

Blue Star
EDUCATION

STORYLANDS
Adventures
in
Reading

RESEARCH & PROGRAM SUPPORT



Storylands – Adventures in Reading

Supporting Effective Instruction with *Storylands*

Storylands: Adventures in Reading is a supplemental resource for emergent through early-fluent readers. The program includes stories that are fun and engaging, with memorable characters and eye-catching illustrations.

Lessons and activities in the Storylands program reinforce basic reading skills, including phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary and word study, meaning and comprehension, and fluency. The Storylands program provides books for readers at different levels, so students can read books at their own level, and enjoy stories that feature the same characters and themes.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2001), teachers can assist children in becoming successful readers in many ways. Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are interrelated skills and should be used purposefully in social contexts.

Teachers can support vocabulary development by reading and talking to children, and they can expand on students' background knowledge through the use of books. Teachers are also encouraged to promote letter recognition and assist students with distinguishing letter sounds. Activities and lessons in the Storylands program help students develop such skills in meaningful, interactive ways.

The Five Elements of Reading Instruction

In 2000, the National Reading Panel identified elements of instruction that lead to reading success.

After reviewing thousands of studies, the panel identified five important areas of reading instruction—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. These elements have been strategically woven into Storylands lessons and activities.

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

PHONICS

FLUENCY

VOCABULARY

TEXT COMPREHENSION

PHONEMIC AWARENESS & PHONICS

According to the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, “Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words” (CIERA, 2003, p. 4). Simmons, Gunn, Smith and Kameenui (1994) report that phonemic awareness is the key to reading proficiency.

Teachers can teach phonemic awareness through rhyming, blending, and segmenting sounds. Activities in the Storylands program involve child-friendly ways to practice phoneme identification and segmentation as well as rhyming and word families in the context of games that are engaging, colorful, and fun.

The instruction of sound-letter relationships must be interwoven with phonemic awareness for optimal development of reading skills. “Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language” (CIERA, 2003, p. 12). These relationships assist children with reading and writing words.

Storylands includes both phonemic awareness and phonics activities in many of the lessons. Activities featuring beginning and ending sounds, blends, digraphs, and vowels are provided to offer students meaningful opportunities to practice such skills. These experiences not only capture student interest and foster a desire to learn, but they also give children the beginning tools they need on their journey to being more fluent readers.

FLUENCY

As children develop reading skills, it is important for them to read smoothly, accurately, and with expression. Pikulski and Chard (2005) state that fluency builds on oral language, phonemic awareness, and phonics. Further research

indicates that development of fluency improves comprehension (NICHD, 2000) because fluent readers focus on comprehension, while less fluent readers focus on decoding. Fluency serves as a bridge between the identification of words and reading comprehension (CIERA, 2003).

Fluency is best developed through the reading and rereading of texts that are on or below a child’s independent reading level. This allows students to focus on reading rate, accuracy, and expression, rather than the decoding of new words.

The three levels of readers provided in Storylands ensure that children of all reading abilities will have appropriate texts for fluency practice. Teachers can encourage ongoing fluency development by having students engage in choral reading and partner reading experiences. They can also model fluency and then invite students to accompany them in the rereading of text. Even the use of audio-assisted reading (included in Storylands online readers) is effective in the development of fluency.

VOCABULARY

Storylands books introduce children to a wide variety of words that enhance vocabulary development, which is an important element of learning to read. “As beginning readers, children use the words they have heard to make sense of words they see in print” (CIERA, 2003, p. 34). Children also encounter new words in texts.

Activities associated with Storylands books encourage children to participate in “word study” which allows them to engage with new words in order to improve their reading comprehension.

The National Reading Panel tells us that children develop vocabulary in two distinct ways—indirectly and directly. They develop vocabulary indirectly by participating in oral language, by listening to story read-alouds, and by reading on their own.

VOCABULARY (cont.)

