



PRIMARY PHONICS
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By Carol Jenkins

Since the 1960s, each decade has been marked by a pivotal research project that has sought to identify the best method for teaching young children to read. In her classic work, *Learning to Read: The Great Debate*, Jeanne Chall (1967) synthesized the research on meaning emphasis and code emphasis approaches and concluded:

A code emphasis tends to produce better overall reading achievement by the beginning of fourth grade than a meaning emphasis At about the end of the first grade (or the beginning of the second grade), meaning-emphasis programs tend to affect comprehension and vocabulary test scores adversely, mainly because the child does less well in word recognition. (p. 137)

Chall's conclusions were bolstered by the USOE-funded Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading (Bond & Dykstra, 1967/1997). This project pooled the findings of 27 independent studies that were conducted from 1964–1967 under the direction of Bond and Dykstra to establish “which of the many approaches to initial reading instruction produces superior reading and spelling achievement at the end of first grade” (p. 348). The researchers concluded:

No one approach is so distinctly better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the one best method and the one to be used exclusively.

There are, however, many indications that no matter what the underlying method is, word study skills need to be emphasized and taught systematically. This is best shown by the superiority of the approaches, which augmented the basal readers with a phonetic emphasis as compared to basal readers as usually taught. (p. 416)

With successive decades, comprehensive reviews of the research on the efficacy of beginning reading programs have essentially corroborated and extended Chall's and Bond and Dykstra's seminal findings:

Becoming A Nation of Readers (Commission on Reading, 1985):

Classroom research shows that on the average, children who are taught phonics get off to a better start in learning to read than children who are not taught phonics. (p. 37)

Primary Phonics comprises 80 decodable storybooks, several types of workbooks, 4 teacher's manuals, and 2 audio CD's. The 80 proven, illustrated storybooks use words containing the phonic elements taught in accompanying workbooks. As soon as students have learned the short vowel *a*, taught in the first pages of *Workbook 1*, they can read the first storybook, *Mac and Tab*. Each story contains only those words learned in the workbooks being studied.



Beginning to Read (Adams, 1990)

...the vast majority of program comparison studies indicate that approaches including systematic phonics instruction result in comprehension skills that are at least comparable to, and word recognition and spelling skills that are significantly better than, those that do not. Furthermore, approaches in which systematic code instruction is included alongside meaning emphasis, language instruction and connected reading are found to result in superior reading achievement overall. And these conclusions seem at least as valid for children with low reading-readiness profiles as they are for their better prepared and more advantaged peers. (p. 49)

Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children (Snow, Burn & Griffin, 1998):

There is converging research support for the proposition that getting started in reading depends critically on mapping the letters and the spelling of words onto the sounds and speech units that they represent. Failure to master word recognition impedes text comprehension....Kindergarten Instruction should be designed to provide practice with the sound structure of words, the recognition and productions of letters, knowledge about print concepts, and familiarity with the basic purposes and mechanisms of reading and writing. First grade instruction should be designed to provide explicit instruction and practice with sound structure that lead to phonemic awareness, familiarity with spelling-sound correspondences and common spelling conventions and their use in identifying printed words, "sight" recognition of frequent words, and independent reading, including reading aloud. A wide variety of well-written and engaging texts below the children's frustration level should be provided. (pp. 321–322)

While many of these researchers acknowledged the drawbacks associated with the studies they reviewed (poor research designs, the use of the laboratory versus the classroom, varying assessment instruments, and so on), the convergence of the data in favor of systematic phonics instruction is quite compelling. And with the most recent meta-analysis, completed by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in 2000 at the behest of Congress to "assess the status of research-based knowledge, including the effectiveness of various approaches to teaching children to read" (p. 1-1) comes further affirmation for the use of systematic phonics instruction with young readers. The National Reading Panel's findings with regard to phonemic awareness, phonics, and comprehension will be the benchmark for this evaluation of *Primary Phonics*.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness, one of the best predictors of early reading, is defined by the NRP as "the ability to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words" (pp. 2–10). A child who can say the word *cat* and then segment it into three phonemes (*c-a-t*), or can isolate the first sound in the word *dog*, or can blend the sounds in *p-o-p* and pronounce *pop* is a child who is phonemically aware. The young child can do all of these tasks without any knowledge of sound-letter correspondences (that is, she doesn't have to know that the letter *p* represents the /p/ sound). Rather it is the child's knowledge of the underlying sound structure of oral language that is key.

