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Decodable Books in Evidence-Based Literacy Instruction

MARCH 2026

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Introduction

Learning to read is an inherently complicated task that requires various systems to work together. The Science of Reading has reshaped how many educators, researchers, and policymakers approach early literacy instruction. The resulting shift from belief-driven to evidence-based practices has greatly increased the importance of research-based and systematic instruction. At the heart of this movement is a renewed emphasis on systematic, explicit instruction in foundational skills, particularly phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding. One of the main tools used in systematic instruction for early reading development is a decodable text. The implementation of decodable texts, which are specifically designed to include previously taught phonetic patterns, into literacy programs has been shown to be a sound practice that is supported by cognitive science, psycholinguistics, and educational research. This paper will discuss connections between systematic instruction, decodable texts, and basic reading skills.

By reviewing the body of empirical research and instructional principles that provide the foundation for Scholastic's decodable text products, this paper presents a comprehensive evidence-based rationale for decodable text, as well as a vision for its role in literacy instruction. Drawing on insights from product design, pedagogy, and classroom implementation, this paper provides a comprehensive picture of how the products and associated teaching materials build foundational reading skills and provide all students access to effective literacy instruction.

By bringing together information from a range of sources, this paper will help educators, administrators, and policymakers see how Scholastic's decodable text products fit within a larger, coherent literacy framework. It shows how decodables can improve decoding fluency, comprehension, and confidence. At the intermediate and middle grade levels, where literacy demands are increasingly urgent, decodable texts are valuable assets in helping striving readers with multisyllabic decoding, morphological awareness, knowledge-building, and scaffolding for comprehension. The theory of action and evidence base behind the programs are mapped out below, including the full range of program inputs, pedagogical practices, proximal outcomes, and long-term impacts on learning (see Logic Model, Figure 1).

Logic Model

Program Inputs	Pedagogical Strategies	Proximal Outcomes	Long-Term Impacts
Structured Decodable Texts: • Short Reads Decodables (GK-3) • Short Reads Decodables Advance (G3+) • Read to Know Text Sets (GK-3) • Read to Know Advance (G3+) • Our Stories Decodables (GK-5) • Cuentos fonéticos • Grab & Go Decodables packs (GK-5) **Print Teaching Materials** • Scope and Sequence • Printed Teacher's Guides with lesson plans and other supports **Digital Resources** • Ready4Reading Voice Technology • Ready4Reading Letters2Meaning assessment • For children and teachers: Online access to books and cards; videos; student activities • For teachers: Online access to Implementation Guides, printable assessements and rubrics, answer keys, professional supports • Lesson plans, fluency routines, vocabulary routines, spelling lists **Professional Learning** • Targeted sessions and coaching support for districts	**Systematic, Explicit Instruction and Practice:** Skill-targeted texts aligned to defined scope and sequences and explicit instruction with appropriate levels of challenge and targets for both younger and older students **Knowledge Building:** Informational texts build cross-curricular real-world knowledge. **Student-Centered Fiction:** Stories reflect a broad array of characters, settings, plots, and themes relevant to students' own experiences. **Scaffolded Progression:** From simple CVC decoding to multisyllabic word study **Cumulative Review:** Interleaved practice based on the scope and sequence **Flexible Use Cases:** Small group, whole group, repeated reading, intervention, summer learning, take-home **Spanish Language Access:** Cuentos fonéticos for multilingual learners	**Increased Decoding Skills:** Students improve accuracy, automaticity, and fluency with decoding. **Increased Literacy Skills:** Students improve comprehension, build knowledge, and acquire new vocabulary, which promotes transfer to success in reading non-controlled texts. **Increased Reading Confidence:** Students experience success with decodable texts. **Improved Phonics Fluency:** Repeated application of familiar sound-spellings to an authentic reading experience boosts accuracy, reading rate, and prosody. **Increased Motivation:** Decoding mastery and practice builds interest in and enjoyment of reading informational and fiction texts. **Engagement with Text:** High-interest topics and relatable stories foster motivation. **Instructional Consistency:** Teachers use aligned materials across grade bands.	**Grade-Level Reading Proficiency:** Students are equipped to bridge to comprehending complex texts independently and with confidence. **Literacy Opportunity:** Decodables support learners at all skill levels, including multilingual learners and striving readers. **Sustained Reading Motivation:** Students build reading stamina, academic confidence, and agency as readers. **Resource Allocation:** Schools and districts decrease the proportion of students needing intervention services. **Scalable Implementation:** Districts adopt coherent, research-aligned foundational reading programs.

