

THE SUPERKIDS READING PROGRAM

The
Common Core
State Standards
and
SUPERKIDS



ROWLAND READING FOUNDATION

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Introduction

The goal of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts is to ensure that all students are college- and career-ready by the end of high school. The Standards are intended to provide teachers with year-end goals. They are *not* intended to prescribe what happens in classrooms day to day. In other words, the Standards define what students need to know and are expected to do, but it is up to teachers to define *how* to reach these goals.

The most important task for children in the primary grades is to learn how to read. Children cannot meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards in the intermediate grades and beyond if they do not learn how to read in the primary grades. The Superkids® Reading Program teaches children how to read and provides the tools teachers need to successfully implement the English Language Arts Standards in K–2.

The purpose of this booklet is to explain the Standards for K–2, why they are important, and how Superkids meets them. We begin with an overview of each of the key areas of the English Language Arts Standards for K–2 and continue with an explanation of text complexity and its importance to the Standards. We conclude with a section on the importance of decodable text in the primary grades.

We hope the following pages answer your questions as you embark on the new era of the Common Core State Standards.

Understanding the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts in the primary grades are organized into the following categories: foundational skills, reading literature, reading informational text, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Although the Standards provide specific goals in each category, they recognize that each standard doesn't necessarily stand alone. Often, several standards are addressed with one task. This integration is key to building the foundation students need to become college- and career-ready.

★ Foundational Skills

Meeting the Common Core State Standards in the primary grades is particularly challenging given that children must first learn *how* to read. It's critical for children to master the foundational skills in order to become proficient readers. Skill development in concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, and fluency is the foundation upon which children's ability to read is built.

What the Standards Say: Foundational Skills

Print concepts. The term *print concepts* refers to a child's growing understanding of the conventions of written language.

In kindergarten, the Standards require that children demonstrate an understanding of the organization of print features, such as following text from left to right, top to bottom, and page by page; recognizing that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters; understanding that words are separated by spaces; and recognizing all upper- and lowercase letters.

First graders should be able to distinguish the basic features of sentences, such as first-word capitalization and ending punctuation.

Phonological awareness. Before children can learn to read, they must first develop auditory discrimination, the ability to hear and distinguish between environmental sounds, and then phonological awareness, the understanding that speech consists of smaller units, such as words, syllables, and phonemes.

The Standards state that kindergartners should recognize and produce rhyming words; blend and segment syllables in spoken words; blend and segment onsets and rimes; isolate and pronounce initial, medial, and final sounds; and add or substitute individual sounds in simple, one-syllable words.

First graders should be able to distinguish long- from short-vowel sounds; orally blend sounds; isolate initial, medial-vowel, and final sounds; and segment single-syllable words into their individual sounds.

Phonics. Phonics instruction teaches children the relationship between written letters and spoken sounds—the alphabetic principle—so that they can accurately and automatically decode new words.

Kindergartners should demonstrate a basic knowledge of one-to-one correspondences by producing the most frequent sound of each consonant and the sounds for the five major vowels, and identify different sounds of letters in similarly spelled words.

First graders should be able to decode phonetically regular words, know common digraphs and final *-e* and vowel team conventions, decode regular two-syllable words, read words with endings, and read grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.

Second graders should distinguish between long and short vowels in phonetically regular one-syllable words, know additional vowel teams, decode regularly spelled two-syllable words with long vowels, decode words with common prefixes and suffixes, identify words with different spellings but common spelling-sound correspondences (such as *ou*, *ow/ou/* and *oi*, *oy/oi/*), and recognize grade-appropriate irregularly spelled words.

Fluency. Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately, smoothly, and with natural expression. It provides a bridge between word recognition and comprehension. Readers can devote more cognitive energy to understanding what they read when they are fluent in word recognition.

The Standards require kindergartners to read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding.

First and second graders should be able to read on-level text with purpose and understanding; read orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings; and use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.


