



The Roadmap to Reading



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Welcome

Thank you for taking the first step in helping a child learn to read. Literacy affects everything and whatever you can do to promote early literacy skills is life-changing. My wish is that this guide will help you understand fundamental literacy skills necessary for all children to become skilled readers. We work with libraries because librarians are literacy first-responders, and soon you will be too!

A lot goes into learning to read, and our Roadmap to Reading will clarify and simplify the process and show you where the different skills fit along the road to reading. You will learn that two main roads lead to reading. The first road builds language skills, and it's probably the road you hear the most about it because it includes reading aloud to a child. Reading aloud is a critical way to build language skills, and we will even show you a way to make read-aloud more engaging and interactive.

The second road that leads to skilled reading is the decoding road. The decoding road is not as familiar to most of us, yet understanding how children recognize and manipulate sounds and eventually identify sounds in letters and words is critical. Decoding starts early with pre-reading skills that teach children to hear the largest sounds in words and finally the tiniest sounds. There are games and activities you can play with a child to make learning about sounds fun.

The Roadmap to Reading will highlight both roads, language skills, and decoding skills so that you understand all of the ways to help a child become a skilled reader. Enjoy the journey and share what you learn with anyone willing to help a child learn to read.

Here's to the joy of reading for all children!

Kind Regards,



Marion Waldman
Founder/Executive Director
Teach My Kid to Read (TMKTR)

How We Learn To Read

Before working with any program or resource, you should understand how we learn to read. We do not all have to be literacy specialists, but we need to know the steps that lead to skilled reading and what comprises each step. Understanding those steps will enable you to help a child learn to read.

The Roadmap to Reading is based on The Simple View of Reading. The Simple View of Reading is a formula that illustrates that strong reading comprehension ability is attained by acquiring decoding skills—the ability to apply letter–sound relationships to pronounce words correctly—and language comprehension abilities.



At Teach My Kid to Read, we refer to the two domains that lead to skilled reading, language comprehension skills and decoding skills, as two roads. The Roadmap to Reading maps both roads, and shows you what skills or competencies along the two roads help a child learn to read. See Figure 1–1

Figure 1–1 The different components that comprise the two roads to reading comprehension. The left column shows the language-comprehension skills and the right column shows the word-recognition skills that lead to reading comprehension.

It is really important that children develop both language comprehension and decoding skills. When the two roads converge, children reach the treasure chest—strong reading comprehension—successfully. If emergent readers take a detour and miss some of their time on one road or the other, they may never reach the finish line. Similarly, struggling readers who veer off the road without a map will become lost and risk falling further behind.

The components of the two roads that lead to reading comprehension support what are known as the five pillars of reading:

1. Phonological awareness
2. Phonics
3. Fluency
4. Vocabulary
5. Comprehension

For those who are not literacy specialists, the terminology may take time to get used to. It's more important to focus on the skills outlined in the guide and the resources that help support those skills. For example, **phonological awareness** is a pre-reading skill that focuses on identification and manipulation of sounds in language. One component of phonological awareness, **phonemic awareness**, is identifying and manipulating the smallest sounds in words. It is directly connected to learning to read. **Phonics** is sounding out and spelling the words. All of these terms are easy to confuse because they sound so similar.

Language Comprehension

The first road or domain on The Roadmap to Reading is language comprehension. Language comprehension is natural: We are hard-wired to speak, and listening comprehension comes before reading comprehension. To develop language comprehension skills, children must receive lots of exposure to language. Not only is the quantity of words significant, but the quality of the language that is heard is as well. The best way to ensure quantity and quality is to read aloud to a child as early and as often as possible.

You may have heard that surrounding children with books is the best way to help them learn to read. Surrounding children with a literacy-building environment and reading to them is the best way to build early language skills, but there is still more that can be done. To maximize the value of reading aloud to a child, TMKTR takes this recommendation one step further.

Interactive Read-Alouds

Interactive reading uses dialogue between the adult and the child to specifically and intentionally build language and vocabulary. Reading aloud with a child instead of reading to a child is critical. We recommend reading with a child before and after a child can read books independently and especially while the child is learning.

Here's a way to read with a child that uses the acronym **PEER**, which stands for the following steps:

Prompt — Ask a question.

Evaluate — Make sure the question makes sense.

Expand — Elaborate on the answer.

Repeat — Return to the prompt, so the child expands on the answer.

