

COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY GUIDES

Grades K-6

Read Alouds | Shared Reading | Small Group Reading Instruction |
Vocabulary | Fluency | Writing | **Phonological Awareness** |
Phonics | Oral Language | Independent Reading



For more resources and Professional Learning Opportunities visit: aplc.ca

To contact our office directly email: info@aplc.ca

OVERVIEW

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS is essential for developing a child's understanding of words and sounds in words. It focuses on recognizing and manipulating sounds (phonemic awareness) in spoken language. Phonics focuses on the relationship between sounds and letters in written language.

Phonological awareness is broader in scope and includes phonemic awareness as well as units of sound larger than the phoneme, such as syllable, onset and rimes. It includes the ability to separate sentences into words, words into syllables, and onset and rimes.

Phonemic awareness is a specific skill that is part of phonological awareness. It includes the ability to recognize that words are made up of individual sounds and the ability to manipulate sounds. It is the ability to segment sounds in a word and to blend segmented sounds into words.

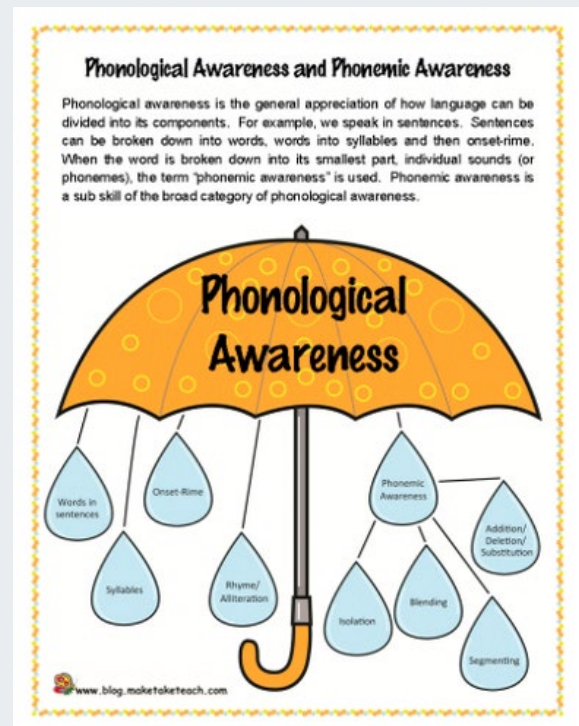
As part of Phonological Awareness, instruction in Phonemic Awareness should be explicit and systematic. The goal of phonemic awareness is to manipulate sounds by segmenting the sounds in words and blending sounds to create words.

Phonics is the association of the phonemes (sounds) to graphemes (letters). See *the APLC Phonics Comprehensive Literacy Guide*.

Phonological Awareness/Phonemic Awareness: highly correlated with success in beginning reading but are not sufficient in and of themselves to guarantee reading success. These belong as part of a comprehensive approach to literacy. (Adams, 1990; Yopp, 1995; Ehri & Nunes, 2002: [National Reading Panel, 2000](#); Cunningham, 2005).

See also:

- [Louisa Moats, Speech to Print](#) - Language Essentials for Teachers, 2020
- Holly Lane, University of Florida: [How Children Learn to Read Words - Ehri's Phases](#)



CURRICULUM CORRELATIONS

Phonological Awareness Organizing Idea

Foundational literacy is supported by the ability to identify and manipulate sounds in oral language.

- **Kindergarten Learning Outcome:** Children experiment with sounds in words.
- **Grade 1 Learning Outcome:** Students manipulate sounds in words in oral language.
- **Grade 2 Learning Outcome:** Students apply understandings of how sounds create meaning in oral language.

