

# SUPERKIDS



## Why Is Decodable Text Important?

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THE SUPERKIDS READING PROGRAM

The type of text used in beginning reading is critical.<sup>1</sup> As children are acquiring an understanding of the alphabetic principle, they need to practice their ever-increasing skills in text that matches the progression of those skills. This is called phonetically controlled, or decodable, text. The Superkids Reading Program for K–2 provides the decodable controls that match the program’s system of teaching letter-sounds, ensuring successful early text reading.

The science of reading confirms that the use of decodable text is necessary to build the automatic systems in the word-form region of the brain that lead to fluent reading.<sup>2</sup> When children are given text for which they do not know the phonetic code, they develop an over-reliance on context usage, sometimes knowing a word one day yet forgetting it the next. Contextual guessing is never a strategy children should develop or rely on; context and pictures are useful for confirming meaning, not for initial word recognition. These are students who are at tremendous risk for reading failure, as they have not developed the decoding accuracy or automaticity necessary for reading success.

### Matching the text to goals for beginning readers

The text that teachers select impacts the kind of word identification strategies that students will use in their reading. So teachers need to think: *What are my goals for my readers?*

Students who read from texts that are primarily constructed around high-frequency words will primarily employ a visual strategy for word identification, a strategy that will not sustain a reader very far into the process of reading.<sup>3</sup> Students who read from predictable text will memorize patterns, repetitive language, and rhyme, but they are unlikely to acquire strong

phonetic decoding skills. In fact, studies have shown that students in programs that emphasize these types of text fare poorly when compared to students in programs which employ decodable text.<sup>4</sup> Superkids builds the decoding habit so that decoding is consistently the first approach a child uses to unlock an unknown word.

Students who read from decodable text will develop a phonetic decoding strategy based on letter-sound correspondences. This is the best and most reliable strategy to develop in beginning readers, as this matches what brain science tells us about the need to establish a neural connection between sounds and letters. *It is especially important that beginning readers have explicit, systematic instruction of the specific letter-sounds before they meet them in decodable text.* Decodable text allows them to get reliable results when they meet new words and reinforces their mastery of and *automatic* reliance on decoding. Solid and automatic decoding is a critical strategy to have in place as readers encounter higher levels of text with multi-syllabic and unknown words.

### Superkids text is unique

Although the use of decodable text is important and continually affirmed in contemporary research of beginning reading,<sup>5</sup> decodable text has frequently been characterized as dull and unnatural. Not only do the Superkids’ stories provide text that is completely decodable based on the phonetic skills children have learned in the program, but the stories are engaging and lively. The program features nonfiction text as well, in beautifully illustrated library books that are also phonetically controlled. In kindergarten and first grade, more than 100 books in the leveled libraries are written with the phonetic controls taught in the core lessons for ample and engaging

practice. High-interest decodable text allows children to experience early success. They are “really reading” not guessing, and the reliable word identification that results propels them forward to apply their new-found decoding skills confidently and independently. It also reinforces their metacognitive awareness that reading is not guessing, but the consistent application of the alphabetic principle.

With its decodable stories and books, the Superkids Reading Program provides the appropriate text that supports beginning readers.

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1. C. Juel and D. Roper/Schneider, “The Influence of Basal Readers on First Grade Reading,” *Reading Research Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1985): 134–152.
  2. S. Shaywitz and B. Shaywitz, “Reading Disability and the Brain,” *Educational Leadership*, 61, no. 6 (2004): 6–11.
  3. B. R. Foorman, D. J. Francis, K. Davidson, M. Harm, and J. Griffin, “Variability in Text Features in Six Grade 1 Basal Reading Programs,” *Scientific Studies of Reading* 8, no. 2 (2004): 167–197.
  4. B. R. Foorman, D. J. Francis, J. M. Fletcher, C. Schatschneider, P. Mehta, “The Role of Instruction in Learning to Read: Preventing Reading Failure in At-Risk Children,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 90, no. 1 (1998): 37–55.
  5. M. J. Adams, *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); P. McCardle and V. Chhabra, eds., *The Voice of Evidence in Reading Research* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2004).

To learn more about  
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