Use **PEER** to increase oral language and vocabulary. For example,

The adult **prompts** the child to say something about the book.

Ex. “What is this?” The adult points to a fire truck.

The adult **evaluates** the response.

Ex. The child says, “truck,” and the adult follows with “That’s right.”

The adult **expands** the child’s response by rephrasing and adding information to it.

Ex. “It’s a big, red fire truck.”

The adult **repeats** the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion.

Ex. “Can you say big, red fire truck?”

Another acronym for interactive read-alouds is **CAR**:

Comment and wait.

Ask questions and wait.

Respond by adding a little more.

Content Knowledge

We encourage reading books from different genres to develop content knowledge, as well as books based on a child’s interest in a topic. A child who has independent, successful opportunities to practice by reading decodable books aloud to an adult and who listens to and talks about vocabulary-rich books is more likely to proceed directly to the treasure chest: Reading Comprehension! (Audiobooks may be used as long as the child listens together with a caregiver, and the child or caregiver can stop or pause throughout the book.)

To see examples of read-alouds, go to KidsRead2Kids (www.kidsread2kids.com). KidsRead2Kids, in partnership with Teach My Kid to Read, creates video recordings of older children performing interactive read-alouds. Downloads of sample questions are included.

Phonological Awareness (Pre-Reading Skills)

Did you know that you can help a child build decoding skills (sounding out words) even before the child learns to read? Pre-reading skills begin with kids tuning in to the sounds of language. Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that deals with how children identify and work with sounds. Phonological skills start with manipulating large chunks of sound in language. Early pre-reading skills are easy to incorporate into day-to-day activities with young children. If parents or caregivers want to know how to help their children with literacy skills before they start reading, you can recommend phonological awareness activities as a way to start.

Phonological Awareness Activities

Helping children develop phonological awareness can be as simple as asking children which sounds are the same and which sounds are different. You can instruct parents or caregivers to make up phonological awareness games, or you can use guides or resources. Here are examples of phonological awareness activities.

- Ask children to reproduce sounds they hear, using an instrument such as a toy drum. For example, after modeling a few beats, have the children copy the sounds. As they improve, extend the strings of sound.
- Get children to listen for word boundaries in sentences. They can tap out words, jump up and down every time they hear a separate word, or place tokens on a mat to represent the words in a sentence read aloud to them.

Dog on a Log Books (www.dogonalogbooks.com) offers free phonological awareness activities on their website and they publish a pre-reader, ***Before the Squiggle Code (A Roadmap to Reading)***, that you can use to guide parents and caregivers through phonological awareness activities.

- Teach children how words can break down into sounds. The most straightforward words to use for this activity are compound words (words broken up into two separate words such as sun/set and cup/cake). Demonstrate to children how two different words put together build a compound word and how we can also hear the separate words when we break them apart. Take away one of the words and ask children which part remains as a way to get them to tune into syllables. (A syllable is a unit of pronunciation having one vowel sound, with or without surrounding consonants.)
- Once children can hear and recognize distinct words in a compound word, encourage them to hear multisyllable words that are not compound words. Have them place their hands beneath their chins to feel their jaws drop each time a vowel sound comes out. Vowels open the mouth, so a two-syllable word will have two vowel sounds and two chin drops. The word “crayon” has two syllables because it has two vowel sounds.
- Having children develop the ability to recognize and generate rhymes is a little harder. A rhyme is a listening and speaking activity, not strictly speaking a reading activity. Rhymes occur when the vowel sounds and the consonant sounds that follow are the same. The difference between two rhyming words occurs before the vowel sound, for example, “leaf” and “beef.” (Notice that the vowel letters in those two rhyming words “ea” and “ee” are not the same.) See Figure 1–2 for an example of a rhyming activity.

