Sadlier® School
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Seven Key Characteristics of Strong Phonics Instruction

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INTRODUCTION

The important role of phonics in building the necessary foundational skills for reading has been well documented by research over the past 60 years (Chall, 1967; Anderson et al, 1985; Adams, 1990; Snow et al, 1998; NICHD 2000; Hattie, 2012; Wong, 2015). But not all phonics instruction is equal. In addition to being explicit and systematic, strong phonics instruction must include seven key ingredients for student success (Blevins, 2017, 2011, 2006, 2001). These include the following and are cornerstones of the Sadlier *From Phonics to Reading™* program.

1 READINESS SKILLS

1. Phonemic Awareness
5 MIN

Oral Segmentation Tell children they will be segmenting, or breaking apart, words. Say the following words, one at a time: *bud*; *cup*; *hum*; *mud*; *fuss*; *nuts*; *runs*; *hums*. Ask children to segment each word sound by sound, then count the number of sounds. Provide corrective feedback by modeling how to segment the word using sound boxes and counters. Stretch the sounds in the word. Place one counter in each box as you move from sound to sound.

1. Phonemic Awareness
5 MIN

Oral Blending Tell children they will be blending, or putting together, sounds to make words. Say the following sound sequences:

/u/ /s/   /k/ /u/ /t/   /h/ /u/ /m/   /l/ /u/ k/
/r/ /u/ /n/   /h/ /u/ /g/   /h/ /u/ /g/ /z/

Ask children to blend the sounds together to make a word. Provide corrective feedback by modeling how to stretch together (or sing) the sounds. Introduce the **short u** sound-spelling in Learn and Blend.

From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Teacher's Edition

The two best predictors of early reading success are phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition (Adams, 1990; Beck and Juel, 1995; Chall, 1996; Stanovich, 1992). These skills open the gate for reading. Without a deep knowledge of the English letters and an awareness that words are made up of sounds, students cannot learn to read.

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that words are made up of a series of discrete sounds, called phonemes. A range of subskills is taught to develop phonemic awareness with **oral blending** and **oral segmentation** having the most positive impact on reading and writing development. These skills are known as the power skills (Blevins 2017; Reutzel, 2015) and are the emphasis of instruction.

Alphabet recognition involves learning the names, shapes, and sounds of the letters of the alphabet with fluency (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 1996). Phonemic awareness and alphabet recognition are focused on primarily in Kindergarten and Grade 1.

2 SCOPE AND SEQUENCE

From Phonics to Reading

A strong scope and sequence builds from the simple to the complex in a way that takes advantage of previous learning. The sequence allows for many words to be formed as early as possible and focuses on teaching high-utility skills before less useful sound spellings (Hanna, Hodges, Hanna, and Rudolph, 1966).

The sequence also has built-in review and repetition to ensure mastery over time. While there is no "right" scope and sequence, programs that strive to connect concepts and move through a series of skills in a stair-step way offer the best chance at student success.

The phonics in the *From Phonics to Reading* sequence teaches new skills and concepts in this manner. As with most early reading skills, differentiated support is provided for the scope and sequence to meet the needs of all students.

3 BLENDING

This is the main strategy for teaching students how to sound out words and must be frequently modeled and applied (Resnick and Beck, 1976; Haddock, 1978; Rosenshine and Stevens, 1984). It is simply the stringing together of letter sounds to read a word. It is the focus of early phonics instruction, but still plays a role when transitioning students from reading one-syllable words to multisyllabic words.

Two types of blending exist—

final and successive

—and each plays an important role in phonics instruction.

Learn and Blend
Directions: Listen and join in.

u…u…u…
Up goes the umbrella.

Short u
u

Introduction

Blend It
Directions: Chorally read the words.

INTRODUCE

1.	up	cup	pup	but	cut	hut
2.	cup	cut	bug	bun	hug	hum
3.	cap	cup	pop	pup	bug	bag
4.	bus	dug	fun	gum	jug	nut
5.	The big red bug hid.					
6.	The big red bug hid under the rug.					