INSTRUCTIONAL PROCESSES & STRATEGIES

Implementation Science: The "Formula for Success" (Fixen, et. al., 2010, National Implementation Research Network, 2013) helps explain why "intentional implementation" is important:

- Effective practice that follows the evidence to align instruction to that evidence:
 - Enact principles of evidence-aligned instruction

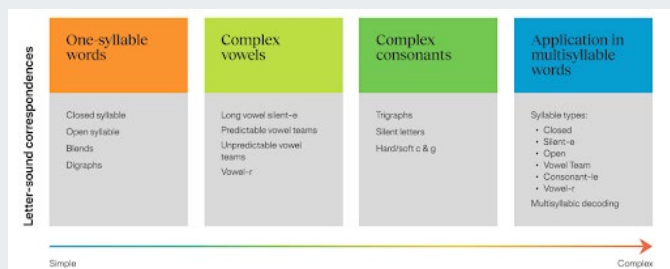
- Acquire effective instructional resources and tools to support that instruction
 - Effective practice includes frameworks such as [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support](#) (MTSS) and grouping students
- Effective implementation (including professional learning and ongoing coaching)

Phonological Awareness is integrated into active learning through explicit instruction, rather than through isolated phonics (e.g., worksheets/worksbooks).

Louisa Moats in her book, ([Speech to Print](#), 2020, Brookes Publishing) noted the “Seven Recommended Principles and Practices of Instruction”, of which the first three below focus on developing phonological awareness (and phonics) for building reading skills:

- “Explicit teaching of phonological skills, sound-symbol correspondence (phonics), fluent word recognition and text reading, vocabulary, text comprehension, and literature appreciation is necessary from when children begin school until they become proficient readers and writers.
- Phoneme awareness instruction, when linked to systematic decoding and spelling instruction, is key to preventing reading failure in children who come to school without these prerequisite skills.
- It is better to teach code of written English systematically and explicitly than it is to teach it randomly, indirectly or incidentally. The units for instruction (sound, syllable, morpheme, word) should vary according to students’ reading and spelling skill.

A Sample Continuum of Word Study (page 26)

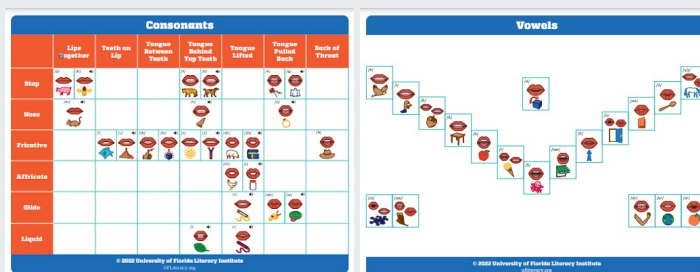


Examples of Material to Use for Phonemic Awareness/Phonological Awareness:

- [UFLI Foundations: An Explicit & Systematic Phonics Program](#) (8-step phonological awareness/phonics program focused on:
 - Phonemic Awareness
 - Visual Drill
 - Auditory Drill
 - Blending Drill
 - New Concept
 - Word Work
 - Irregular Words
 - Connected Text
- [Equipped for Reading Success](#), by David Kilpatrick, is a systematic phonemic awareness and word fluency program (K-12)
- [Heggerty](#)
- [Foundations/Just Words/Wilson Reading System](#)
- [Orton-Gillingham Approach](#)

Build a Sound Wall:

- [Transitioning from Word Walls to Sound Walls](#) Reading Rockets, Marjorie Bottari, 2024
- [The Key Sounds of English - How to Say 44 Phonemes and Blends](#), Sally Cole, Feb. 24, 2013 (video)
- [Sound Wall Materials: Consonant & Vowel Sound Walls](#): UFLI Foundations, 2020



(Images: UFLI Foundations)

Letter/Sound Correspondences (Alberta Education, 2021)

- [Grade 1: 60 Most Frequent Letter/Sounds Correspondences](#)
- [Grade 2: 120 Most Frequent Letter/Sound Correspondences](#)

Phonological Skill Development

- [The Development of Phonological Skills](#) - in this article you will find:
 - › Ages at which 80%-90% of typical students have achieved phonological skills
 - › Basic to advanced development of skills:
 - » Word Awareness
 - » Responsiveness to Rhyme & Alliteration
 - » Syllable Awareness
 - » Onset & Rhyme Manipulation
 - » Phonemic Awareness

(Moats & Tolman, retrieved March 2025)

High Frequency Words (and Tier 1 & 2 words)

High-frequency words are words that appear frequently in text and many of these words are phonetically irregular.