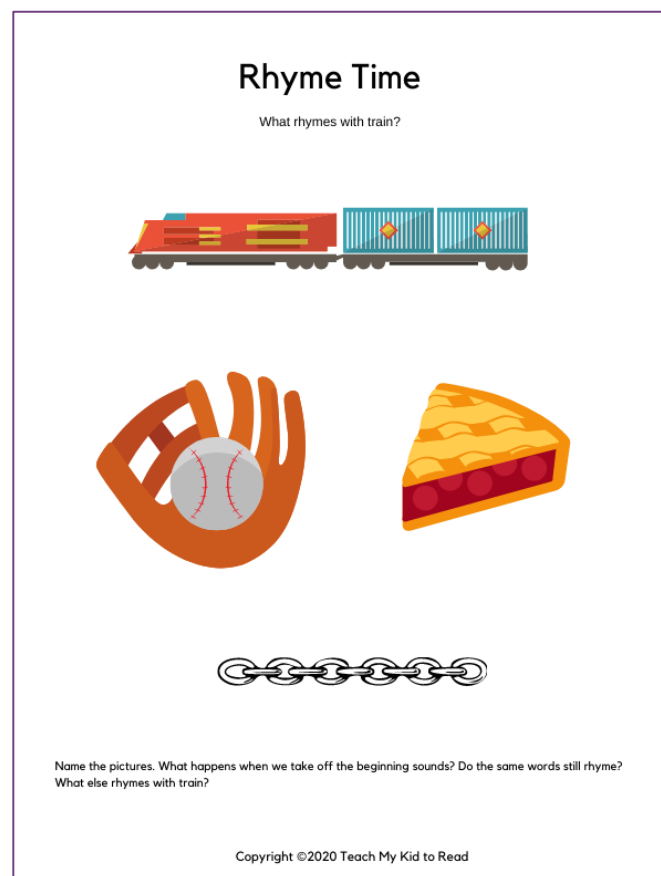


Figure 1–2 An example of a rhyming activity.

If we want to use words that contain the same letters that make a rhyme, we call that part of the word a rime, such as the “ill” in Jill and Hill. Both have the rime, and they sound alike as well. The beginning letters before the rime are called the **onset** of a word. The J and the H are the onsets, while ill is the rime.

When working with rhyming words, the spelling doesn’t matter. We just want kids to recognize that the words rhyme and eventually to be able to generate their own rhymes. Nursery rhymes and sound games help children hear similarities and differences between words. Parents frequently recognize that their children are having difficulties with language when they see them struggling with rhyming and sound games.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the most advanced level of phonological awareness skills. It refers to a child’s awareness of the individual phonemes, the smallest units of sound, in spoken words, and the child’s ability to manipulate those sounds. Phonemic awareness is critical to reading success. For children who struggle to read, difficulties are often traced to challenges with phonemic awareness.

There are approximately forty-four phonemes in the English language, and they are responsible for all the sounds in the English language!

Figure 1–3 shows The English Phonics Code.



Figure 1–3 The English Phonics Code.

Source: Courtesy of Phonic Books.


Phonemic Awareness Activities

Blending and segmenting are two of the most important phonemic awareness skills to work on with a child. Blending sounds to build words and segmenting words into individual sounds are crucial skills for children to develop because they lay the foundation for learning to read.

- Blending refers to building words from individual sounds, such as /k/ /a/ /t/, until the child hears the whole word “cat.” (Figure 1–4).
- Segmenting refers to breaking a whole word up into individual units of sound. For instance, the individual sounds of the word “cat” would be /k/ /a/ /t/. If you take away the /k/ sound, the word that remains is “at.”
- If you change one of the sounds, such as substituting /b/ for /k/, then the new word is “bat.” If there is a vowel change, the word might become “cut” if you use an /u/. Notice that we are concerned with the “sounds” represented by the letters, **not the letter names.**

Phonemic Awareness is the ability to hear, identify and manipulate **individual** sounds in spoken language.

Cat /k/ /a/ /t/ = 3 phonemes



Sheep /sh/ /ee/ /p/ = 3 phonemes




Figure 1–4 Examples of phoneme blending.

