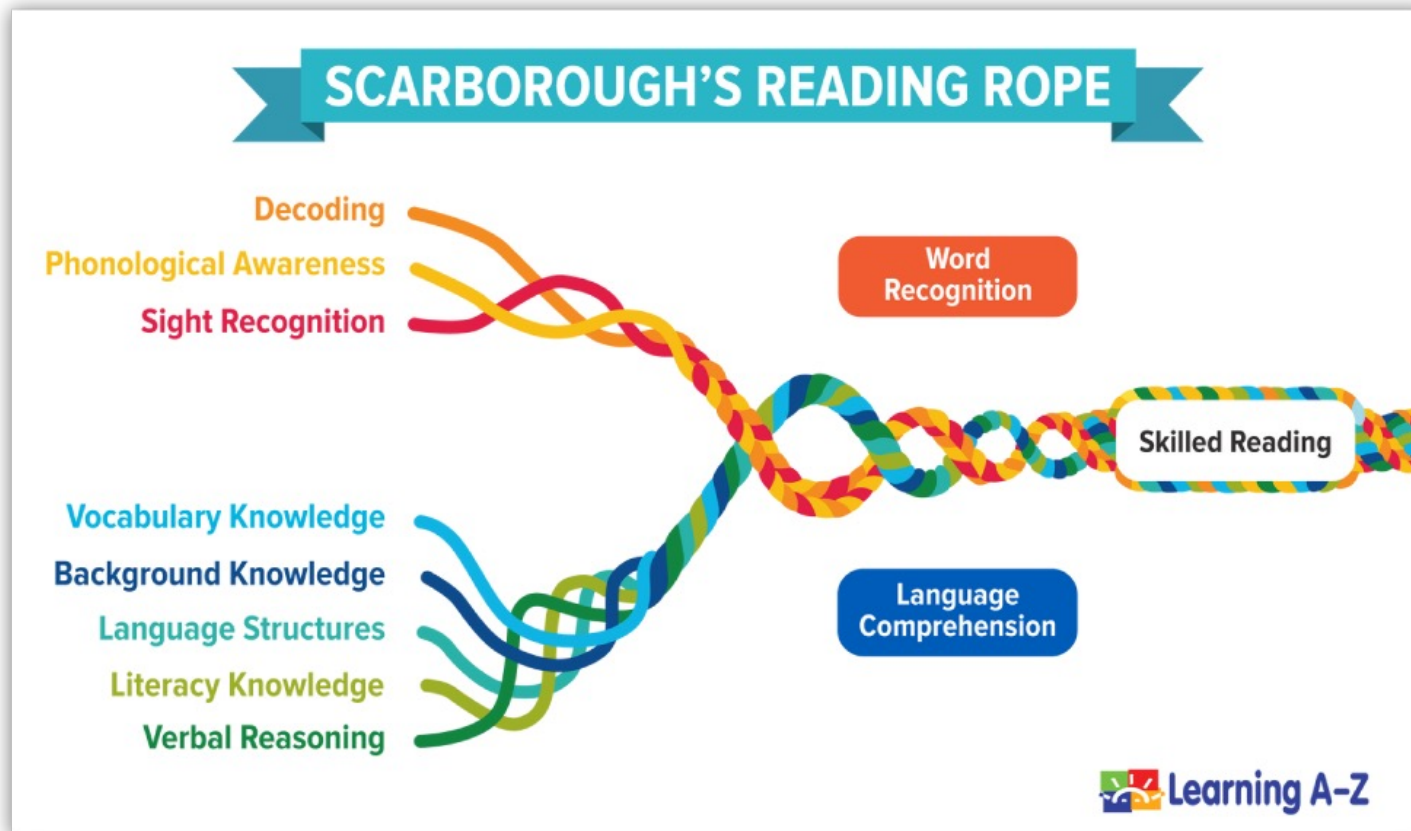
Considerations for reading tasks



Simple View of Reading



Strands of Literacy



Build bridges from skills to reading

- **Independent reading does not support fluency or comprehension for *beginning* or *struggling* readers**
- Instruction should integrate multiple skills
- Texts should be aligned with skill instruction
- Students need modeling and feedback
- It is a process!
- Continue to support all areas of literacy