They also learn vocabulary directly through the instruction of specific words and through word-learning strategies, such as learning about word parts (prefixes, suffixes, etc.), and use of context clues (CIERA, 2003). As children encounter new words in Storylands books, they are encouraged to use them in different ways, incorporating them into speaking and writing. These words are woven throughout many books in the series in order to ensure that children encounter them over and over. This repeated exposure to new words assists children with word learning.

TEXT COMPREHENSION

According to CIERA (2003), good readers are purposeful and active. They use text for the purpose of gathering information or gaining pleasure and entertainment. They also engage the text and think about what they are reading. Because good readers are also active readers,

they recognize when they are having trouble with text and use helpful strategies or seek assistance.

Teachers can assist students with the development of comprehension by teaching monitoring, the use of graphic and semantic organizers, answering and generating questions, recognizing story structure, and summarizing (CIERA, 2003). Teachers can further enhance comprehension development through direct instruction, modeling, and guided practice. The common themes and characters throughout Storylands books provide children with connections throughout the series. This gives them a “cognitive anchor” for new stories they encounter in the series.

It is important to remember that, while the ability to identify letters and sounds and read with fluency is an important part of the reading process, reading is, above all, a meaning-making process. Assisting students with comprehension of text should be our ultimate goal.

Fiction and Nonfiction Reading

Storylands features both fiction and nonfiction readers. “Perhaps one of the most significant trends to emerge during the past decade is the increasing attention that researchers and educators have devoted to the role of expository text in early literacy development” (Gambrell, 2005). Educators often assume that young children are more captivated by and better able to understand fiction. This assumption has resulted in the emphasis on fiction in the early years. However, research indicates “...units of study that contain fictional and informational texts on the same topic can support students’ comprehension by helping to build their background knowledge, vocabulary, and motivation” (Soalt, 2005).

Nonfiction reading helps to lay a foundation of the knowledge needed to fully understand and enjoy fiction. In fact, Yopp and Yopp (2000) suggest pairing fiction and nonfiction books as

exposure to informational text gives students a richer knowledge of the content of the fiction book. Duke (2000) expresses the importance of providing a balance between narrative and informational text. In a study of 20 classrooms, Duke found the classroom walls and libraries as well as language activities had very little informational text. She states “the literature not only indicates that young children can interact successfully with informational texts, but that they actually enjoy doing so with informational texts.” Duke emphasizes that this lack of nonfiction text is “cause for concern” as this exposure to informational text assists children and prepares them for the reading and writing they will do in the future. Duke states that this is a “missed opportunity to use information text to motivate more students’ interest in literacy in their present lives” (Duke, 2000).

Readers' Theater

In addition to fiction and nonfiction books, Storylands includes readers' theater books. Readers' theater is an effective way to develop fluency and motivation in young readers. Moran (2006) states that "Fluency is assessed through reading aloud and requires the combination of sight word recognition, comprehension, and verbal expression, all prerequisites for effective readers' theater presentations" (p. 318).

When children are provided opportunities to experience readers' theater, the improvements in reading rate, accuracy, and comprehension follow them to experiences with new texts (Tyler & Chard, 2000). Tyler and Chard go on to say that it is possible to create readers' theater experiences that accommodate varying reading levels.

Blue Star Education confirms this by developing readers' theater books in the Storylands program that meet the needs of emergent, early, and early-fluent readers. Each script includes a variety of leveled parts so that all readers can be

involved. In any reading program it is important to create a rich language environment that includes interactive language activities. This is precisely the result of implementing readers' theater experiences in early literacy environments as children are motivated and interested, while interacting with their peers.

Oral reading in the form of readers' theater also strengthens decoding skills, listening skills, vocabulary development, and oral speaking. It connects spoken and written language. It boosts comprehension, and it provides informal assessment of reading development. It is a simple educational tool for reading authentic literature in repeated practice readings that are motivating and purposeful.

According to the U.S. Department's *Put Reading First* 2001 publication, "Readers' theater provides readers with a legitimate reason to reread text and to practice fluency. Readers' theater also promotes cooperative interaction with peers and makes the reading task appealing."