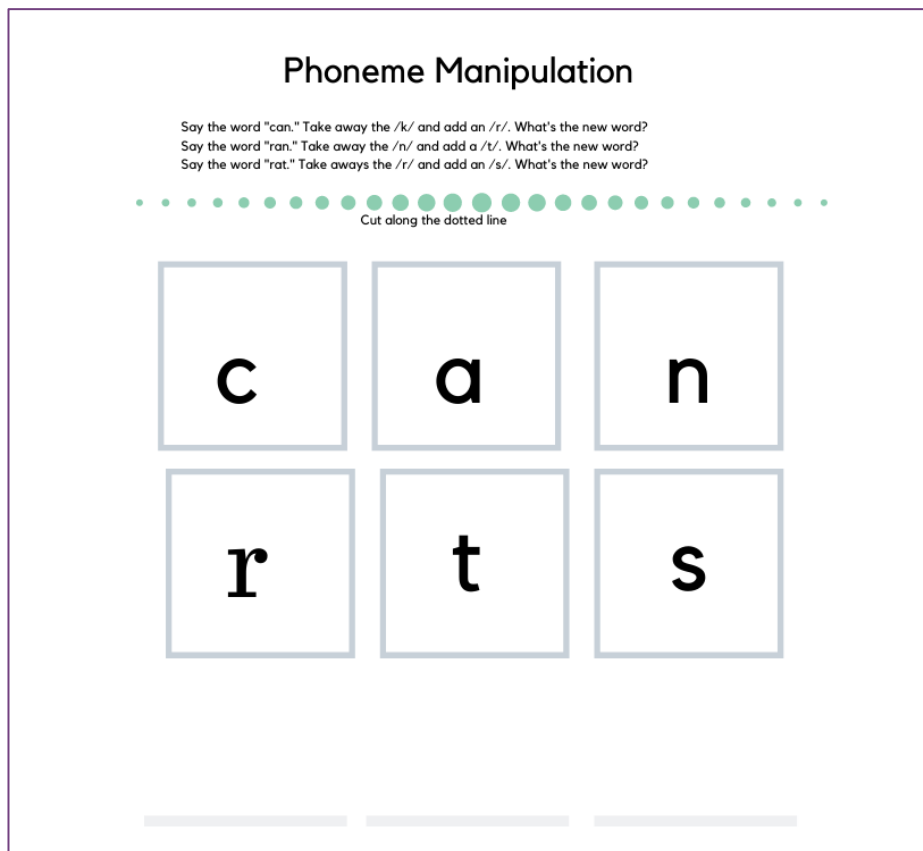


Figure 1–5 Examples of deletion and substitution exercises.

- Deletion and substitution exercises are the most advanced means of developing phonemic awareness. As children practice these skills, their ability to quickly connect letters to sounds improves, and this has a positive impact on their reading fluency. The goal is to have children reading words smoothly at the same pace as talking. Figure 1–5 shows samples of deletion and substitution exercises.

While some children possess or develop phonemic awareness without the need for targeted work or exercises, many children require direct instruction in these critical components of early literacy. Unfortunately, they do not always receive it. Such children usually struggle and fall behind their peers before they get the help they need. TMKTR believes that providing all children with direct instruction in phonemic awareness from the start will significantly reduce the number of children in need of intervention later on.

Once a child is ready to work on phonemic awareness, you can introduce letter-recognition and letter-formation activities.

Letter Recognition + Phonemic Awareness = Alphabetic Principle

Letters are merely symbolic codes for what we hear (Figure 1–6). Decoding is sounding out printed words. “Phonics” refers to the knowledge of letter sounds and the ability to apply that knowledge to decoding printed words. Before children benefit from a phonics program, they must be able to recognize and quickly match letters to the sounds in words.

Preschools spend much time teaching children the alphabet and, in so doing, emphasizing letter names. When we think about it, however, knowing letter sounds, not letter names, is crucial to reading. Many emergent and struggling readers confuse letter sounds with letter names when trying to read and spell words, because they focus on the letters’ names rather than their sounds. For example, a child might spell the word “end” as ND or the word “empty” as MT.

For this reason, TMKTR endorses a sounds-first approach to reading instruction. A sounds-first approach includes teaching letter names only after introducing the letter-sound foundation. TMKTR also encourages the teaching of lowercase letters before adding capital letters, since so many more words appear as lowercase in print.

Figure 1–6

WHAT ARE GPCs?		
<i>A GPC (grapheme-phoneme correspondence) is a specific phoneme (sound) paired with a specific grapheme (letter combination). The word 'it' has two GPCs: 'i' - /ih/ and 't' - /t/.</i>		
PHONEME	WORD EXAMPLES	GRAPHEMES
/f/	fluff, sphere, tough, calf	f, ff, ph, gh, lf
/ch/	cheap, future, etch	ch, t, tch
/ā/	make, rain, play, great, baby, eight, vein, they	a_e, ai, ay, ea, -y, eigh, ei, ey

Figure created by Neena M. Saha, elemeno

How to Introduce Letter Recognition

One way to improve letter recognition in young children and struggling readers is to use an embedded alphabet. An embedded alphabet inserts letters into pictures. Embedded alphabets help children learn letter–sound correspondence by using the initial sound of a word. By integrating the letters in the images, the letters become part of the picture and thus aid in memory. See Figure 1–7

Once recognizing letter–sound correspondence becomes automatic for children, remove the pictures. Embedding letters in pictures is different from the more common and current practice that places pictures above or below the letters.