Instructional goals

- Develop awareness of sounds in language
- Teach the connection between the letters and sounds
- Use a scope and sequence
- Explicit instruction
- Build from small to big → sounds, words, connected text
- Teach skills that can be transferred
- Students read aloud to get feedback and ensure fluency
- Continue to develop vocab and background knowledge



44 English Phonemes

5 Short-Vowel Sounds	18 Consonant Sounds		7 Digraphs
short /ă/ in apple	/b/ in bat	/n/ in nest	/ch/ in chin
short /ĕ/ in elephant	/k/ in cat and kite	/p/ in pig	/sh/ in ship
short /ĭ/ in igloo	/d/ in dog	/r/ in rat	unvoiced /th/ in thin
short /ō/ in octopus	/f/ in fan	/s/ in sun	voiced /th/ in this
short /ŭ/ in umbrella	/g/ in goat	/t/ in top	/hw/ in whip *
	/h/ in hat	/v/ in van	/ng/ in sing
	/j/ in jam	/w/ in wig	/nk/ in sink
	/l/ in lip	/y/ in yell	* (wh is pronounced /w/ in some areas)
	/m/ in map	/z/ in zip	
6 Long-Vowel Sounds	3 r-Controlled Vowel Sounds		Diphthongs and Other Special Sounds
long /ā/ in cake	/ur/ in fern , bird , and hurt		/oi/ in oil and boy
long /ē/ in feet	/ar/ in park		/ow/ in owl and ouch
long /ī/ in pie	/or/ in fork		short /ōō/ in cook and pull
long /ō/ in boat			/aw/ in jaw and haul
long /ū/ (yoo) in mule			/zh/ in television
long /ōō/ in flew			

Start with a scope & sequence

This gives you a **PLAN** for teaching letter-sound relationships **systematically**