It is important both to distinguish between phonemic awareness and phonics and to recognize the reciprocal causation (Snow et al., 1998). Phonics is the study of sound-symbol relationships for the purpose of decoding words. When children are presented with the *written* word *rig* and are asked to decode it, they must use their

All students can benefit from this program, which permits them to progress at their own speed. A set of 10 storybooks goes with each of the 6 workbooks or can be used independently. Two more sets of storybooks can be used for additional practice. The revised workbooks are progressive in difficulty with constant review to reinforce previously learned material. Used in combination with the storybooks, *Primary Phonics* introduces reading comprehension at the earliest level of phonetic understanding.



phonics knowledge—command of sound-symbol correspondences as well as their ability to blend these individual sounds—in order to succeed. Thus, as readers encounter phonics instruction, phonemic skills continue to strengthen (Ehri, 1979). Phonemic awareness, then, is both a prerequisite to and a result of learning to read. Some phonemic awareness skills such as phonemic blending must precede learning to read; other skills such as phonemic deletion may be an outcome of learning to read (Ehri and Wilce, 1980; Juel et al, 1986; Perfetti et al., 1987),

The powerful distinction between phonemic awareness and phonics is illuminated in a study by Connie Juel (1988), who traced the literacy development of 54 low-income, culturally diverse children. Juel set out to ascertain whether children who were poor readers in grade 1 remained poor readers in grade 4 and to identify the factors that contributed to their lack of improvement. The children’s phonemic awareness was tested at the beginning and end of each school year. At the end of the year they took decoding tests, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the WRAT. Reading instruction consisted of a combination of a basal program that included instruction in sight words, context clues, and phonics, and a synthetic phonics program in grades 1 and 2. Juel found that, indeed, children who were poor readers in first grade remained poor readers in fourth grade. She also found that “the children who became poor readers entered first grade with little phonemic awareness” (p. 440). The mean scores of good first grade readers actually exceeded the mean scores of poor readers at the end of third grade. The majority of poor readers could not decode all the pseudowords at the end of grade 4. Recall that these poor readers learned to read in a basal program, supplemented with a synthetic phonics program in grades 1 and 2. As Snow et al. (1998) point out:

Phonics, in short, presumes a working awareness of the phonemic composition of words. In conventional phonics programs, however, such awareness was generally taken for granted, and therein lies the force of the research on phonemic awareness. To the extent that children lack such phonemic awareness, they are unable to internalize usefully their phonics lessons. The resulting symptoms include difficulties in sounding and blending new words, in retaining words from one encounter to the next, and in learning to spell. In contrast, research repeatedly demonstrates that, when steps are taken to ensure an adequate awareness of phonemes, the reading and spelling growth of the groups as a whole is accelerated and the incidence of reading failure is diminished. (pp. 55–56)

In 2000, the National Reading Panel (NRP) reaffirmed the centrality of phonemic awareness to reading acquisition, concluding that training in phonemic awareness “improved children’s ability to read and spell in both the short and the long term” (pp. 2–28).