- It will be helpful to teach the sound/symbols that are represented, rather than memorization
- Words are temporarily irregular until the sounds are taught and some sounds are “permanently irregular” (UFLI Foundations, “Heart Words”, page 31)
- Implementing activities that support sound/symbol instruction through direct, explicit instruction, will support automaticity of sight words for decoding and encoding

Alberta Education ELAL Curriculum has lists that identify 300 High Frequency Words and are assigned to Kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, Grade 3. To view this document, you must have a log-in for [English Language Arts & Literature and go to “Explore Resources”](#) where you can look up “High Frequency Words” to find your grade.

- [High Frequency Word Lists-K, 1, 2](#) (Alberta Education, ELAL): These lists are only accessible through a log-in onto the Alberta Education K-6 site.
- [Irregular “Heart” Words \(UFLI Foundations\), 2024, University of Florida Literacy Institute](#). “Heart Words” are words that cannot be easily decoded until the sound/symbols have been taught. Words are “temporarily irregular” until they are taught and there are a few words that are “permanently

irregular). Heart Words are taught throughout the UFLI program.

- [Word Study for Phonics, Spelling and Vocabulary Instruction \(formally Words Their Way\) 2024. Bear, Templeton, Johnston. Pearson U.S.](#) provides pacing and sequencing guides as well as lists of patterns, high frequency words and words where students frequently experience difficulty for all levels of spellers. Consider which words should be prioritized for students, e.g., frequently occurring words, conversational vocabulary, and formal, academic vocabulary.
- Three Tiers of Vocabulary: This is not a list meant for Phonics or Phonological Instruction. Words can be categorized into [Three Tiers of Vocabulary \(Alberta Education\)](#). These do not need to be taught as Phonics Instruction, but some words, particularly in Tier 1, may be applicable. The focus for these words would come under [Vocabulary in the Alberta Education ELAL Curriculum](#):
 - › Tier 1 features basic every-day vocabulary (e.g., dog, table, clock, food).
 - › Tier 2 can be academic words, but not discipline specific; more likely to be encountered in classrooms rather than conversations and should be taught directly (e.g., relative, analyze, and define).
 - › Tier 3 involves low frequency, discipline specific vocabulary (e.g. photosynthesis and circumference)

SNAPSHOT

“The ultimate goal of reading instruction is that the reader attains fluency and comprehends text.”

P. Antonacci & C. O’Callaghan, 50 Research-Based Strategies for K-8 Learners-Promoting Literacy Development, Sage, 2012

Systematic, explicit instruction in letter-sound relationships is considered best practice in phonics instruction and builds word recognition and fluency... what is referred to as, “breaking the code”.

Pressley, M (2006) Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching. New York, Guilford (Links to the entire book on Google Books)

K. Norman and R. Calfee (2004). Tile test: A hand-on approach for assessing phonics in early grades. The Reading Teacher, 58, 42-53.

PROGRAMS FOR DEVELOPING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

Read alouds and literature are an invaluable support to develop phonological awareness. There are a number of programs which focus on phonological awareness. Some programs will only address the phonemic piece

- Some programs will address both the phonemic and the phonics piece
- Some programs will only address the phonics piece
- Decodable text is a necessary component for students to practice with and achieve mastery and only some programs include decodable text for students to read
- It is important to know that any one program will not address all Alberta Curriculum outcomes (e.g., vocabulary, comprehension, etc.). We need to be aware of the materials we use and the purpose we use them for.

Decodable Text

- [Using Decodable Books](#) (Reading Rockets)
- [Decodable Text Sources](#) (The Reading League)
This site organizes free and paid by age resources.
- [Free Decodable Texts for Each Phonics Skill](#) (Reading Universe)

Systematic Programs

- [UFLI Foundations](#): Systematic Phonics Program, University of Florida Literacy Institute
- [Foundational Literacy Skills](#) (Pearson Canada)
Various materials including phonological awareness and phonics
- [Phonics for Reading](#), Anita Archer (2023). Includes a phonological component. This program is meant for older students with reading challenges including: EAL, diagnosed learning challenges, intervention past grade 4.
- [Section II – Essential Strategies for Teaching Phonics](#) (P. Antonacci & C. O’Callaghan, 50 Research-Based Strategies for K-8 Learners–Promoting Literacy Development, Sage, 2012 – includes phonological and phonics components

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING PHONICS

When identifying which phonological awareness activities would be appropriate for each grade, consult the KUSPs (Knowledge, Understandings and Skills and Procedures) in the [ELAL Curriculum](#).