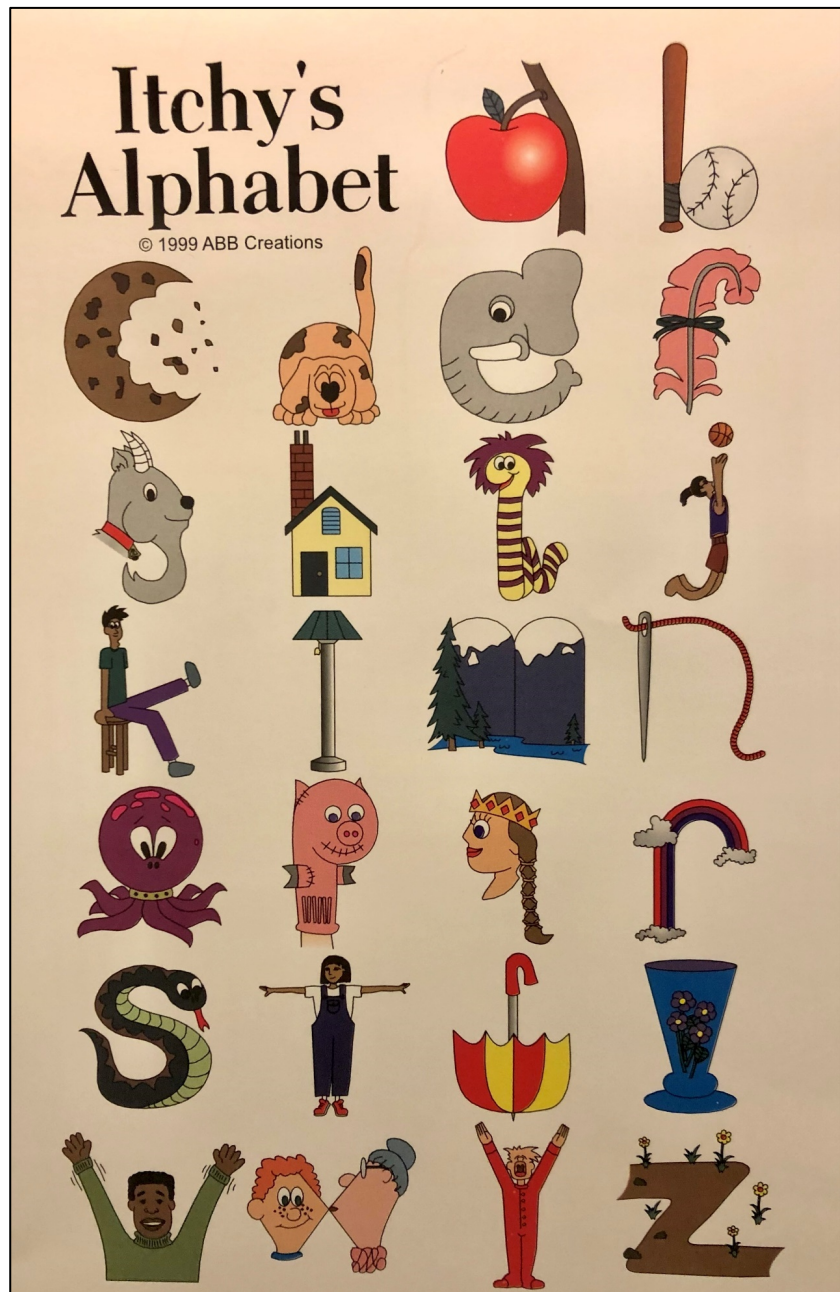


Figure 1–7

An example of an embedded alphabet. Materials like flip books enable you to show how overlays of the letters correspond to the images in an embedded alphabet (Courtesy of ABB Creations LTD)

Letter Formation and Handwriting Instruction

It is best to emphasize proper letter formation at a young age while children are learning letter sounds. Simultaneous instruction in handwriting builds stronger neural connections for children and helps them remember and differentiate between letters. You can also reduce letter reversals and confusion by teaching children to form letters correctly from the start while saying the sounds out loud. For example, teaching that /c/ turns into /d/ helps significantly with the b/d reversal. Children learn to form the round part first, then the stick.

Children will see that forming certain letters begins with a counterclockwise rotation, while other letters are begun by pulling the pencil down toward the body or on a slant. If letters are grouped by how they are formed, they will be easier for children to learn.