Primary Phonics takes into consideration the challenge facing young children who, for the first time, are asked to manipulate the sounds in spoken words. It does so by presenting young readers with a variety of opportunities to analyze the sequence of speech sounds in words. *Primary Phonics* focuses on three phonemic awareness skills that the NRP has identified as important:

- phoneme isolation, the ability to isolate sounds in words
- phoneme segmentation, the ability to break words into individual phonemes
- phonemic blending, the ability to merge phonemes into words

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Primary Phonics provides precisely such opportunities in accordance with the NRP's finding that "instruction that taught phonemic manipulation with letters helped children acquire phonemic awareness skills better than instruction without letters" (pp. 2–28). For example, in the *Consonant Book*, children say the name of a picture (e.g., *seal*), isolate the initial sound (*/s/*) and record the letter on the line provided (___eal). Children encounter one new sound every second page, while continuing to reinforce previously learned sounds. When children move to the *Primary Phonics* workbooks, they continue to complete phoneme isolation activities, but at increasing levels of difficulty. For example, they isolate not only initial sounds of pictures but also final sounds as well as both initial and final sounds. Moreover, children encounter phonemic segmentation activities in their *Primary Phonics* workbooks. They examine the picture of a bug, for example, segment the sounds in the word, *b-u-g*, and then find the correct spelling of the word from a choice of words (e.g., *bun*, *bug*), and record each letter on the designated line under the bug's picture. It is only after children have experience phonemically isolating sounds in words and segmenting words that they are asked to apply sound-symbol correspondences and then blend these sounds in exercises with minimal picture support. For example, children using the *Primary Phonics* workbooks must decode the phonemically regular words, *cat* and *hat*, in the sentence, "Is the cat in the hat?" in order to answer "yes" or "no" on the line. They answer four such questions by examining the two pictures at the top of the page. On other pages, children must decode target words as well as read some sight words (*the*, *is*, *in*) and then unscramble the words to create a sentence. Thus, *Primary Phonics* offers systematic instruction in phonemic isolation, phonemic segmentation, and phonemic blending for every new phonic skill presented.

The Panel alerts teachers to the fact that kindergartners and first graders will vary in their phonemic awareness abilities and urges them to assess children's capabilities and offer appropriate instruction (pp. 2–6). The Panel also acknowledges that while phonemic awareness is one critical variable in the acquisition of literacy, "there is much more that needs to be taught to children to enable them to acquire reading and writing competence" (pp. 2–7).

Phonics

The NRP concluded that "systematic phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction . . . when it begins in kindergarten or first grade before children have learned to read independently" (pp. 2–92, 2–93). Such instruction was particularly effective for at-risk children and disabled readers (pp. 1–133). Significant growth in spelling was also noted for kindergartners and first graders.

The Panel cites as evidence, for example, the most recent comparison study, conducted by Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, and Mehta (1998). These researchers investigated the effects of the three literacy programs used by teachers in Houston, Texas:

- Whole Language, defined by the researchers as emphasizing meaningful reading and writing with implicit attention to the code within the context of predictable stories
- Embedded Phonics, defined as analytic phonics instruction, sequenced according to phonograms (e.g., *at*, *in*, *op*). Having learned a particular phonogram, children practice the new pattern in trade books containing such words.
- Direct Code, defined as explicit instruction in letter-sound correspondences and opportunities to apply this learning in decodable texts

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Foorman et al. (1998) found that the first and second graders (the majority of whom were at risk) who learned to read in the direct code approach outperformed the children in the other two approaches. This approach was particularly effective for the youngsters who scored poorly on phonological tests at the beginning of the school year.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

RTI grew out of the reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). IDEA removes the federal requirement to use the aptitude/achievement discrepancy in order to identify students with learning disabilities. Instead of waiting for students to fail on high-stakes tests before providing services, schools can provide a more intensive level of instruction when a student's response to research-based general classroom instruction is unsatisfactory.

Current models of RTI favor a three-tier approach to prevention: Tier 1: Primary Prevention; Tier 2: Supplemental Instruction; and Tier 3: Intensive Instruction. According to Vaughn and Roberts (2007), as many as 20% to 30% of students will require supplemental Tier 2 instruction to prevent reading difficulties. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education and the Council of Administrators of Special Education, in a White Paper on RTI, suggest that approximately 5% of students will need more intensive Tier 3 instruction. (NASDSE and CASE, May 2006)

Tiered Instruction Using the *Primary Phonics Teachers' Guides*

Using the appropriate *Primary Phonics* teacher's guide (K, 1•2•3, 4•5•6, or the Intervention Guide and Blackline Masters) in conjunction with the *Primary Phonics* student materials enables teachers to provide tiered, differentiated instruction for a broad range of learning needs.