REVIEW

| 7. | map | led | hip | rock | dot | rip |
| 8. | fell | tap | fog | beg | tan | lid |

CHALLENGE

| 9. | truck | stuck | struck | fluff | stuff | plug |

Daily Practice
Directions: Do one activity each day. Then check the box.
☐ **Build Fluency** Read the words each day by yourself and to a partner.
☐ **Mark It** Circle all the words with short u.
☐ **Spell It** Have a partner say each word. Write the word. Check your answer.
☐ **Write About It** Use the words to create a story. Draw a box around the words from the list that you used.

Lesson 4 • Short u 51

From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Student's Edition

4 DICTATION

From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Student's Edition

To best transfer students' growing phonics skills to writing, dictation (which is guided spelling with teacher think-alouds) is critical and begins in Kindergarten.

While not a spelling test, this activity can accelerate students' spelling abilities and understanding of common English spelling patterns and can assist them in using these phonics skills in writing.

Used in combination with word building and structured and unstructured writing experiences in phonics instruction, students have increased opportunities to "try out" their developing skills to express ideas in written form.

5 WORD AWARENESS
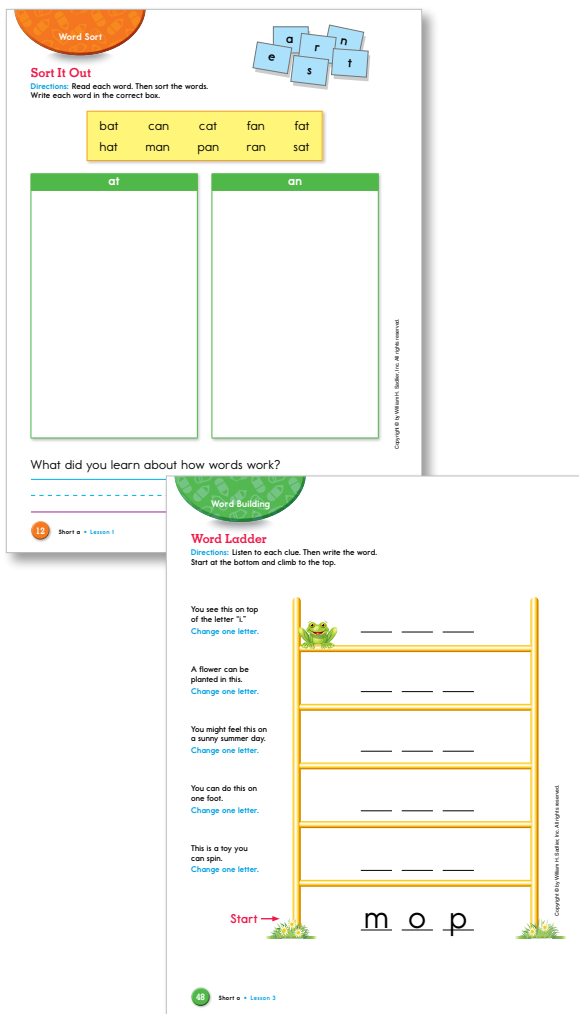
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Level A, Student's Edition

While the introduction to phonics skills is best when explicit and systematic, students also need opportunities to play with words and experiment with how words parts combine in order to solidify and consolidate their understanding of how English words work. Word sorts and word building are key activities to increase students' word awareness (Bear, Templeton, Invernizzi, and Johnston, 2016; Beck and Beck, 2013).

In word building, students are given a set of letter cards and are asked to create a series of words in a specific sequence. This increases their ability to work with letter-sounds flexibly and to fully analyze words for their component sounds and spellings. In word sorts, students look for common spelling patterns, engage in discussions about what they learn about words from this examination, and increase their ability to notice larger chunks in words (an important skill as they transition from one-syllabic to multisyllabic words).

6 HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS

High-frequency words are the most common words in English. Some are irregular; that is, they do not follow common English sound-spellings. Others are regular and are needed by students during reading before they have the phonics skills to sound them out (Johns, 1980; Adams, 1990; Carroll, Davies, and Richman, 1971; Fry, Kress, and Fountoukidis, 1993; Rinsland, 1945).