What Superkids Does: Foundational Skills

Print concepts. Instruction in print concepts is an essential part of *Happily Ever After*, the pre-K component of Superkids. In *Happily Ever After*, children learn to recognize and name the letters of the alphabet. In kindergarten, children learn to print the upper- and lowercase form of each letter as they learn to associate the letters with sounds. The Daily Routine for Handwriting in kindergarten through second grade is used to reinforce children's letter recognition and formation and also their knowledge of sentence conventions, such as directionality, punctuation, capitalization, and spacing.

Phonological awareness. *Happily Ever After*, the pre-K level of the Superkids program, develops auditory discrimination and phonological awareness through activities in the Daily Routines. Superkids continues to develop these skills with a careful and thorough sequence of instruction. Thus, Superkids students are prepared to develop phonemic awareness and learn letter-sound correspondences in kindergarten and first grade. In kindergarten, the Superkids *Building Blocks of Reading* booklet teaches children to identify words as the same or different, compare word lengths, and listen for words in sentences. In addition, *Building Blocks* provides a variety of rhyming, syllable, and onset-rime activities. These activities are designed to be used at the beginning of kindergarten, but can be used throughout the year with children who need more support with reading readiness phonological skills.

Phonics. Systematic, explicit phonics instruction is the organizing foundational principle of the Superkids program. Letter-sound associations are introduced in a clearly defined sequence and at a pace that's manageable for students. In kindergarten, children are taught one sound for each letter. Learning one sound for each letter removes the element of guessing and enables children to develop strong word-attack and blending skills. Late in kindergarten, after children have developed a strong decoding habit with short-vowel words, they learn that vowels also have a long sound. Although children develop this awareness of long vowels in kindergarten, they are not expected to decode or write words with long-vowel sounds until first grade. In first grade, students learn consonant digraphs (such as *sh*, *ch*, and *th*), long-vowel patterns, *r*-controlled vowels, and other variant vowels (such as *y* as a vowel and vowel diphthongs *oi*, *ou*, and more). In second grade, children review the major sound-spellings taught in the previous grades and learn additional phonetic and structural skills, such as syllable chunks and morphological units.

Explicit instruction for each letter-sound always involves these multimodal steps: hear it, see it, say it, write it. As students are learning to use the alphabetic code to decode (read) words, they are also using this knowledge to encode (spell) them. Daily Routines at the beginning of lessons give children



practice decoding and encoding words with newly taught letter-sounds. Practice and review are carefully built into the Student Books so that children have continuous reinforcement of letter-sound correspondences taught earlier.

Engaging, decodable texts are provided in kindergarten and first grade so that children can practice their phonics skills with text that matches the progression of these skills. (See pages 21–22 for more information about the importance of decodable text in the primary grades.)

By the end of kindergarten, children can read and spell hundreds of phonetically regular words, including 67 Dolch (high-frequency) words. By the end of first grade, children can read and spell thousands of phonetically and structurally regular words as well as all 220 Dolch words, many of which have irregular spellings. By the end of second grade, children expand their skills with longer, more complex words. Children who complete all levels of the Superkids program enter third grade having mastered the sound-symbol code that forms the foundation of written English.

Fluency. The Superkids program develops children’s automaticity in word recognition and their fluency with connected text. Through daily practice with decodable text, children learn to blend letter-sounds effortlessly and decode words quickly and accurately. They also learn to recognize by sight a number of high-frequency words (called Memory Words in the program). Specific fluency skills are explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced over and over again. Skills include reading with expression, with natural phrasing, with appropriate stress, and at an appropriate rate, as well as observing punctuation and using proper pitch and volume.

In kindergarten and first grade, children practice fluency skills using the on-level decodable texts in the core materials. Decodable library books for these grades provide additional reading materials at three levels—easy, on-level, and challenging. The leveling of the books ensures that every child can practice with text that’s just right for building fluency. In second grade, children practice fluency skills using both decodable stories and texts with uncontrolled vocabulary. Recorded readings of texts in each grade provide models of fluent reading for children to listen to and read along with. As a result of this thorough, careful, and systematic instruction, children enter third grade with the ability to read accurately, fluently, and with understanding.

★ Comprehending Literature

The Standards call for children to read from a wide variety of high-quality, increasingly challenging literary texts. As children read stories, poems, and plays, they gain literary and cultural knowledge and become familiar with various text structures and elements.