Grade-Level Instruction

K *Primary Phonics Teacher's Guide K*, which is used with student *Workbook K*, provides a detailed instructional plan for teaching 18 consonants and their corresponding sounds. Lessons can be taught to one child, a small group, or a whole class. The letter sounds that a child finds difficult can be reviewed by repeating lessons or by using the resources listed at the end of each lesson. For example, teachers can use the *Consonant Workbook* to reinforce a Tier 2 student's ability to decode consonants. If further consonant practice is needed with Tier 2 or Tier 3 students, teachers can use the *MORE Consonant Workbook*. The *Picture Dictionary* provides practice with picture-word matching for approximately 2,500 words, and the *Color Workbook* reinforces color sight words and offers grapho-motor practice.

Grades 1–2 *Primary Phonics Teacher's Guide 1•2•3* provides a systematic, focused program for teaching the beginning phonics skills most often taught in first grade, while *Teacher's Guide 4•5•6* continues the program with the phonics skills most often taught in second grade. These guides, which accompany *Primary Phonics Storybook Sets 1–6* and *Workbooks 1–6*, are well suited as Tier 1 programs within a general classroom and for supplemental Tier 2 instruction. Each lesson covers phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, automaticity, comprehension, and reading in context. Differentiated instruction activities are built into every lesson. Tier 2 students who achieve mastery with relative ease may need only a couple of instructional opportunities for skill mastery. Tier 2 students who need more fluency practice can read *Primary Phonics Storybook Sets 1A* and *2A* to review, with new material, the phonic elements they learned in Sets 1 and 2. Tier 2 students can listen to audio recordings of the storybooks on *Storybooks CD's 1•2•3* and *4•5•6* as they read along in their books, while other students may first

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read the storybook independently and then reread it for fluency along with the audio recording. *Comprehension Workbooks 1–6* provide additional optional comprehension practice to differentiate learning for advanced students.

Intervention

Grades 1–6 The *Primary Phonics Intervention Guide* and accompanying *Blackline Masters*, used with the *Primary Phonics* storybooks, provide targeted Tier 2 and Tier 3 intensive instruction. The phonetic coding system at the core of the *Intervention Guide* has proven to be successful for individuals and small groups of students in grades 1–6 who have not responded to more traditional synthetic phonics program. Its multisensory approach combines three modalities: visual (printed, decodable *Primary Phonics* storybooks and blackline masters for coding and written practice); auditory (sounds heard and practiced in class, both in isolation and in words); and tactile (written codes students apply to each isolated sound and within words, phrases, and sentences). In addition, each lesson that introduces a new phonetic code reinforces previously learned codes embedded in phrases and sentences in the new lesson, so that students have multiple opportunities to practice and review their phonic skills.

To monitor progress, teachers can use students' completed BLM pages as written feedback to monitor student progress in coding letters and words (BLM A), followed by phrases and sentences (BLM B). By identifying where mistakes have occurred (at the letter, word, phrase, or sentence level), teachers can successfully tailor small-group instruction to the skills students most need to work on. For example, if a student has successfully coded consonant digraph *sh* in isolation, but has made mistakes in coding *sh* at the word level, the teacher can provide additional isolated letter practice. Additional ways of differentiating instruction include the following:

- Students who are progressing well in coding and decoding but need more written practice can be asked to write selected *Primary Phonics* storybook sentences on a Dictation Reproducible.
- The *Primary Phonics* workbooks, which are referenced as optional materials in the *Intervention Guide*, can be used for additional focused practice with word/picture matching for each phonic element.
- *Primary Phonics* Storybook Sets 1A and 2A provide additional opportunities for students to practice fluency, reading in context, and the phonics skills taught in the first twenty lessons.
- Students can reinforce sound/symbol relationships by listening to the storybooks on audio recordings (*Storybooks CD's 1•2•3* and *4•5•6*) as they read along in their books.