The top 250-plus words are taught in Grades K–2. Past Grade 2, when the majority of the key high-frequency words have been introduced, students need to be continually assessed on their mastery of these words, as a lack of fluency can impede comprehension. Some words are more difficult to master (e.g., reversals like *no/on* and *was/saw*, *of/for/from*, and words that begin with wh- or th-). These words receive more instructional time and assessment in the *From Phonics to Reading* program.
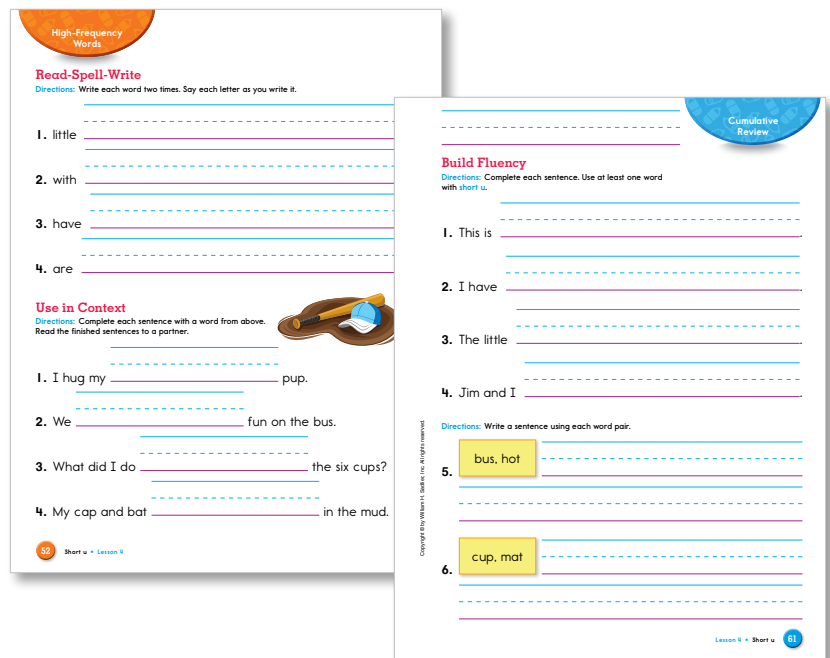
From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Student's Edition

7 READING CONNECTED TEXT
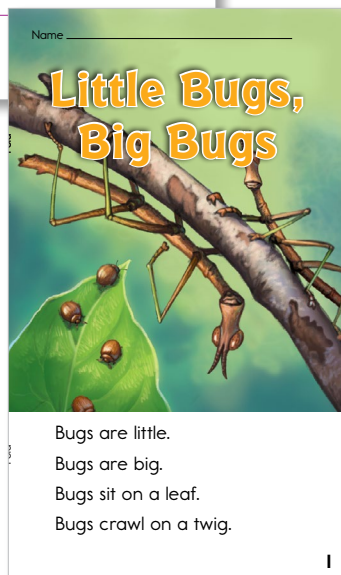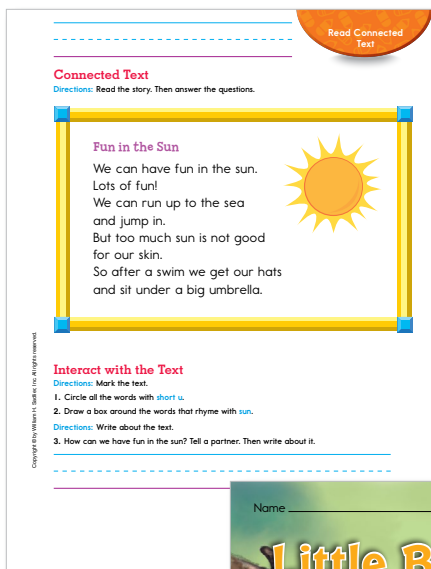
From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Student's Edition

The goal of phonics instruction is to develop students' ability to read connected text independently (Adams, 1990). Controlled, decodable text (also known as accountable text) at the beginning level of reading instruction helps students develop a sense of comfort in and control over their reading growth and should be a key learning tool in early phonics instruction.