What the Standards Say: Comprehending Literature

The college and career readiness anchor standards for reading focus on key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas, and text complexity. (Text complexity is discussed on pages 18–20.)

Key ideas and details. Children in the primary grades should be able to ask and answer questions about key details in a text; describe characters, settings, and major events in a story; use illustrations to aid their understanding; and retell stories in detail. First and second graders should also demonstrate understanding of the central message or lesson of a story.

Craft and structure. To develop a sense of author’s craft, first graders should identify in stories and poems words and phrases that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses. Second graders should describe how words and phrases supply rhythm and meaning in stories and poems. Children should start understanding text structure in kindergarten by recognizing common types of texts and understanding the role of author and illustrator. By first grade, children should be able to explain the major differences between stories and informational texts. Second graders should have an understanding of the overall structure of a story and be able to describe what happens in the beginning, middle, and end.

Integration of knowledge and ideas. In kindergarten and first grade, children should be able to compare and contrast adventures and experiences of characters in stories. In second grade, they should compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story by different authors from different cultures. In all grades, children should recognize the relationship between the illustrations and the story. First and second graders should use details in illustrations to help them describe the characters, setting, and events in a story.

What Superkids Does: Comprehending Literature

The Superkids program develops children's understanding of stories read aloud to them and stories they read themselves. Lessons begin by building background and vocabulary, and activating children's prior knowledge. As a story is read aloud or children read it together in a small group, the teacher asks comprehension questions for children to discuss and answer. The questions, provided in the story lessons, help ensure that children understand key details about the characters, setting, and events in a story. Some questions require children to respond based on evidence from the text. Other questions require children to make inferences. Suggestions for think-alouds are also included to help teachers model comprehension strategies, such as self-monitoring and asking and answering your own questions. After reading the whole story, discussions are designed so that children demonstrate understanding of the message of the story, give and support opinions about the story, and make connections to their own experiences.

In first and second grades, a specific comprehension skill is explicitly taught and applied to each story or book during and after reading. Skills include understanding characters and setting, sequencing events, recognizing plot, understanding a story's lesson, recognizing rhyme and rhythm, and more. Other story follow-up activities give children practice summarizing and retelling stories. Second graders also compare and contrast stories.

★ Comprehending Informational Text

The primary purpose of informational text is to convey factual information about the world. Informational text includes books about history, social studies, science, and the arts. Information presented in other formats, such as graphs, charts, or maps, or from digital sources, is considered informational text as well. By reading a variety of informational texts on a range of topics, children build the background and vocabulary that enable them to be better readers in all content areas. Learning to read and comprehend informational text is critical for children's success in school and throughout their lives.

What the Standards Say: Informational Text

The Standards for comprehending informational text are categorized in the same way as the Standards for comprehending literature: key ideas and details, craft and structure, integration of knowledge and ideas, and text complexity. (Text complexity is discussed on pages 18–20.)

Key ideas and details. Children in the primary grades should be able to ask and answer questions about a text, identify the main topic, retell key details, and describe the connection between two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text. By second grade, they should be able to describe connections between historical events, scientific ideas, or steps in technical procedures presented in a text.

Craft and structure. Children should ask and answer questions to help determine the meaning of words and phrases in a text. Kindergartners should be able to identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book. They should also be able to name the author and illustrator and define the role of each. First and second graders should know and use various text features to locate key facts or information in a text and be able to distinguish between information provided in pictures and information provided by words in the text. Second graders should also be able to identify the author's main purpose for a text.

Integration of knowledge and ideas. With prompting and support, kindergartners should be able to describe the relationship between illustrations and the text. First graders should use illustration and details in a text to describe its key ideas, and second graders should be able to explain how specific images contribute to and clarify a text. With more support in kindergarten and less in first and second grades, children should identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text and identify basic similarities in and differences between two texts on the same topic.