Figure 1

Grounded in the Science of Reading, this paper situates Scholastic's decodable products within a structured literacy approach. Structured literacy is an evidence-based method of teaching reading and writing that emphasizes explicit, systematic instruction in foundational language skills—particularly phonemic awareness, phonics, and decoding—in service of the ultimate goals of fluent reading and deep comprehension.

Structured literacy is *systematic* in that instruction follows a carefully developed scope and sequence, ensuring that skills are taught cumulatively from simpler to more complex and reinforced through ample practice using research-based instructional routines. It is *explicit* because teachers provide direct, clear instruction on how spoken sounds map onto written language, guiding students to analyze and decode words using spelling patterns and structural features rather than relying on inference or context. It is *code-based* because it is grounded in the alphabetic principle—the predictable relationships among phonemes, graphemes, and morphemes that underlie English orthography (Moats, 2020).

Within this framework, Scholastic's decodable products are designed to support students' application of newly taught skills, enabling readers to successfully decode text that aligns with their current level of instruction and to build accuracy, fluency, and comprehension over time.

Decodable texts are consistent with structured literacy instruction because they feature controlled vocabulary and predictable sound-spelling patterns that match taught phonics skills/rules, which allows students to apply their phonics learning in context and provides focused opportunities for immediate feedback related to decoding accuracy. Scholastic's decodables are cumulative and layered, building upon previously taught targets, and they allow for differentiated instruction by targeting specific phonics components according to student needs.

Decodable texts are often thought of as books used during early reading instruction. However, decodables continue to serve struggling readers in upper elementary by providing practice with complex phonics, syllable types, and morphology.

Another instructional input is knowledge-building through exposure to informational text. Both research and our program logic model include informational texts designed to build background knowledge and vocabulary and support comprehension. Scholastic's student-centered decodable fiction texts include motivating characters and stories that engage readers and reflect varied perspectives.

Flexibility of implementation is another key design feature. Scholastic's decodables can be used flexibly for small groups, whole-class instruction, intervention or acceleration programs, summer learning, or as take-home practice.

Teacher materials provide educators with lessons as well as practical tools and structures for delivering consistent, high-quality instruction. Scholastic's digital resources, such as printable decodables and student activities, further extend access and integration into classroom practice.

The Role of Decodable Books in the Science of Reading

The Science of Reading is an interdisciplinary field of knowledge. It synthesizes information about how to teach literacy from linguistics, psychological, and educational research. The use of decodable books can be understood as a practical application of the Science of Reading. They support the theory, method, and key aspects of the Science of Reading.

- **Theory.** Decodable texts illustrate the connectionist view of reading development (Seidenberg & McClelland, 1989) and, more specifically, Share's (1995) self-teaching hypothesis. In these models, skilled reading is based on more precise associations between orthographic, phonological, and semantic systems. The activities inherent in reading decodable books provide focused practice on specific orthographic units to develop these associations. This allows readers to make 'lexical analogies' when reading words with the same orthographic patterns (Share, 1995, p. 405).
- **Method.** Key research study in the area of emergent literacy by Juel and Roper-Schneider (1985) made use of decodable books. This experiment provided evidence that the types of word-identification strategies children develop are influenced by the types of text they encounter in early learning. This study is one of a series that have since employed more advanced cross-sequential research designs to map out developmental trajectories in learning to read, with recent studies using particular sequences of decodable text as a form of response-to-intervention to identify differential response subgroups and determine optimal sequencing of instruction. By more closely approximating naturalistic instructional conditions in the classroom, these methodological innovations also help to address some of the ongoing concerns about the ecological validity of research in the area.