The Knowledge and Skills and Procedures will focus on curriculum needs and activities (KUSPs) that support students in meeting the Learning Outcome. Below you will find one KUSP example from each grade level:

Kindergarten KUSP Example:

KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS & PROCEDURES
Sounds can be identified at the beginning, middle, or ending of words.	Words are made up of sounds (phonemes).	Identify sounds at the beginning of spoken words. Identify sounds in the middle of spoken words. Identify sounds at the ending of spoken words.

Grade One KUSP Example:

KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS & PROCEDURES
A series of words or phrases that begin with the same sound can be combined for humorous effect (alliteration) (e.g., tongue twisters).	Sounds in words (phonemes) can be repeated for effect.	Generate alliterative words. Generate alliterative phrases.

Grade Two KUSP Example:

KNOWLEDGE	UNDERSTANDING	SKILLS & PROCEDURES
Consonant blends can be separated into their individual sounds. Consonant blends can be located anywhere in words.	Words can be separated (segmented) into syllables or sounds (phonemes).	Segment sounds in words that have five or more phonemes. Identify phonemes in words that have three or more syllables. Segment sounds in words that have consonant blends.

The following Activities for Phonological/Phonemic Awareness can be used to complement curriculum work and can be used for literacy centres or incorporated into daily practice:

Use a variety of activities with students to orally practice: recognize, hear, identify, and make and break words into parts. Centres could include such activities as:

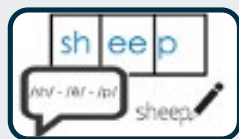
- A sample of building word lessons and word sorts and is also shared in the APLC
- [Phonics Curriculum Guide](#)
- Visit this resource site with the work of Wiley Blevins, [A Fresh Look at Phonics](#), 2016.
- “Roll & Read” game (S. Hardman, 2023): This is a video to show how to do the [UFLI Foundations “Roll & Read” game](#) (scroll to the bottom to

"Compiled Lesson Resources")

- Rhyming games such as memory, bingo, rhyme search, and scavenger hunts
- Read poems or stories with predictable rhyming words or patterns
- Listen to and sing rhyming songs
- Use kinesthetic activities (e.g. step, jump or throw a ball for each syllable)
- Use manipulatives to represent sounds in a word
- Say a word and students identify the beginning, ending, or medial sound in the word ex.
- In order to review skills taught, weekly sentence dictations and review of new phonological concepts taught as spelling words, are part of the assessment in phonological processing programs and directly connected to lessons taught.
- Set up words to review in a series of lines (words with new skill, words with review skills, and some sentences.) Read each sentence aloud, have students repeat and then have them write sentences as you circulate and offer assistance. Then write correct answer on the board and students can self-check. This is not intended as a summative assessment.

Elkonin Boxes

1. Elkonin box is used to break apart sounds
 - › /sh/ /ee/ /p/ consists of three phonemes
2. Ask student(s) to repeat the word.
3. Draw "boxes" or squares on a piece of paper, chalkboard, or dry-erase board, with one box for each syllable or phoneme.
4. Have the child count the number of **phonemes** (sounds) in the word, not the number of letters.
 - › For example, 'sheep' has three phonemes and will use three boxes. /sh/, /ee/, /p/



HEARING AND MANIPULATING SOUNDS

Rhyme Providing

- Say a word that rhymes with ...

Rhyme Categorization

- Do these words rhyme?

Sound Providing

- What sound do you hear at the beginning of ... ?
- What vowel sound do you hear in ... ?
- What sound do you hear at the end of ... ?

Sound Categorization

- Is there an /f/ in ...
- Which word begins with ... ?
- Which word has the same beginning sound as ... ?
- Which word has the same vowel sound as ... ?
- Which word has the same ending sound as ... ?
- Which word does not begin the same as the others?
- Which word does not end the same as the others?