What Superkids Does: Informational Text

The Superkids program develops children's understanding of informational texts read aloud to them and texts they read themselves. Lessons begin by building background and vocabulary, and activating children's prior knowledge. As a text is read aloud or as children read it together in a small group, the teacher asks comprehension questions for children to discuss and answer. The questions, provided in the lessons, ensure that children understand the main idea and key details of the text. Some questions require children to provide answers based on evidence from the text, while others require children to make inferences from the text. Some questions have direct answers that children can find in the text, often by using text features. Other questions require children to make connections between pieces of information in the text. Suggestions for think-alouds are also included to help teachers model comprehension strategies, such as looking at the pictures and thinking about what makes sense. After reading a text, children are asked to give and support their opinions about the information they read and to make connections to other things they know about the world.

In first and second grades, a specific comprehension skill is explicitly taught and applied to an informational text after it is read. Skills include identifying the main idea and supporting details, summarizing key information, using pictures and text features, comparing and contrasting, recognizing cause and effect, and understanding an author's purpose and reasons.

★ Writing

Writing is a complex process that requires a combination of high-level cognitive skills, plus handwriting, spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills. Students must learn to effectively use writing as a way of offering and supporting opinions, conveying real and imagined events, and showing understanding of the various subject areas they are studying.

What the Standards Say: Writing

Text types and purposes. Children in the primary grades should write opinion pieces, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives. Kindergartners are expected to use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose simple versions of these texts. First and second graders should be able to write opinion pieces that name a topic, state an opinion, and give supporting reasons. Their informative/explanatory texts should name a topic and give some facts. In their narratives, they should recount two or more sequenced events, provide some details, and use temporal words. First graders should be able to provide a sense of closure in their writing, while second graders should provide concluding statements or sections, elaborate with details, and include facts and definitions to develop their points.

Production and distribution of writing. With guidance and support from adults, children in all three grades should be able to focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, add details to strengthen their writing, and use digital tools to produce and publish writing. Second graders are also expected to revise and edit their writing with the help of adults and peers.

Research to build and present knowledge. At all three grade levels, children should participate in shared research and writing projects. With adult help, children in kindergarten and first grade should be able to recall or gather information to answer a question. Second graders should be able to do this independently.

What Superkids Does: Writing

The Superkids program provides explicit, systematic writing instruction and practice appropriate for children’s developmental stages. Instruction in each grade includes teacher modeling of skills and different types of texts, think-alouds to show how good writers think, and individualized instruction to help children develop as writers. In kindergarten through second grade, children write a wide variety of texts for different purposes, including opinion pieces (opinion paragraphs about given topics and reviews of stories, books, and shows), informative/explanatory texts (facts about a topic, how-to instructions, research reports), and narratives (story extensions, personal and imagined stories), plus descriptions, poems, and friendly letters. Kindergartners use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose their pieces. First and second graders are taught how to support their opinions with reasons, supply facts in their informational texts, sequence events in narratives, and provide closure for their writing.

In all grades, children share their writing regularly and are encouraged to revise and edit their work. First and second graders learn how to use the writing process—planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing—to create finished pieces. They typically work with their teacher or a partner to revise and edit their writing. They learn to use revision and editing checklists to help them improve their writing.

Children participate in shared research and writing activities in all three grades. They also learn how to answer questions using information recalled from their own experiences or gathered through research.

★ Language

Although the Common Core State Standards consider the language standards a separate strand, skills related to the effective use of language, conventions, and vocabulary are critical to the development of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

What the Standards Say: Language

The language Standards are categorized into conventions of standard English (grammar, usage, and mechanics), vocabulary acquisition and use, and knowledge of language. (Standards for knowledge of language don't begin until second grade.)

Conventions of standard English. Children in the primary grades should demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. At each grade level, they should increase their knowledge of different parts of speech so that they can produce and expand different types of sentences.

When writing, children should also demonstrate command of the standard conventions for capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. They should spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions.

Vocabulary acquisition and use. Children in the primary grades should determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade-level reading and content. Kindergartners should use common inflections for clues to the meaning of an unknown word. First and second graders should also choose appropriate strategies, such as context clues or structural analysis, to help them determine word meanings.

With adult guidance, kindergartners and first graders should explore word relationships and nuances in word meanings. Second graders should be able to demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances.