Primary Phonics Workbooks

The National Reading Panel writes that “the hallmark of systematic phonics programs is that they delineate a planned, sequential set of phonic elements, and they teach these elements explicitly and systematically” (pp. 2–89). *Primary Phonics* meets the NRP’s mandate for systematic instruction. For example, in *Workbook K*, children are introduced to a sequence of consonant letters and corresponding sounds. Each lesson follows the same instructional sequence across four workbook pages. To illustrate, in the first lesson, the consonant *h* is introduced as follows:

Page 1: The children are introduced to the new letter name (printed in bold at the top of the workbook page) and are asked to write this letter six times. The teacher then explicitly teaches the corresponding sound of the letter and asks the children to practice this new sound-symbol correspondence by examining pictures beginning with the *h* sound and circling the corresponding letter of the picture label.

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Pages 2 and 3: The children examine a silly picture (two page spread) that contains many words beginning with the letter *h* and are asked to point to these objects as the teacher reads a story about the events in the picture. The children then phonemically isolate the first sound in various pictures and record the letter *h* on as many of the *h*-objects as they can identify.

Page 4: The lesson ends with an auditory discrimination task in which the teacher pronounces the names of two pictures and instructs the children “to write an *h* on the one that begins with the sound of *h*.” There are a total of 8 sets of pictures per page.

When children finish *Primary Phonics Workbook K*, they move to *Primary Phonics Workbook 1*. After they have completed the first 26 pages of this workbook, they are ready to begin the *Primary Phonics* storybooks.

Primary Phonics Storybooks

The NRP advocates the use of decodable texts as part of a systematic phonics program, noting though that there is a paucity of research on such texts:

Some systematic phonics programs are designed so that children are taught letter-sound correspondences and then provided with little books written carefully to contain the letter-sound relations that were taught. Some programs begin with a very limited set and expand these gradually. The intent of providing books that match children’s letter-sound knowledge is to enable them to experience success in decoding words that follow the patterns they know . . . Surprisingly, very little research has attempted to determine whether the use of decodable books in systematic phonics has any influence on the progress that some or all children make in learning to read. (pp. 2–137)

The research that does exist suggests support for the use of decodable texts. In addition to the previously mentioned Foorman study (1998), which used decodable readers as part of the direct code program, Juel and Roper-Schneider (1985) investigated the influence of text features in two basal series—one emphasized high-frequency words, the other phonemically regular words—on first graders’ word identification strategies. The first graders in both classrooms received the same kind of phonics instruction but read from different basals. The children in the highly decodable basal used their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences to a significantly greater degree than their peers in the high-frequency word basals. They also induced more letter-sound relationships that had not been taught, prompting the researchers to conclude, “. . . it also appears that the regularity of the words in this text could foster learning” (p. 143). “The results suggest that when there is a match between method of instruction (i.e., synthetic phonics) and the decodability of words in initial reading texts, a more consistent and successful use of a letter-sound correspondence strategy will result than when there is a mismatch. In particular, emphasis on a phonics method seems to make little sense if children are given initial texts to read where the words do not follow regular letter-sound correspondence generalizations. Results of the current study suggest that the types of words which appear in beginning reading texts may well exert a more powerful influence in shaping children’s word identification strategies than the method of reading instruction” (pp. 150–151).