Student's Name _____

Recipe for Reading Sequence Chart by Bloom and Traub

<input type="checkbox"/> *c (cat)	<input type="checkbox"/> Review Tests: Detached CVC Syllables	<input type="checkbox"/> *y as a Vowel
<input type="checkbox"/> *o (octopus)	<input type="checkbox"/> Syllabication-Method	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard-Soft c
<input type="checkbox"/> *a (apple)	<input type="checkbox"/> *Initial Consonant Blends	<input type="checkbox"/> Hard-Soft g
<input type="checkbox"/> *d (dog)	<input type="checkbox"/> *Final Consonant Blends	<input type="checkbox"/> *ge-dge
<input type="checkbox"/> *g (go)	<input type="checkbox"/> Review Tests: Consonant Blends	<input type="checkbox"/> Review Tests-Hard-Soft c and g
<input type="checkbox"/> *m (moon)	<input type="checkbox"/> Multisyllabic Words with Blends	<input type="checkbox"/> *aw (straw)
<input type="checkbox"/> *l (log)	<input type="checkbox"/> ng and nk Endings	<input type="checkbox"/> au (August)
<input type="checkbox"/> *h (hat)	<input type="checkbox"/> Suffix ed	<input type="checkbox"/> a (ball)
<input type="checkbox"/> *t (turtle)	<input type="checkbox"/> Magic e (i-e, o-e, u-e, a-e, e-e)	<input type="checkbox"/> *oi (oil)
<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewing CVC Words	<input type="checkbox"/> Review Tests-Magic e	<input type="checkbox"/> oy (boy)
<input type="checkbox"/> *i (igloo)	<input type="checkbox"/> Open and Closed Syllables	<input type="checkbox"/> *tch (catch)
<input type="checkbox"/> *j (jug)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ph (phone)	<input type="checkbox"/> Dividing between Two Vowels
<input type="checkbox"/> *k (kettle)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ck (black)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ing as an Ending
<input type="checkbox"/> *p (pig)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ea (eat)	<input type="checkbox"/> VCV and VCe Spelling Rules
<input type="checkbox"/> *ch (chair)	<input type="checkbox"/> *oa (soap)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ew (grew)
<input type="checkbox"/> *u (umbrella)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ai (mail)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ew (few)
<input type="checkbox"/> *b (bat)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ee (tree)	<input type="checkbox"/> *eu (feud and neutral)
<input type="checkbox"/> *r (rabbit)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ay (play)	<input type="checkbox"/> *eigh (eight)
<input type="checkbox"/> *f (fish)	<input type="checkbox"/> *oe (toe)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ei (vein)
<input type="checkbox"/> *n (nail)	<input type="checkbox"/> Reviewing Four Kinds of Syllables	<input type="checkbox"/> *ie (chief)
<input type="checkbox"/> *e (elephant)	<input type="checkbox"/> *Spellings for k, ck, ke	<input type="checkbox"/> *ei (ceiling)
<input type="checkbox"/> *s (sun)	<input type="checkbox"/> *er (fern)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ue (rescue)
<input type="checkbox"/> *sh (shoe)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ir (bird)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ue (true)
<input type="checkbox"/> *th (that)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ur (burn)	<input type="checkbox"/> Three-Syllable Words
<input type="checkbox"/> *w (wag)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ow (clown)	<input type="checkbox"/> Schwa
<input type="checkbox"/> *wh (whale)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ou (cloud)	<input type="checkbox"/> *tion (action)
<input type="checkbox"/> *y (yarn)	<input type="checkbox"/> *igh (light)	<input type="checkbox"/> sion (division)
<input type="checkbox"/> *v (vase)	<input type="checkbox"/> *Endings: -ble -fle -tle -dle -gle -kle -ple -zle	<input type="checkbox"/> sion (mansion)
<input type="checkbox"/> *x (box)	<input type="checkbox"/> *Endings: -y -ly -vy -by -dy -ty -fy -ny -py -sy -my	<input type="checkbox"/> *ow (snow)
<input type="checkbox"/> *z (zebra)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ild-old-ind-olt-ost Words	<input type="checkbox"/> *ea (head)
<input type="checkbox"/> *th (thumb)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ar (star)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ea (great)
<input type="checkbox"/> Review Consonant Digraphs	<input type="checkbox"/> *or (horn)	<input type="checkbox"/> *oo (good)
<input type="checkbox"/> *qu (queen)	<input type="checkbox"/> *oo (zoo)	<input type="checkbox"/> *ou (group)
<input type="checkbox"/> Review Tests: CVC Words		<input type="checkbox"/> *ch (school)
<input type="checkbox"/> Two-Syllable Compound Words		<input type="checkbox"/> *ch (machine)
<input type="checkbox"/> Spelling Rule: -ff-ll-ss-zz		<input type="checkbox"/> *s (is)
<input type="checkbox"/> Detached Syllables		<input type="checkbox"/> Spelling with Affixes

*Asterisked items are also found on Sound Cards

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Decoding Assessments

- Sight Word Inventories (Dolch, Fry)
- Decoding Inventories – CORE Reading Survey
- Nonsense words
- *Words Their Way* spelling inventories