- **Practice.** It can also be argued that the use of decodable books in early reading has helped clarify and resolve some of the issues that have long been sources of controversy in the field of the teaching of reading. Stanovich (1994) famously described the "reading wars" as a conflict between philosophical perspectives on reading instruction, but the use of decodable books shows that code-emphasis and meaning-emphasis are not incompatible and can, in fact, be combined in an instructional approach. This view is consistent with Perfetti's (1985) verbal efficiency theory of skilled reading and Scarborough's (2001) "reading rope" metaphor which represent skilled reading as comprising multiple components of both automatic and strategic processing.

In terms of practical application, the use of decodable books has informed policy development and curriculum guidelines. Evidence supporting decodable texts and other code-emphasis instructional practices has influenced standards documents, including state-specific frameworks. In turn, curriculum resources aligned to these principles reflect a broader shift toward more systematic and explicit phonics instruction.

To this end, the use of decodable books—and the research underlying their effectiveness—can be seen as a key example of how evidence-based practices contribute to the development of "improvement infrastructure" for literacy instruction. (Duke & Martin, 2015, p. 109).

Decodable Books in Kindergarten Through Grade 3

Decodable books are texts that have been written with controlled sound-spelling patterns that align to a phonics scope and sequence. Decodable books are specifically crafted to provide a vehicle for students to apply recently learned phonics and word study skills in connected text. This design gives students an opportunity to practice decoding with accuracy and fluency.

The pedagogical strategies that underpin Scholastic's decodable text products are all evidence-based. At the forefront is systematic phonics practice, with the texts carefully sequenced to reinforce specific sound-spelling patterns. These programs are designed to promote accurate and fluent decoding. Research has shown the importance of cumulative review and interleaved practice, two approaches that are part of the logic model and embodied in Scholastic's decodable text products. Together, these design elements make decodable texts a central component of evidence-based early literacy instruction that guides students toward fluent and confident reading.

The Impact of Decodable Books on Phonics and Decoding Instruction

Within the domain of the Science of Reading, decodable texts are an instructional medium uniquely situated to facilitate the movement toward automaticity in the recognition of printed words. They allow for the reinforcement of grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC) rules that have been explicitly taught and learned.

The underpinning theoretical framework for this approach to reading instruction is encapsulated in Ehri's (2014) phase model of sight word acquisition (instant word recognition). This model posits that learners traverse a continuum that includes pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic, and consolidated alphabetic stages on their path to automatic word recognition. In the context of this model, decodable books are instrumental in solidifying the bonds that form during the full alphabetic phase, in which words are fully mapped at the grapheme-phoneme level but have not yet been consolidated for fluent retrieval.

Empirical research offers robust support for the incorporation of decodable texts into reading instruction. Mesmer's (2001) pioneering research with first-grade students illuminated the tangible impact of text decodability on the application of phonics knowledge. The study found that children reading texts with higher decodability indices were not only more likely to attempt the application of GPC rules, but also more frequently succeeded in these attempts. This was in comparison to their counterparts engaging with texts that had lower GPC-to-text ratios.

Subsequent research by Cheatham and Allor (2012) further substantiated these findings, revealing that students in the intervention group, who were exposed to highly decodable text, advanced more rapidly in their development of decoding abilities than those in the control group, who experienced a more heterogeneous text exposure. At the meta-analytic level, the National Reading Panel (2000) and a later meta-analysis by Castles et al. (2018) have both reported substantial, positive effects of systematic and explicit phonics instruction on reading outcomes, including word recognition, spelling, and comprehension, especially for students identified as at-risk for reading difficulties.

The impact of reading instruction, as operationalized through the use of decodable texts, on the brain's structure and function has been illuminated by neuroscientific research using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI). Dehaene et al. (2015) have shown that effective reading instruction can lead to changes in neural circuitry, particularly in areas of the left hemisphere involved in phonological processing. The process of repeated successful decoding experiences, which is facilitated by decodable texts, is likely to reinforce these neural pathways, leading to the instant recognition of words as described by Kilpatrick (2015) in his discussion of orthographic mapping. This understanding of the neural basis for reading development provides a biological rationale for the observed benefits of structured practice through decodable texts.

Pedagogically, decodable books allow children to bridge the gap between phonics lessons and meaningful reading and writing activities. This is essential for fostering what Stanovich (1986) has described as the “Matthew effect” in a positive sense, where reading success begets further reading success, thereby enhancing motivation, self-efficacy, and by extension, reading volume and skill acquisition.