Many experts (Adams, 1990; Beck & Juel, 1995; Gough, 1997; Hiebert, 1999; Mesmer, 1999; Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998) concur with Juel and Roper-Schneider (1985) as do the Departments of Education in California and Texas, which are filling classrooms with

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decodable texts (Mesmer, 1999). Theoretical support for decodable readers is tied to the research on the changing concepts that young children entertain about written language. Ehri (1991) proposed that children move through three phases of development with respect to learning to read words: logographic, alphabetic, and orthographic. Children's earliest reading is logographic—they read words by relying on the visual aspects of words such as logos or the shape of a particular letter, rather than the sound-symbol relationships. For example, many young children are able to “read” the word *McDonalds* because they recognize the golden arches, not because they can decode the name of the restaurant. At this early stage, children are adept at using visual cues to “read” environmental print (Gough, Juel, & Griffith, 1991; Mason, 1980); however, once the context is removed, few youngsters can read environmental signs and labels (Masonheimer, Drum, & Ehri, 1984).

Alphabetic reading, specifically phonetic cue reading, follows the logographic phase. Children now know some letters of the alphabet and some sounds. They read printed words by remembering some sound-symbol associations. For example, they might read *mom* because of the initial consonant, m. If given the word *man* they may also read it as *mom*. They can't decode the string of individual phonemes in words yet. At some point, their alphabetic reading shifts to cipher reading—young readers can now segment words into phonemes and blend sounds into words. In a study with preschoolers and kindergartners, Ehri and Wilce (1985) demonstrated this developmental trend. They taught two sets of word spellings: (a) spellings that contained visually prominent letters, but no sound-symbol associations (yMp for *turtle*) and (b) spellings that were phonemically based (JRF for *giraffe*). The prereaders, who could read no words before the training, learned to read the spellings with the visually prominent letters (yMp)

much more easily than the phonemically based spellings; the children who could read some words before the training learned to read the phonemically based words more easily. Ehri and Wilce (1991) concluded that “these results suggest that when children move into reading they shift from visual cue processing to phonetic cue processing” (p.163).

It is at this juncture in the young child's reading development that Ehri (1991) argues for the use of decodable texts:

During the alphabetic phase, students need to learn how to phonologically recode [decode] unfamiliar spellings. Also they need sufficient practice phonologically recoding the same spellings so that words become familiar forms with reliable access routes established in memory. Very likely words also need to be practiced in a meaningful context so that the associations formed include correct meanings for pronunciation. (pp. 412–413)

Other experts (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; Hiebert, 1999; Mesmer, 1999) agree that “. . . the use of text may be related to specific developmental phases and to readers' specific needs. The goal of using decodable text, like the purpose of using any other scaffolded text, is to move children quickly into independently reading texts with no controls.” (Mesmer 1999, p. 140)

Used in conjunction with the *Primary Phonics* workbooks, the *Primary Phonics* storybooks offer teachers opportunities to “ensure that children understand the purpose of learning letter-sounds and are able to apply their skills in their daily reading and writing activities.” (NRP, pp. 2–135) As noted earlier, the children begin the first storybook, *Mac and Tab*, after completing the *Primary Phonics Consonant Workbook* and the first 26 pages of *Primary Phonics Workbook 1*. The words in *Mac and Tab* contain only the

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phonic skills introduced in the workbooks as well as a few sight words. For example, *Mac and Tab* contains words composed of eleven consonants and short vowel *a*. The next book in Set 1, *The Tin Man*, contains words with the same eleven consonants, plus *h*, and the short vowels *a* and *e*. *Al*, the third book in Set 1, contains only the consonants in the first two books and three vowels, *a*, *e*, and *o*. By the time children encounter storybook 10 in Set 6, *A Birthday Surprise for Goldie*, they will decode words containing short vowels, long vowels with silent *e*, vowel digraphs, *r*-controlled vowels, consonant blends, consonant digraphs, twin consonants, vowel diphthongs, initial *wa*, final *y*, soft *c*, and soft *g*. Thus, careful attention to systematic reinforcement of learned sound-symbol associations continues throughout the 60 *Primary Phonics* storybooks in Sets 1-6 and the 20 storybooks in Sets 1A and 2A, which are designed for additional practice.

Comprehension

One of the NRP's research questions was, "Does systematic phonics instruction improve children's reading comprehension ability as well as their decoding and word-reading skills?" (pp. 2–133). The Panel found that first graders in systematic phonics programs outperformed their non-phonics peers in the area of comprehension, as did older disabled readers (defined as "children with average IQs but poor reading.") (pp. 2–133) This was not the case for older readers in second through sixth grade.