Literacy Centers

Students are encouraged to engage in follow-up literacy experiences through literacy centers that are provided in Storylands. These center activities allow students to develop further proficiency in reading, language, and writing.

Skill Topics included in the Literacy Centers

- *Sight words and high frequency words*
- *Content word recognition*
- *Beginning and ending sounds, blends and digraphs*
- *Phonemic awareness, rhyming words, word families*
- *Making words, short vowel sounds*
- *Story recall, comprehension, sequencing*
- *Sentence structure, writing procedure, text types*
- *Comprehension, spelling, vocabulary*
- *Story writing—structure and development*
- *Oral reading and fluency*

The Storylands literacy centers address a wide range of skills deemed most appropriate for literacy learning in the early years.

The International Reading Association, in its position statement entitled, “Using Multiple Methods of Beginning Reading Instruction,” states that “reading is a complex system of deriving meaning from print” and requires many strategies including:

- ✓ the development and maintenance of a motivation to read
- ✓ the development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print
- ✓ sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension
- ✓ the ability to read fluently
- ✓ the ability to decode unfamiliar words
- ✓ the skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes or speech sounds are connected to print

The correlation between the skills featured in Storylands and the International Reading Associations position is evident. Specific reading skills are reinforced in both the Teacher’s Guide and the Literacy Centers lessons and activities. As children engage in this program, they will encounter daily opportunities to read, followed by the necessary skills practice to assist them on the journey to becoming proficient readers.

Interactive Whiteboard Activities

The Storylands program includes a CD that provides activities adapted from the Literacy Centers. These are designed for use with interactive whiteboards.

Experiences with interactive whiteboards benefit students in many ways. According to Warwick and Kershner (2008), experiences with interactive whiteboards assist students in the early stages of learning skills and provide pathways for thinking aloud as they discuss activities with their peers.

Interactive whiteboards “have the potential to encourage collaboration by creating a shared learning environment suitable for teaching strategies involving whole classes or small groups” (Bennett & Lockyer, 2008, p. 289). They are also convenient and easy-to-use, as the materials necessary for the activities are all featured on the CD provided in the kit.

In the IRA Position Statement on Technology, the International Reading Association expresses that children should have “a literacy curriculum that integrates the new literacies of information and communication technology into instructional programs.”

The statement further expresses that teachers must help students to develop technology skills that will assist them later in life. Participation in the interactive whiteboard activities related to the Storylands books and literacy centers provide children with another avenue to integrate technology into their learning.

Intervention and Other Special Programs

Storylands is an excellent resource for intervention programs, and works particularly well for summer school and other out-of-school-time programs, as it can be adapted to a shorter schedule as needed. Research indicates that many children experience a decline in achievement particularly during the summer months (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992; Cooper et al., 1996). Evidence-based literacy programs are now frequently offered during the summer months to minimize this decline (Edmonds, et al., 2009).

Mraz and Razinski (2009) state that “Access to reading materials has been consistently identified as a vital element in enhancing the reading development of children.” Numerous researchers agree and claim the importance of the time that children spend outside of school engaged in reading, suggesting that this is the best predictor of reading achievement (Allington, 2006; Anderson, Wilson, & Fielding, 1988).

The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) research regarding out-of-school-time (OST) programs indicates the following: “Our findings from the 27 studies included in the meta-analysis revealed an overall tendency for positive impacts in reading for low-achieving or at-risk students who participate in OST (Out of School) strategies (Lauer, 2004). This suggests that policy makers and practitioners should consider the use of OST strategies as potentially effective ways of providing students with instruction and related experiences that can help them advance their reading achievement.”

Such findings reinforce the need for supplemental resources such as Storylands to provide the support materials for intervention and other special programs. The Storylands program provides high-interest materials with appropriately-leveled readers and a format that works well with any intervention or special program.