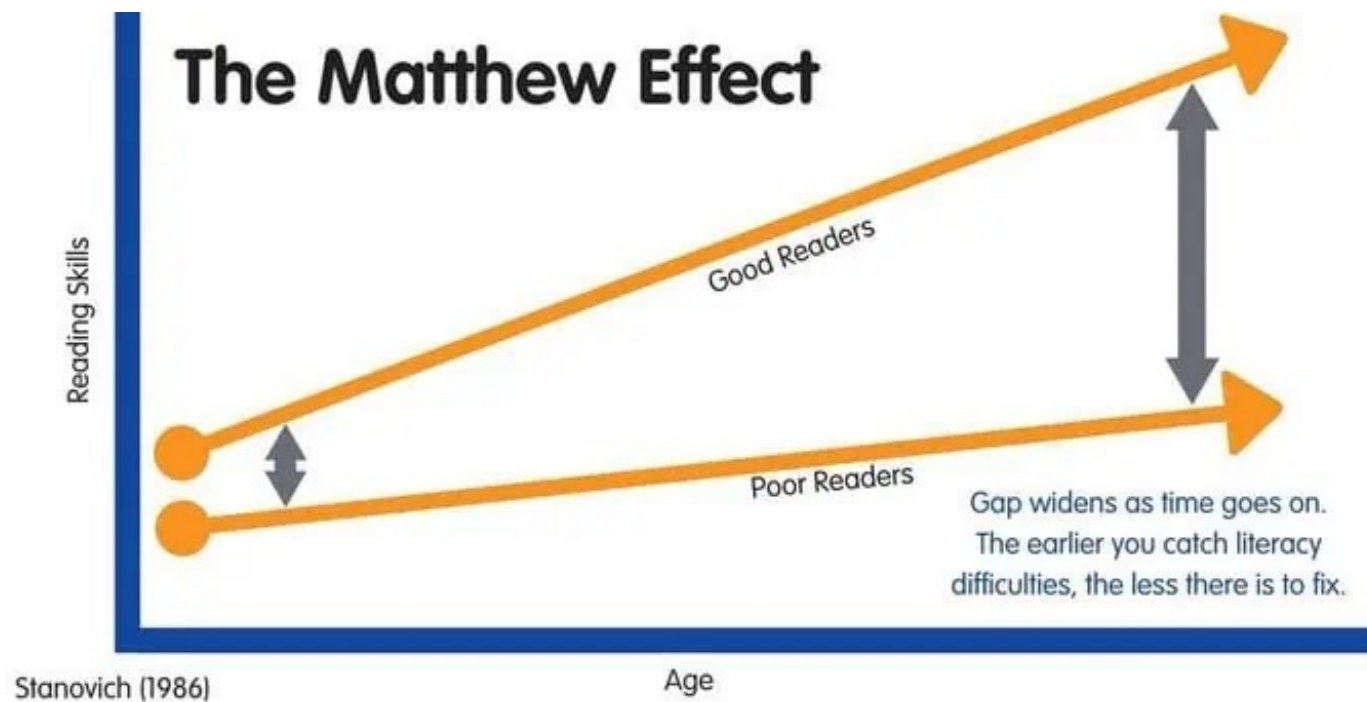
- De-emphasize Running Records

Student Profiles

- Maya
 - 1st grader, bilingual school in Harlem, Spanish dominant and extremely verbal
 - Reading at B/C Level
 - **Uses initial/final consonants**
 - **Needs short vowels, digraphs and blends**
- Lewis
 - 3rd grader, dual language program, family speaks Spanish at home, low income
 - Level N
 - Reads to end of line rather than to end of sentence
 - **Displays accurate comprehension in running records in spite of errors**
 - **Confusion with w & j, digraphs, vowel teams and multisyllable words**
- Sonya
 - 4th grader, East Harlem
 - Level O
 - **Missing all basic phonics knowledge, reads from memory**
 - **Confuses consonants h, j, r, q,**
 - **doesn't know short vowels, blends, r-controlled vowels**
 - **Open and closed syllables**
 - **Multisyllabic words**



No time to waste!



Retrieved 3/11/23 from: <https://adayinourshoes.com/did-your-childs-school-problems-explode-in-3rd-grade-heres-why/>

Considering Sample Texts

- What is the level of independence expected?
- What has this student been taught about phonics and decoding?
- How has the student demonstrated reading fluency?
- What is the utility of this text now or in the future?