Blending

- compound words
- syllables
- phonemes

Deletion

- compound words
- syllables
- phonemes

Segmentation

- sentences
- syllables
- phonemes

Substitution

- compound words
- syllables
- phonemes - initial, medial, final

DESIGNER OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TIPS

- Research tells us that phonemic awareness is the primary indicator of readiness for reading instruction, as well as a reliable predictor of future success in reading. Since phonemic awareness is an awareness of (and competency in) oral language, it follows that the more a child practices oral language, the stronger their phonemic awareness grows, and the more ready he or she is for phonic connections and ultimately written language (Middendorf, C. (2009). Building oral language skills. New York, NY:Scholastic).
- When skill deficiencies are identified. Appropriate intervention efforts should be set in motion; assuming that time (i.e., general maturation)

and/or increased oral language ability will lead to adequate early literacy achievement appears misguided. Instruction and intervention are the keys to learning; time or maturation alone is not. (Scheule, Spencer, Barako-Arndt, & Guillot, 2007)

Basic implementation would look like this...

- Play with sounds that may involve whole class or small group instruction and randomly choose target sounds/skills. This is an exploration focus good for kindergarten and early learning.

A more impactful implementation would look like this...

- Follow a program that offers a systematic, sequence order of sounds and patterns in order to teach these skills.
- Teach students to hear, articulate, and use sounds and patterns that focus on onset-rime, segmenting sounds in words and blending sounds to words, rhyming and alliteration.
- Use literacy centres where students can practice, learn, and support one another and teachers can provide time to support intervention groups.

Someone who has the basics mastered and could go the extra mile might look like this...

- Use screening tools to effectively group students and differentiate instruction based on what they already know and where they still need support.
- Model good speech and clear articulations.
- Provide students opportunities to generate, sort, transfer, and manipulate patterns and phonemes with increasing complexity.
- Experiencing new words in connected texts, e.g., the word hop could be read in a text about frog life cycles.
- Advance to multi-syllabic words.

you which letters and sounds need more instruction and practice (Blevins, 2016).

Assessment is necessary in order to identify student needs to inform instruction and conduct progress monitoring.

Assessment of students' word knowledge can be done using informal spelling inventories and/or analysis of students' independent writing, however, it is important to assess using tools designed to diagnostically identify needs and successes. The following tools are used to identify phonics and sound/symbol (phonemic awareness) needs in K-3 classrooms (and older grades when needed):

- Literacy assessments: These tools combined together are referred to as the government provided literacy screening assessment. Details regarding their use in Kindergarten to Grade 3 are available on page 5 under the section titled "Administration of Government Provided Literacy and Numeracy Screening Assessments. (All of the following assessments can be accessed through the [Provincial Assessment Hub](#) through Learn Alberta and your login is required):
 - PAST: The Phonological Awareness Screening Test
 - LeNS: Letter Name-Sound Test
 - CC3: Castles and Coltheart 3 based on the Castles and Coltheart Reading Test 2 (CC2)
 - CORE Phonics Survey (CORE Learning)
- Other assessments are available including:
 - UFLI Spelling Assessment (UFLI Foundations Manual)
 - [Schonell Spelling](#) (requires sign-up)
 - [DIBELS, 8th Edition](#) Assessment materials (free edition), University of Oregon. *Note: Schools, school districts, and multi-district agencies may use the DIBELS materials (free) solely for internal educational use

PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

We need to monitor student growth in identifying letters and sounds over a longer period of time to check for mastery and retention. Assessments should be cumulative and longer as the year progresses. We should look at both accuracy and speed which can tell

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Early identification and remediation is critical. Identifying areas of need in decoding (reading) and encoding (writing) will support reading.
- If you suspect that a child has production or articulation errors, seek further support through your school. Some students may have poor speech perception, problems making appropriate inferences about phonological components of words to store them correctly or impaired sound rehearsals (Preston & Edwards, 2009)
- Alberta Health has developed a series of ["Talk Boxes" that provide tips to parents for children ages 5-12](#) – what to expect at each age and everyday tips for creating language-rich environments.
- Provide time that allows for sufficient practice of new skills and allows for time to review skills before introducing new ones (use literacy groups for practice).
- Targeted interventions should focus on phonological awareness skills to support the basic needs required for decoding/encoding and should not focus only on phonics. When providing interventions to struggling readers, offer a systematic approach where students build phonological skills to build encoding and decoding skills together with vocabulary comprehension to help create skilled readers.
- Exposure to words and practice reinforces new decoding skills and vocabulary. Practice using decodable books for targeting phonological awareness. Use daily read aloud books. Increase talk times in classrooms among students both during formal and informal learning times.
- Use assessment to inform instruction. Group students by identified needs to target/differentiate phonological awareness needs. Use materials that can support diverse needs through a systematic/sequential approach. Activities should provide differentiated levels of practice.
- Partner with families to extend the learning. Share with families skills learned in the classroom. Send home a backpack with activities, supplies and phonological games to facilitate interactions. Host

a school family literacy night. Encourage word play and rich conversations at home and in the car.