The tight connection between what students learn in phonics and what they read is essential for building a faster foundation in early reading (Juel and Roper-Schneider, 1985; Blevins, 2017). This is especially critical when students encounter less-controlled leveled readers during small group lessons. These accountable (phonics-based) texts need to be reread to build fluency, discussed to develop comprehension, and written about to provide opportunities for students to apply their growing phonics skills in writing.

The accountable texts in the *From Phonics to Reading* program were written to be instructive, engaging, and comprehensible—using standard English language sentence patterns and high-utility words to benefit early readers.

PLUS

YOU, THE TEACHER

TEACHER TABLE
ENGLISH LEARNERS

Sound Transfer In Cantonese and Mandarin, there is an approximate transfer for **short u**. There is no transfer in Spanish, Hmong, Korean, or Farsi. Focus on articulation. Model correct mouth position. Have children use hand mirrors to focus on mouth position as they pronounce the sound.

Vocabulary Each day, select several words from the Blend It lines on Student Book, page 51. Focus on words whose meanings can be explained or demonstrated in a concrete way. For example, show a picture of a *cup*, *pup*, *hut*, or *jug*. Demonstrate the meaning of *hum*, *hug*, and *cut*.

Note: Children will complete the **Daily Practice** activities on Student Book, page 51 throughout the week. Whenever you see children will return to previous pages to reinforce their learning.

From Phonics to Reading
Level A, Teacher's Edition

The power and impact of phonics instruction rests on the shoulders of a skilled, informed teacher. For example, a teacher with expertise in linguistics and research-based phonics routines improves the language of instruction in order to avoid student confusion and better assesses students' instructional needs (Moats, 1995).

Differentiated support is often needed for teachers based on their teaching experience or when they move across grade-level bands (K–2, 3–5, 6–8) as each band requires a nuanced understanding of phonics and word study instruction. Point-of-use professional development resources are provided in *From Phonics to Reading*.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring these seven (plus one) characteristics are in place is a critical first step in developing a phonics instructional strand that will meet the needs of early readers. The *From Phonics to Reading* program contains these characteristics through instruction that is active, engaging, and thought-provoking—the kind of instruction that creates active word learners on the path to becoming successful independent readers who love reading.

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Wiley Blevins studied at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Bowling Green State University and has his doctorate in Education. He is an author, educational consultant, and researcher and has taught both in the United States and South America.

Wiley has written over 17 books for teachers, including *A Fresh Look at Phonics, Phonics From A to Z*, and *Choosing and Using Decodable Texts*, and he has authored several phonics and reading programs including Sadlier's *From Phonics to Reading*. He also wrote the phonics brief by the International Literacy Association, *Meeting the Challenges of Early Literacy Phonics Instruction* and has penned over 100 children's books. Wiley's current focus is on adaptive technology, differentiated professional development, and children's literature. He is SVP and Associate Publisher at Reycraft Books, a new imprint focused on publishing books by authors and illustrators from under-represented groups.

From Phonics to Reading for Grades K–3, authored by Wiley, is a Tier 1 program that aligns with the Science of Reading research and was recognized as a high-quality foundational skills program by EdReports. See complete review **here**. Embedded professional development in the program, along with a critical review and repetition cycle, make early reading mastery possible for every student. Wiley has three complementary *From Phonics to Reading* programs: the **Interactive Practice Bundle** for practicing and applying newly taught skills; the *Fluency Booster Practice Book*, which provides a variety of practice for building fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension skills; and *Interactive Assessments*, offering diagnostic, formative (Lesson), and summative (Unit) assessments in an interactive format online. His newest program is *Building Reading Success with Wiley Blevins*, a Tier 2 & Tier 3 intervention program for Grades K–5. Grounded in the latest science of reading research, it offers a systematic and explicit approach to literacy and seamlessly integrates into any classroom setting.

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