Considering Decodability

0%-----WORD FREQUENCY-----100%→		
1 0 0 % D E C O D A B I L I T Y	<p>Low Frequency/High Decodability</p> <p>Beep! Beep! Sheep in a jeep on a hill that's steep! Uh-oh! The jeep won't go! (Sheep in a Jeep)</p>	<p>High Frequency/High Decodability</p> <p>That Sam I am! That Sam I am! I do not like that Sam I am! (Green Eggs and Ham)</p>
0 %	<p>Low Frequency/Low Decodability</p> <p>This is Gossie. This is Gertie. Gossie wears bright red boots. Gertie wears bright blue boots. (Gossie and Gertie)</p>	<p>High Frequency/Low Decodability</p> <p>Little Bear said, "Mother Bear, I am cold. See the snow. I want something to put on." (Little Bear)</p>

Mesmer, H.A., Hiebert, E. & Cunningham, J.W. (2010.) Beyond the decodable books and leveled text paradigms: What beginning readers really need [pdf]. Retrieved 3/4/20 from: <http://www.textproject.org/assets/library/handouts/Mesmer-Hiebert-CunninghamLRA2010Decodable-Leveled-Texts.pdf>

Beginning First Grade Reading

Leveled Reader

It was time to take the books back to the library. “We had ten books, “ said the teacher. “But now we have nine! We must find the lost book.”

Controlled Reader

Chuck the duck is sick. He has a chill and a bad neck. His back is bad and he can not quack. Zack and Mom get Chuck in to see the vet.

Text Analysis

Student: _____

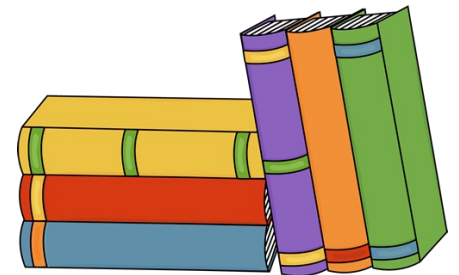
Text Name: _____

Text Level: _____

Sight Words	Decodable now	Decodable later

Phonics and Decoding

- Teach one pattern at a time
- Have students practice reading out loud
 - Words → Phrases → Sentences → Connected text
- Begin comprehension work at the word level
- Teaching must be systematic and sequential
- Each lesson can target multiple skills
- Teach students to apply skills and generalize across tasks
- Choose texts based on patterns that have been taught



Phonics

-ang

bang

fang

hang

rang

sang

-ing

king

ring

sing

wing

spring

swing

thing

Phonics and Fluency

bang the drum

said the king

had a ring

sang to him

rang a bell

the bird's wing

not a thing

loves to sing

this spring

hang it up

on the swing

ring and ring

Decoding and Fluency

The King of Ing

Once upon a time, there was a King

He was the King of Ing.

He loved to sing.

He loved to swing.

The King of Ing loved everything.

One spring day, he got a sting.

He put his arm in a sling.

But he could not see his fancy ring!



-ing

Decoding Connected Text

- Goal for **daily** phonics instruction is to practice new patterns.
- Control text for known patterns, or plan to pre-teach or provide all unknown words
- Insist on **accuracy** during all instruction sessions
- Provide time to pre-read and re-read passages for fluency work
- Work on comprehension with decodable text
 - Word recognition
 - Text structure
 - Story elements

Why you need a scope and sequence

sh	ch	th	wh
shade	chain	three	whale
shake	chair	throw	wheat
share	chase	think	wheel
she	charm	thigh	while
sheep	chat	third	what
ship	cheese	thirsty	whisper
shirt	chess	thongs	whistle
shoes	chop	thread	white
shop	choose	throat	who
shot	church	Thursday	when

ch Word List

chalk

chief

change

child

chart

chill

chase

chin

chat

chip

















cheap

choice

















check

choke

ch_ Words

 cherries	 chair	 chick	 chicken	 cheetah	 check	 chips	 chalk
 cheese	 chocolate	 chimpanzee	 chess	 chili	 church	 chameleon	 chocolate