Itchy's Alphabet provides several resources to help with handwriting. Learn more at www.itchysalphabet.com

Phonics

There is not a one-to-one match between letters and sounds in the English language. As shown in Figure 1–3, we have twenty-six letters in our alphabet, but we have (approximately) forty-four sounds, and particular sounds can have many spelling variations. For example, the long vowel “o” sound may look like o (no), oa (boat), ow (slow), oe (toe), o-e (hope), or ough (though). There is also overlap in the alphabetic code, where the same spelling pattern can represent more than one sound. For instance, we pronounce “ow” differently in the two words making up the common phrase “slow down.”

Phonics instruction is the direct, explicit, and systematic teaching of letter–sound relationships and how to blend sounds to achieve correct pronunciation of a word. Phonics decoding is the ability to recognize familiar words quickly and to sound out unknown words using the knowledge of letter–sound relationships.

Phonics Instruction – *Beginning Reading Instruction*

You can implement a phonics program with *Beginning Reading Instruction/Advanced Reading Instruction (BRI/ARI)*. The books in these sets are systematic and cumulative. BRI/ARI is based on research funded by the United States government to develop the most effective sequence of sounds, words, practice, and pacing for teaching children to read. The instructional method was used in kindergarten classes across the United States, with a series of national studies demonstrating that the program successfully taught thousands of preschool children to read. Researchers also tested the program extensively to verify its effectiveness in teaching young children to read.

A follow-up study found that young children who had learned to read in kindergarten maintained their reading advantage through high school. This extensive research and evaluation account for the effectiveness of this program. No other reading series has been developed so scientifically and carefully.

Working with *Beginning Reading Instruction*

Beginning Reading Instruction includes the following components:

- *Beginning Reading Instruction* (Three sets of decodable booklets and one booster set)
- *Advanced Reading Instruction* (Three sets of booklets with two booster sets)

For access to E-book versions of *Beginning Reading Instruction*, go to www.teachmykidtoread.org and sign up in the parent/family section.

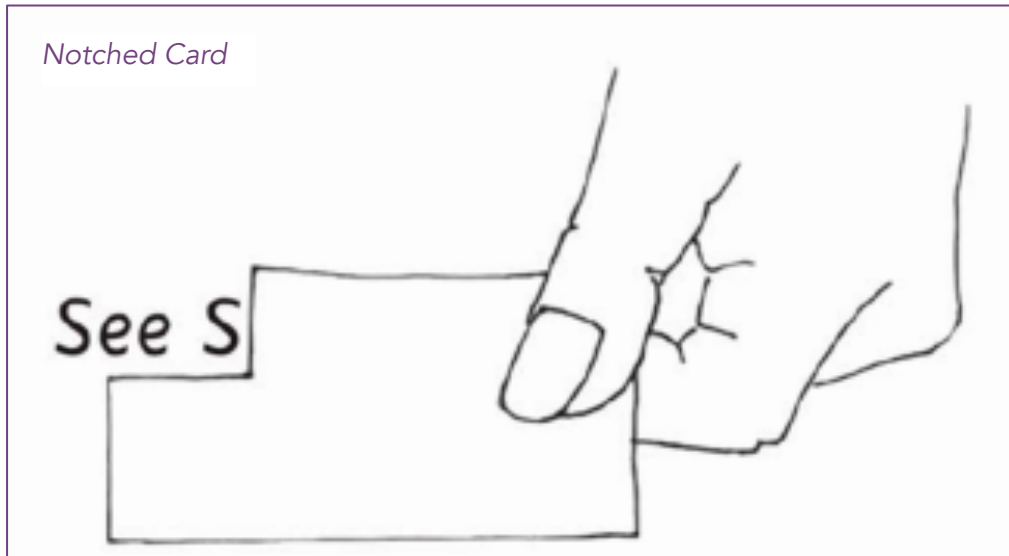
Here's how the method works:

The child says the sounds, then says the word.

The child is instructed to say the word the "slow way" by sounding out.
(/k/ /a/ /t/ - cat)

The child is instructed to say the word the "fast way" as a whole word. (cat)

If the child is guessing, use a notched card and demonstrate how to read left to right and all through the word. (A child who has been taught with a Balanced Literacy approach tends to look all over the page for clues, which many times results in guessing.) The card prevents looking ahead and looking below the word.



