

SUPERKIDS



Is Superkids a Phonics Program?

THE SUPERKIDS READING PROGRAM

Phonics or phonics-based: What is the difference?

A large body of evidence confirms that systematic, explicit phonics is the most critical component of beginning reading instruction.¹ To provide it, educators may choose stand-alone *phonics programs* that are specifically designed to teach just phonics, or they may choose *phonics-based programs* that provide a strong foundation in phonics while connecting phonics instruction to reading, writing, and spelling.

As stated in *The Voice of Evidence in Reading Research*, “. . . [It] is less effective to teach phonics as a separate subject unrelated to anything else students are taught during the day. For example, children might study letter-sound correspondences for 20 minutes every morning, then move to reading and writing instruction that bears no connection to the phonics lesson. Research shows that students will not apply their knowledge if they do not use it to read and write. The best phonics program is one that is deliberately integrated with reading and writing instruction.”²

What is systematic, explicit phonics instruction?

The key attributes of effective phonics instruction are that it is systematic and explicit. **Systematic instruction** is characterized by the use of a method or system. The skills that are needed to acquire the alphabetic principle should not be learned opportunistically. To be effective, instruction must be organized and sequential.³ And the system of instruction must follow the developmental sequence of skills students must master to be competent readers.

Explicit instruction is clearly, intentionally stated and not merely implied. It is direct instruction that does not make assumptions about the skills and knowledge that children acquire on their own. It explicitly teaches the sound/symbol relationships *before* children meet them in a word. In explicit instruction, the sequence of teaching and teacher actions is conspicuous.⁴



Don't all reading programs teach phonics?

Virtually every reading program on the market today teaches some phonics. But too often phonics has been included as one of many strategies for accessing unknown words. It is *not the core, fundamental principle from which all other reading instruction evolves* as research indicates it should be. Multiple strategies applied simultaneously confuse beginning readers, who don't know whether to try to decode a word or guess at it from looking at illustrations or context.

What is the role of decodable text?

For children to understand that phonics is not just a puzzle to solve but the very foundation of reading, they must receive extensive instruction in the alphabetic principle. Then they must have ample opportunities to apply these skills in decodable text that reliably results in words they know and can

pronounce. This is how children understand metacognitively the purpose of the code and how it works. After the decoding habit is developed, other strategies can be applied. Without focused application in decodable text that yields consistent results, phonics becomes a game rather than the critical basis of reading.

Phonics-only programs can be dull, relying primarily on “skill and drill” practice. When they include reading opportunities, the decodable text children are asked to read is often meaningless and irrelevant to them. While decodable text is critical for beginning readers,⁵ phonics-only programs often provide text with a phonetic pattern to practice but without a real story line or any literary value. In these programs, decodable “books” sometimes come in black-line newsprint format, furthering their distance from “real reading.”

The very foundation of Superkids is systematic, explicit instruction in phonics that follows the sequence of skills a beginning reader must master. Phonics is the pedagogical foundation upon which all other skills depend and upon which they are built—hence, it is *phonics-based*. The lively Superkids characters are the vehicle for teaching letter-sounds, and they are the heart of the beautifully illustrated, decodable stories that children find so engaging.



How is phonics integrated with other skills?

As students apply their alphabetic skills to text that is reliably decodable, they also learn to encode. This way, reading and spelling have a meaningful relationship and progress at the same pace. Children can read what they write and write what they read, constantly reinforcing letter-sound relationships. Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities are engaged to fully support student learning. This careful integration of skills continues throughout first grade until children have learned all the letter-sound patterns of English and applied these to multi-syllabic words. These are reviewed once again in second grade along with higher-level phonics skills such as syllable chunks and morphological units, to give children one last chance to consolidate their knowledge. Over three years, children master the decoding and encoding habit because it has been thoroughly and carefully developed. By the time they leave second grade, word recognition is accurate, automatic, and fluent so that their brain energy can be focused on comprehending content.





As the Superkids Reading Program builds strong decoding skills, it simultaneously integrates instruction in comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. The program *also* provides instruction in reading,

writing, spelling, grammar, usage, and mechanics. Thus, it is a *comprehensive reading and language arts curriculum with phonics at its core.*

By the time children complete the Superkids Reading Program, they are truly ready for the academic materials that await them in the intermediate grades. Forever after, they can turn to their phonics foundation as they approach unknown words, as all good readers do. They have mastered the alphabetic principle at the right time, in the primary grades, and in the right way, with the systematic, explicit instruction of the Superkids.

1. M. J. Adams, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).
2. P. McCardle and V. Chhabra, eds., *The Voice of Evidence in Reading Research* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2004).
3. E. McEwan, *Teach Them All to Read* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2009).
4. R. Dixon, D. Carnine, and E. Kame'enui, *Curriculum Guidelines for Diverse Learners* (monograph) (Eugene: University of Oregon, National Center to Improve the Tools of Educators, 1992).
5. C. Juel and D. Roper/Schneider, "The Influence of Basal Readers on First Grade Reading," *Reading Research Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1985): 134–152.





To learn more about
the Superkids Reading Program,
call 866-370-7323 or
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ROWLAND READING FOUNDATION

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dedicated to improving reading instruction in the primary grades.*

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