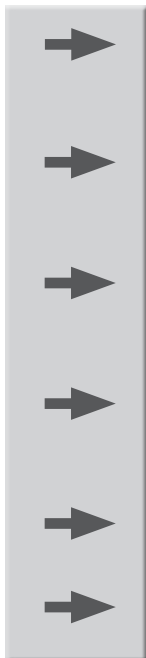
Exemplary Practice

When implementing a reading program, it is important to recognize the role of the environment and literacy routines in the classroom. Exemplary practices serve to enhance the overall reading experience.

The following have been identified as exemplary language arts practices of kindergarten teachers (Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996):

1. a literate environment
2. accessible, quality children’s literature
3. read-aloud experiences
4. teacher/student shared reading
5. numerous, regular opportunities to write
6. integrated literacy instruction
7. a wide range of skills taught
8. home-school connections

These exemplary practices correlate nicely to the Storylands program in the following ways:

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- Children encounter reading, writing, listening, and speaking through daily experiences with books and related activities.
 - Books in the program are accessible to all children through the use of varied text levels.
 - Teachers are encouraged to share stories in different ways—through read-alouds and shared reading experiences.
 - Children are encouraged to respond to stories in many ways, including dramatization, discussion, writing, and drawing.
 - Children experience the reading of fiction and nonfiction texts.
 - Children engage in a variety of skill-based activities related to phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Family Involvement

The Storylands website includes all of the fiction titles in a read-aloud format, which can be accessed by children and their families. Involving families in the process of reading is yet another way to scaffold the development of literacy.

The literature on parent involvement in education strongly emphasizes the immediate and long-term academic benefits to children. Because parents play such an important role in their children's academic success (Christenson & Conoley, 1992; Chavkin, 1993), providing them with meaningful ways to engage with their children in literacy experiences is imperative. This is especially the case with children in their early years of school as they adapt to the new environment and begin to form who they are as learners. "It is a well-established fact that home-school collaboration benefits all children" (Raffaele, 1999). In reading together, family members can model behaviors and provide learning opportunities as children grow (Swick, 2003).

Numerous studies indicate the benefits of parent involvement with literacy learning (Hewison, 1998; Faires, Nichols, & Rickelman, 2000; West, 2000). Collectively, these studies reveal increased overall reading achievement and improvement with struggling readers when parents read to their children and participate in activities at home that reinforce skills taught at school. Studies also show the long-term benefits of parent involvement. In *Attainment in Secondary School* by Feinstein and Symons (1999), it was found that when parents spend time with their children early in the school experience by reading to them and assisting with homework, and by expressing interest in education, greater academic success is evident years later.

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Conclusion

As educators, it is important to provide quality reading sources that are appropriately leveled and of high interest to children. Research has shown that when children are interested in what they read, comprehension improves. In this program, we have included fiction, nonfiction, and readers' theater books, literacy centers, online readers, and interactive reading experiences.

We have addressed the building blocks of reading instruction by providing readers and related activities that reinforce phonemic awareness and phonics, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. And, the materials provided to support these building blocks are interactive and motivating.

In conclusion, *Storylands: Adventures in Reading* is a supplemental program that helps meet the needs of young, developing readers by providing research-based strategies in combination with stories and activities that children can share and enjoy.

Students are actively engaged in the reading experience with stories and characters that captivate their interest and activities that allow them to practice the essential skills necessary for long-term reading success!

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This paper was researched and written by Dr. Jennifer Prior. Dr. Prior is Associate Professor of Early Childhood and Literacy at Northern Arizona University. Her scholarly interests include using environmental print as an instructional literacy tool, family involvement in education, and effective literacy practices. She has coauthored *Environmental Print in the Classroom: Meaningful Connections for Learning to Read* (International Reading Association) and *Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education: Research into Practice* (Thomson Cengage Learning). She has presented her literacy research and classroom applications at numerous conventions for the International Reading Association as well as for the National Reading Conference, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the Association for Childhood Education International.