Use the notched card (download from www.teachmykidtoread.org) to slide under the word and reveal **only the letters for one sound at a time**. Error correction should occur immediately following an error. Slide the card back and model how to blend sounds correctly. **Do not let mistakes go uncorrected.**

The child will repeat and reread the sentence correctly. The goal is to develop accuracy.

The notched card should only be used temporarily until the guessing diminishes. Encourage child to use his or her finger under words to track across lines of print.

Books should be read a second time to build **accuracy and fluency**. Decodable books such as *BRI* can be used for comprehension, too.



Decodable Books

We learned how *BRI/ARI* works as a phonics program to teach a child to read. *BRI/ARI* materials include a type of text called decodable or controlled text. Decodable books enable children to learn the letter–sound connection as they practice reading.

We support *BRI/ARI* in The Roadmap to Reading because it is a highly researched evidence-based system that anyone can use to help a child. There are many other decodable texts and series that libraries may want to order so that families and caregivers have access to decodable books as their children learn to read. Children who struggle to read will need lots of practice with decodable books.

Why Decodable Books Help All Children Learn To Read

Decodable books are the link between teaching children to decode words and applying that knowledge to connected text. The best decodable book series have a *scope and sequence* that explicitly covers the full spectrum—from basic decoding to advanced decoding of multisyllable words. The books are designed to provide multiple opportunities for practice and repetition, and they demonstrate clearly that letters are not arbitrary symbols. Children will become confident in their ability to read unknown words by applying their phonics knowledge. They will learn that they do not have to depend on pictures or context clues to “solve” words, as only poor readers use such inefficient strategies. Proficient readers do not rely on context clues or pictures.

In contrast, by encouraging children to use pictures or context clues to “solve” unknown words—the Balanced Literacy approach—children are actually being taught to read like weak readers. Many children taught using this approach become dependent on pictures or other cues to help them read, and constantly take their eyes off the words. The eyes of a struggling reader will bounce around pages as they seek help. Guessing becomes the default reading strategy, which is unsustainable when the text becomes more complex and pictures are no longer available.

Making decodable books available to emergent and struggling readers can make a huge difference and is at the core of the TMKTR Roadmap (Figure 1–8). Practice with a quality decodable-book series might be all that some children require to begin reading, particularly those who can quickly grasp the alphabetic principle and develop proficiency with phonemic awareness. Children who struggle with the alphabetic principle and phonemic awareness will need to work at a slower pace, and receive more direct teaching of the alphabetic code. Go to www.teachmykidtoread.org for a list of decodable books that your library may carry.