In each of the primary grades, children should use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts. First graders should use common conjunctions to signal simple relationships and second graders should use adjectives and adverbs in descriptions.

Knowledge of language. Second graders should be able to compare formal and informal uses of English.

What Superkids Does: Language

Conventions of standard English. In the Superkids program, grammar, usage, and mechanics skills are taught and then practiced during class discussions about reading materials, writing assignments, and Daily Routines (Handwriting, Dictation, and Spelling). Daily Routines help children develop critical skills and provide the teacher with a quick assessment of skills just taught. Grammar and usage instruction in kindergarten covers nouns (singular, plural, proper, and singular possessive), verbs, adjectives, and the pronouns *I* and *you*. In first grade, children are taught more pronouns, verb endings and tenses, comparative and superlative adjectives, adverbs with *-ly*, and common conjunctions. In second grade, children are taught additional noun and adjective endings, plus irregular plurals, verbs, and comparative and superlative adjectives. Children's speech and writing at each grade level is expected to reflect their growing knowledge of grammar and usage.

Mechanics instruction begins in kindergarten as children are taught about complete sentences, different kinds of sentences (declarative, interrogative, and exclamatory), and corresponding end marks. Kindergartners also learn to capitalize the first word in a sentence and special names. In first and second grades, the program teaches additional rules for capitalization and punctuation. First graders are taught how to edit their own writing to fix errors in mechanics and spelling. Second graders practice editing every day in Daily Routines and are expected to edit their own writing with greater independence as the school year progresses.

Spelling is taught and reinforced every day in the Superkids program. In kindergarten through second grade, children learn to encode (spell) using the letter-sounds they've been taught to decode (read). Superkids includes a robust spelling program in each grade level. In every unit, children learn the spellings of phonetically regular words, and they learn to decode and spell high-frequency phonetically irregular words. Children are then expected to apply their knowledge of letter-sound associations, spelling patterns, and Memory Words when spelling words during Daily Dictation Routines, Daily Spelling Routines, weekly spelling tests, and in writing assignments.



Vocabulary acquisition and use. Each grade level of the Superkids program provides explicit vocabulary instruction based on grade-level reading of fictional and informational text. Before children listen to or read a text, they are taught specific words that are important to understanding the text. During reading, children are asked questions that help them use in-text clues to determine the meaning of other unfamiliar words and idioms within the text.

The Superkids program teaches vocabulary indirectly through everyday experiences with language and directly through instruction on specific words and word-learning strategies. In kindergarten and first grade, lively songs and richly illustrated scenes in the Superkids student materials prompt conversations based on the Superkids characters and categories of words related to the characters' interests. These conversations provide multiple exposures to vocabulary words and create a common background that helps ensure that all students, including those with limited language, will be able to understand the vocabulary in the reading materials.

After reading, words and concepts related to the text are used as the starting point for teaching about relationships between words. Children engage in both oral and written activities to categorize words and learn about synonyms, antonyms, and multiple-meaning words. First and second graders are taught word-learning strategies, including using in-text clues, analyzing word parts, and using a dictionary.

★ Speaking and Listening

Speaking and listening are essential communication skills that children need for success in school and throughout their lives. Speaking allows children to demonstrate what they know, express their thoughts and ideas, and connect with others. Through active listening, they can understand others and learn about our world.


What the Standards Say: Speaking and Listening

Comprehension and collaboration. Children in the primary grades should participate in collaborative conversations about grade-appropriate topics and texts, following agreed-upon rules for discussions. They should be able to ask and answer questions about text or information presented orally.

Presentation of knowledge and ideas. Kindergartners and first graders should be able to describe people, places, things, and events and use drawings or other visual displays to help clarify ideas. Second graders should be able to tell a story or recount an experience and create audio recordings of stories or poems. At all grades, children speak audibly and express ideas clearly. First and second graders should produce complete sentences when appropriate to the task or situation.