_ch Words

 lunch	 inch	 ranch	 church	 torch	 pouch	 peach	 match
 branch	 witch	 couch	 watch	 bench	 teach	 beach	 wrench

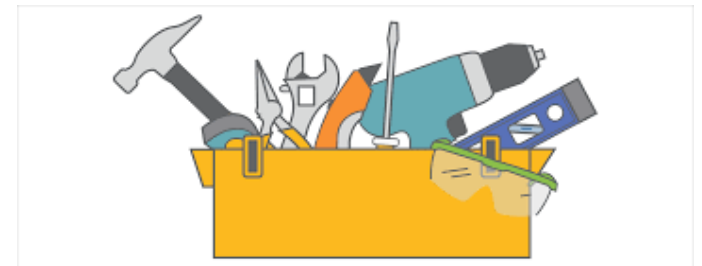
Short Vowels with Digraphs II


 K.2.13

<i>ch</i>		<i>sh</i>		<i>wh</i>
<i>ă</i>	<i>ĕ</i>	<i>ĭ</i>	<i>ŏ</i>	<i>ŭ</i>
wham	cash	whip		
chip	dash	rich		
shot	when	chat		
such	chum	whiz		
wish	much	ash		
chop	inch	rush		
shed	shag			

Final takeaways

- Reading skills must be taught in a systematic and sequential way
- Each lesson should target multiple skills
- Silent reading does not build fluency or comprehension until students have already reached proficiency
- Kids who are behind will likely stay behind without intervention
- Gaps widen over time as reading demands grow
- It's never too late! Don't give up on older kids!



Questions for further discussion

- What is reading? How do kids develop reading skills?
- What are we asking kids to know and be able to do when we give them a reading task? (Guided reading? Independent reading?)
- What is the role of the student/teacher/book in reading instruction?
- How does my school's approach to instruction align with reading research? (Reading workshop? Reading groups? Leveled texts?)
- How does a scope and sequence help us plan and deliver instruction?
- What *should* reading instruction look like in a classroom? Throughout a school? Across a district/state/nation?
- What should happen when a student isn't making progress?

Thank you for coming to **Leveled Out!**



KINDLY RETURN THE SURVEY AT THE END OF YOUR HANDOUT!

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Workshop materials are shared on linkedin

Please get in touch with questions, comments, or to schedule a workshop.

Resources

- Blevins, W. (2021.) Choosing and using decodable text. ORTli Fall Virtual Reading Symposium. Retrieved 3/1/2023 from:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7bm06Wd43k>
- Bloom, F & Traub, N. (2005). *Recipe for reading*. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service.
- Mesmer, H.A., Hiebert, E. & Cunningham, J.W. (2010.) Beyond the decodable books and leveled text paradigms: What beginning readers really need [pdf]. Retrieved 3/4/20 from:
<http://www.textproject.org/assets/library/handouts/Mesmer-Hiebert-CunninghamLRA2010Decodable-Leveled-Texts.pdf>
- Moats, L.C. (2020). Teaching reading is rocket science: What expert teachers of reading should know and be able to do. *American Educator*.
- Pikulski, J.J. & Chard, D.A. (2005). Fluency: Bridge between decoding and comprehension. *The Reading Teacher*, 58(6), 510-519.
- Snow, C. E., Burns, S., and Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998) *Preventing reading difficulties in young children*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1998.

Recommended links:

- The Purple Challenge: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxx7hs0qdKQ>
- The Matthew Effect: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iMo1PJ0TUOg>
- How to embrace the struggle of early reading (Amplify podcast):
<https://www.buzzsprout.com/612361/6201088-s2-05-the-right-to-read-project-on-nurturing-automatic-readers-margaret-goldberg-and-alanna-mednick>
- Current state of reading in the US (*The Daily, NYTimes* podcast):
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/05/podcasts/the-daily/education.html>
- Barriers for children of color with delayed reading:
<https://www.apmreports.org/episode/2020/08/06/what-the-words-say>