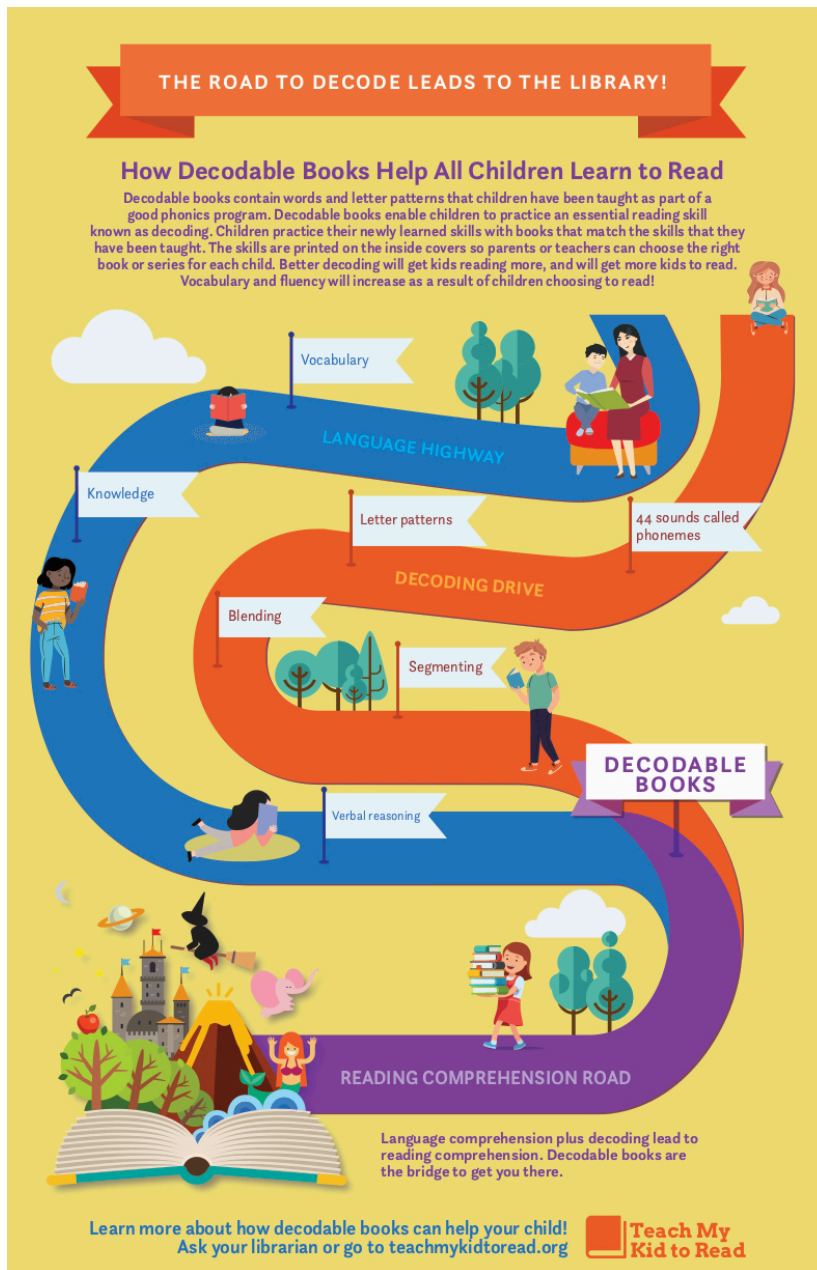


Figure 1–8 When a child learns to decode, they can read anything!

Spelling

Parents who want to incorporate spelling into their phonics instruction can use the words from decodable books to teach spelling. Spelling (encoding) is the inverse of reading (decoding). Using the words from the decodable books for spelling instruction reinforces automatic recognition of letter patterns for reading. Automatic letter formation and automatic letter–sound associations are the building blocks for successful spelling instruction.

Here’s a method for teaching spelling:

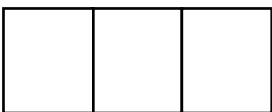
The word is said to the child. (cat)

The child repeats the word. (cat)

The child segments the word into sounds BEFORE writing the word and uses sound dashes.(_ _ _)

The child writes the letters on the dashes while saying the sounds aloud. (c a t)

Preprinted boxes can be used for mapping letters to sounds instead of sound dashes.



Note, when a child needs more intensive decoding and encoding instruction, a program that specifically works on these skills is necessary.



Thank You

You have taken the first step of the most amazing journey. Contact us at info@teachmykidtoread and let us know how we can support you.



Acknowledgments

Teach My Kid to Read's literacy initiatives would not be possible without the work of Faith Borkowsky. Faith Borkowsky, the founder of High Five Literacy and Academic Coaching and a Teach My Kid to Read Director, has over thirty years of experience as a classroom teacher, reading and learning specialist, regional literacy coach, administrator, and tutor. Ms. Borkowsky is Orton-Gillingham trained and is a Wilson Certified Dyslexia Practitioner listed on the International Dyslexia Association's Provider Directory. She provides professional development for teachers and school districts, as well as parent workshops, presentations and private consultations. Ms. Borkowsky is the author of the award-winning book, *Failing Students or Failing Schools? A Parent's Guide to Reading Instruction and Interventions*, and the series, *If Only I would Have Known ... What I Wish the Pediatrician (Book 1), Preschool Teacher (Book 2), and Librarian (Book 3) Would Have Told Me About Language Literacy and Dyslexia*.



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The Roadmap to Reading

Learning to read is the beginning of a fantastic journey that anyone willing can take with a young child!

The Roadmap to Reading is an essential guide for understanding how we learn to read and reading approaches that enable all children to develop good reading skills. Learn about the two domains that lead to skilled reading, language skills, and decoding skills and the different components within these two areas essential for skilled reading. In addition, learn about what strategies build language and decoding skills, where the various resources fit, and how you can start working with an early reader to develop good reading habits.



About Teach My Kid to Read

Teach My Kid to Read is a nonprofit with a mission to provide parents, caregivers, librarians, and anyone interested in literacy education with the tools to help all children learn to read.

Teach My Kid to Read initiated the first widespread movement to enlist libraries as partners to help more families of early and striving readers through awareness and education about how we learn to read, and resources demonstrated to help all children become skilled readers.



www.teachmykidtoread.org