What Superkids Does: Speaking and Listening

In the Superkids program, speaking and listening skills are integrated into guided reading lessons. Before reading a fictional or informational text, children participate in collaborative conversations that activate their prior knowledge. While children read the text in a small group, their teacher asks them questions (which are included in the lessons) to engage them in discussion and guide their comprehension of the text. Children are also taught how and encouraged to ask their own questions to ensure they understand what they're reading. Additional questions discussed after reading help children connect the text to their own lives. Every unit also includes a Lasting Lesson that involves children in a collaborative conversation about an important lesson or life skill related to a text they just read.



Speaking and listening skills are also taught and reinforced during the expressive writing portion of the Superkids program. Children participate in shared writing activities in all grade levels, but most frequently in kindergarten. As they dictate sentences for their teacher to write, they are guided in expressing their ideas in complete sentences. In first and second grades, children are often asked to describe and recount experiences in a conversation with a partner before writing those ideas on paper. Partners must take turns listening and speaking as they engage in these conversations. After children finish a writing assignment, they are invited to share their writing and drawings or other visual pieces with the class. When presenting their work, they are expected to speak loudly enough so everyone can hear and to hold or display any visual pieces so everyone can see. When listening to others speak, children are expected to listen quietly and carefully. Afterward, they are encouraged to give the speaker positive feedback and ask questions to learn more or clarify their understanding.

Text Complexity

Text complexity describes how difficult a text is to read and comprehend. While reading demands in college, the workforce, and life in general have remained steady or increased over the last 50 years, K–12 texts have declined in complexity. Furthermore, little attention has been focused on students' ability to read complex texts independently. If children are to be ready for college and careers, they must be able to read complex literature and informational texts by the end of high school.

What the Standards Say: Text Complexity

The Common Core State Standards use a three-part model to determine text complexity.

- **Qualitative** factors of text complexity relate to the levels of meaning, structure, and language in the text, plus the knowledge demands required of the reader.
- **Quantitative** measures evaluate the readability of a text based on word frequency and length, sentence length, and text length and cohesion.
- **Reader and task considerations** include the reader's motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as the purpose for reading a particular text.



The Standards' model of text complexity

Because the ability to decode words accurately and automatically is of primary importance in kindergarten and first grade, the Standards acknowledge that K–1 tasks are not suited to quantitative measure. (CCSS Appendix A, page 10) Thus, the requirement for kindergarten simply states that children should actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding. For first grade, the Standards require that children should read, with prompting and support, prose, poetry, and informational texts of appropriate complexity for first grade.


The Standards' text complexity requirements formally begin in second grade. Second graders should end the school year able to read and comprehend literature (stories and poems) and informational texts (history/social studies, science, and technical texts) in the grades 2–3 text complexity band.

What Superkids Does: Text Complexity

Kindergarten. Because kindergartners can understand more complex information than they can read independently, the program provides informational text called *Super Smart*, which is read aloud by the teacher as it is projected on an interactive whiteboard. *Super Smart* is written above the level of complexity that children can read on their own and covers science and social studies concepts such as how food grows, the invention of the wheel, and the similarities and differences between how humans and animals care for their young. *Super Smart* uses interactive features, animation, and embedded videos to help kindergartners learn about informational concepts and become familiar with how information is presented in print and multimedia.

The fictional stories children read in the Superkids program grow in complexity along with children's decoding and comprehension skills. All children read the decodable stories, poems, and plays written at grade level to match the phonics skills that have been explicitly taught. Controlling the vocabulary in this way assures students have the tools and confidence they need to access the words and comprehend the text they're reading. The decodable stories in the core program and the leveled library books increase in length and include longer words and sentences and more text per page.

First grade. The program introduces *Super-Duper* in first grade, a decodable informational text in a mini-magazine format that children can read themselves. *Super-Duper* teaches about complex science and social studies topics, from muscles to castles to tools. Photographs and different types of text features, such as headings, captions, and diagrams, help convey the concepts.



As is the case in kindergarten, the stories, poems, and plays children read in first grade grow in complexity along with children's decoding and comprehension skills. The decodable stories in the Readers and leveled library books increase in length and include longer words and sentences as children progress through the program.