Text word game ideas to parents, include ideas in the monthly class newsletter or post on the class blog.

1. <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/family-community/talk-box-school-age.html>
 2. <http://pbskids.org/island/parents/>
 3. <http://www.readingrockets.org/audience/parents> (Growing Readers – monthly parent tip sheets)
 4. <https://pals.virginia.edu/parents-monthly-activity.html>
- Lack of teacher understanding. There are many guiding documents to help teachers determine the ideal order in which to teach phonemes, the correct way to pronounce sounds, and providing initial scaffolds to help students such as stretching sounds using hand symbols and using manipulatives such as Elkonin boxes and picture cards.
 - Overfocusing on rhyming and alliteration can be fun, but focusing instruction on blending, segmenting and manipulating phonemes has been shown to produce greater improvements in phonemic awareness and future reading achievement in young children. (Reutzel, 2015)
 - Learners will have developed phonological skills at various levels of difficulty. This phonological continuum might provide guidance for what needs to be reinforced next:

Phonological Elements and Levels of Difficulty				
Element	Easier → More Difficult			
Size of the Phonological Unit	word awareness	syllable awareness	onset and rime awareness	phonemic awareness
Phoneme Position	initial	final	medial	
Number of Phonemes	1-3 phonemes		more than 3 phonemes	
Phonological Properties	continuants, e.g., /m/, /n/, /l/		stop sounds, e.g., /t/, /d/, /p/	
Phonological Dimension	isolating	blending	segmenting	manipulating
Phonological Task (illustrated with rhyming)	identifying "Does dog rhyme with log?"	matching "Which one rhymes with dog? (cat, log)"	odddity "Which one doesn't rhyme: toy, cat, boy?"	producing "Give me a word that rhymes with dog."

Figure 3.4

FSIL002 | First Steps in Literacy: Reading Resource Book
© Western Australian Minister for Education 2013. Published by Pearson Canada Inc.



SEE IT IN ACTION

[UFLI Foundations: Video Channel](#) (for lessons, strategies, etc.) 2021–current

[Susan Landry: Phonological Awareness Instruction](#)
Reading Rockets, Nov. 2, 2013

[Elkonin Boxes](#)
Rollins Resources, 2018

[Animated Literacy](#)
2020–2021

RESOURCES

University of Florida Literacy Institute & Holly Lane (2020). [UFLI Foundations: An Explicit & Systematic Phonics Program](#)

David Kilpatrick (2026). [Equipped for Reading Success](#). Casey & Kirsch Publishers. (ebook version published 2022).

[Heggerty](#) (2022). Literacy Resources, LLC.

[Foundations/Just Words/Wilson Reading System & Wilson Language Training](#) (1995–2025). Wilson Language Training.

[Orton-Gillingham Approach](#) (1995–2025). Orton Gillingham Academy

Louisa Cook Moats [“Speech to Print”](#) (2020). Brookes Publishing.

[Secret Stories](#) (2025). Marenem, Inc.

Blevins, W. (2016). [A fresh look at phonics: Common causes of failure and 7 ingredients for success](#). Corwin Literacy.

Larson, B. (1998). [Itchy’s Alphabet](#). 2025 (available in French and English)

S. Lloyd and S. Wernham (2024). [Jolly Phonics Canada](#), 2024 (available in French and English)

[Phonics and Phonemic Awareness](#) (2025). ILA (International Literacy Association). (Note: Articles on Phonics and Phonological Awareness for purchase)

[Florida Center for Reading Research](#) (2004–2010). Activities focused on the 5 Pillars of Reading (Phonemic Awareness, Phonological Awareness, Vocabulary, Fluency, Comprehension. Lessons are by U.S. grade levels. Includes lesson plans and learning tasks. Also includes [Digital Student Center Activities](#).