Comprehension, described by Dolores Durkin (1993) as "the essence of reading," is addressed in the *Primary Phonics* program. *Teacher's Guides 1•2•3 and 4•5•6* include a series of thoughtful comprehension questions for discussion after children read each of the *Primary Phonics* storybooks. These questions tap vocabulary as well as a range of reader responses, with an emphasis on inferential comprehension as well as personal response. A number of

vocabulary questions are included to ensure that discussion takes place about words that young readers can decode but may not understand (e.g., a pen for animals, a vet, a cub, to wade). Such instruction has been shown to increase comprehension (NRP, 2000). Inferential questions such as "Why did Mac take a nap?" invite readers to push beyond the literal events in the text to examine character's motives and actions. Questions such as "If you were to continue this story after page 16, what would you have happen the next day?" require readers to attend to the storyline in order to make reasonable predictions. Particularly praiseworthy is the framing of questions in accordance with the story grammar elements (setting, characters, problem, attempts to solve the problem, and resolution) of stories 6 in Sets 2–6. Such questions help readers internalize the global structure of a story, which in turn aids their comprehension. Readers who process stories in terms of its grammar elements demonstrate strong story recall (Stein & Glenn, 1979). The inclusion of personal response questions such as "Have you ever taken an animal to the vet? What was it like?" (p. 14) is also important because comprehension is enhanced when readers are encouraged to link life experiences to literature (NRP, pp. 4–5).

In addition to these comprehension questions, enrichment activities are suggested. For example, after reading and discussing the story *Mac Gets Well*, students are invited to act out the story using stuffed animals for *Mac and Tab*. After reading and discussing *Ted*, students are asked to write a prequel to the story; after *Sails*, children brainstorm ways of making small boats and then build and race their own boats. Other comprehension activities include retelling, making crafts, playing games, and writing responses.

For more practice, students also may

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The *Primary Phonics Comprehension Workbooks* follow the phonetic patterns of the coordinating workbooks and storybooks. The "wh" question words (who, what, why, etc.) become sight words as students independently work through the series. Skills covered are sequencing, recognizing story elements, using context clues, and matching text with illustrations.



complete the workbook pages in optional *Comprehension Workbooks 1–6*, which include factual as well as inferential questions and activities that correspond to *Storybook Sets 1–6*. To demonstrate understanding, students are asked to match story characters to pictures, circle which event came first in the story given a series of pictures, complete a crossword puzzle about story events, and draw or write a response to a question about the story.

Conclusion

By using *Primary Phonics*, teachers can help children internalize the alphabetic principle that letters in written words map the sounds of spoken words in systematic ways. *Primary Phonics* fulfills the NRP’s mandate for phonics instruction that is systematically sequenced “to provide children with some key knowledge and skills and to insure that they know how to apply this knowledge in their reading and writing” (pp. 2-96).

Effective teachers also understand that the Panel’s caveat that “Phonics teaching is a means to an end” (pp. 2-96) and that it is important to assess children’s proficiency in phonics and provide instruction that meets their varying needs (pp. 2-97). Effective teachers also understand that phonics instruction is one essential dimension of a balanced literacy program:

. . . it is important to emphasize that systematic phonics should be integrated with other reading instruction to create a balanced reading program. Phonics instruction is never a total reading program. In first grade, teachers can provide controlled vocabulary texts that allow students to practice decoding, and they can also read quality literature to students to build a sense of story and to develop vocabulary and comprehension. Phonics should not become the dominant component in a reading program, neither

in the amount of time devoted to it nor in the significance attached to it. It is important to evaluate children’s reading competence in many ways, not only by their phonic skills but also by their interest in books and their ability to understand information that is read to them. By emphasizing all of the processes that contribute to growth in reading, teachers will have the best chance of making every child a reader. (pp. 2-97)

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