Second grade. By second grade, students have the strong foundational skills they need to be able to read and comprehend literature and informational text without phonetically controlled vocabulary. Children are presented with longer, more complex informational text in *SUPER* magazine. *SUPER* is a full-feature magazine with articles about science, social studies, history, and art, plus an advice column and healthy snack recipes. The articles in each issue explore a theme in depth, so children can build their knowledge about the subject from different points of view. The articles use uncontrolled vocabulary and are written at second- to third-grade levels of difficulty.

Second graders also read a wide variety of literature in the Book Club for Super Kids, including realistic chapter books, historical fiction, folktales, fantasies, mysteries, and poetry, with readability levels within the grades 2–3 complexity band. The books challenge second graders with more complex levels of meaning, structures, language, and knowledge demands.

The Importance of Decodable Text in K–1

Skilled reading happens so quickly and efficiently that it seems as though words are recognized as whole units. But science suggests the brains of skilled readers actually read every letter of every word, assembling each letter into word parts, then whole words, finally connecting the assembled word to meaning. This happens very quickly—in as little as 150 milliseconds for a word.¹ We now know that the “immediacy of reading is an illusion based on the extreme automaticity of these word-assembly steps, which operate outside our conscious awareness.”²

To build the neural connections essential to achieve automaticity, beginning readers need to be taught the relationship between letters and sounds—phonics—*explicitly* and *systematically*. Phonics skills are best practiced with text that matches the letter-sounds as children are learning them. This kind of text is called phonetically controlled, or *decodable*, text. Decodable text in the early grades is critical in developing strong readers—readers who are college- and career-ready.

What the Standards Say: Decodable Text

The phonics and word-recognition Standards require primary-grade children to know and apply phonics and word analysis skills when decoding words. The Standards do not provide quantitative measures of text complexity in kindergarten and first grade because they say that children in these grades should be focused on understanding the alphabetic code, that letters in the alphabet stand for sounds.

What Superkids Does: Decodable Text

All early reading programs contain phonics instruction. But it takes a careful review of curriculum materials to determine whether reading instruction is truly phonics-based, whether letter-sound relationships are taught in an orderly way across all program components and supported by text containing the letters children have learned. The Superkids program teaches the relationship between letters and sounds explicitly and systematically and introduces specific letter-sounds before children meet them in a text. Thus, Superkids builds the decoding habit so that children have the tools they need to unlock unknown words. The program’s decodable text allows children to get reliable results when they meet new words and reinforces their mastery of and automatic reliance on decoding. Reliable, automatic decoding is a critical strategy as readers encounter more sophisticated text with multisyllabic and unknown words.

Beginning readers can become confused if they are presented with both decodable and nondecodable text when they are learning to read. That's why the Superkids program contains only decodable text in kindergarten and first grade. By reading decodable texts, children become strong, confident readers who learn the habit of decoding rather than guessing at words. The Superkids decodable materials in kindergarten and first grade include fictional stories, poems, plays, and informational texts. In second grade, children continue developing decoding automaticity by reading short decodable stories every day, but the training wheels come off. Children's deep knowledge of the alphabetic code allows them to spend most of their time reading *SUPER* magazine and trade books that weren't written with decodability rules.

The goal of effective primary-grade reading instruction is not only to teach children how to read, but to foster a love of reading in every child. Children who experience early reading success *want* to read more. This success leads to confident, independent, and engaged readers—readers who are capable of meeting the demands of the Common Core State Standards. The Superkids Reading Program provides the tools primary-grade teachers need to ensure every child's success.

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1. Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).
 2. Stanislas Dhaene, *Reading in the Brain: The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009).

Helping Parents Understand the Common Core State Standards

You'll likely get questions from parents about the Common Core State Standards. The Council of the Great City Schools has created parent roadmaps for each grade. These roadmaps explain what children should be learning in each grade, provide examples of tasks children are expected to perform, and offer ways parents can help their child meet the goals of the Standards. Visit www.cgcs.org to download the roadmaps.



ROWLAND READING FOUNDATION

Rowland Reading Foundation is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving reading instruction in the primary grades.

The Foundation publishes the Superkids Reading Program, a phonics-based core reading program for kindergarten through second grade. Superkids has achieved exceptional results across all demographics throughout the United States. For more information about Rowland Reading Foundation or Superkids, please visit us at

www.superkidsreading.org.

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