Integrating Decodable Books Into Systematic and Explicit Phonics Instruction

Integration of decodable books with systematic and explicit phonics instruction is a multifaceted process. It demands more than simply lining up books and moving on to the next lesson. It involves a number of key decisions with respect to scope and sequence alignment, transition, diagnostic assessment, and differentiation. These decisions ultimately determine the success or failure of using decodable texts in any phonics program.

Scope and sequence is the most basic level of integration. As research has shown (Foorman et al., 2016), it is when the orthography of the decodable text matches what is being explicitly taught in phonics instruction that the most progress is made with students. The implication of this statement is that scope and sequence of both the phonics lessons and the decodable books need to be coordinated.

One way in which this matching occurs is through the use of a scope and sequence matrix, which can be used to both track what grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) have been introduced over the course of the year, as well as making sure that the decodable texts feature both the GPCs that have just been introduced (for immediate application) and those that have already been introduced (for review purposes).

Instructional density, or the number of known GPCs to unknown GPCs within a decodable text, is another important element of integration. Mesmer (2010) has found that this ratio of decodability is different depending on the student and where they are in the learning process. That is, typically early decodable books will have a higher decodability percentage (number of known GPCs: 75+%) and have few, if any, unknown elements. Later books may have a lower percentage of decodability, reflecting the students' increasing ability to decode.

Integration that involves this shifting instructional density that is informed by student responses to formative assessments has been called by Connor et al. (2013) “individualizing student instruction” (ISI) or "matching instructional density to the performance patterns of students" (p. 171). Another element in the transition process from explicit phonics instruction to applying the skills in decodable texts is the bridging activities that take place between the two.

Classroom research (Savage et el., 2009) has found that when students are explicitly taught how to make use of the skills that they are learning in phonics, the transfer effect is even greater. These activities can include pre-reading, teaching students to identify the GPCs they will encounter in the text and therefore are expecting to see.

Differentiation is another consideration for decodable texts in that this is how (or whether) they are used within a tiered or multi-level instruction system. For instance, O'Connor et al. (2010) have found that some struggling readers need to spend more time on decodable texts and at a higher decodability percentage than others. Likewise, there are students who are able to successfully read texts with lower decodability percentages.

Scholastic's Read to Know Text Sets, Short Reads Decodables, and other decodable products emphasize tight alignment to a systematic phonics scope and sequence. These resources are described as explicitly coordinated so the grapheme-phoneme correspondences in each text match what students have been taught, allowing for immediate application of new skills alongside cumulative review. Scholastic also addresses instructional density and differentiation by offering short, compelling decodable texts that incrementally target individual sound-spellings and progressing to texts based on an aggregated S&S, combining phonic elements to allow for cumulative application and reinforcement of decoding skills so instruction can be adjusted based on student progress and formative assessment. Additionally, Scholastic Teacher's Guides include pre-reading routines, phonics focus words, story/content word support, and high-frequency word support, which function as bridging activities that help students transfer phonics learning into successful reading, supporting individualized instruction within tiered classroom settings.

Decodables and High-Frequency Word Recognition

Decodable texts are a means of practicing phonics within the context of real reading, in a story or informational text. The graphemes recently introduced in phonics lessons are contained in these texts. By reading decodable texts, children are applying their knowledge of the alphabetic principle while also building automaticity in decoding. However, many words in English have one or more phonic elements that do not follow typical GPCs, often referred to as irregular words. Thus, relying solely on the decoding of regular sound-spellings is limiting. Irregular high-frequency words make up roughly 50–75% of any children's text (Pagnicone, 2007). In a phonics-focused lesson, a teacher may work on sounding out an irregular high-frequency word as far as possible until the child needs scaffolded support (see Table 1 for examples of commonly encountered high-frequency words that are not regular in their phonetic spelling and may be present in many decodable texts).

Word	Notes on Pronunciation/Spelling
the	Final *e* does not represent a short or long vowel sound
was	Spelling does not match expected short *a* sound
said	Diverges from typical *ai* long vowel pattern
come	Final *e* does not signal long vowel
some	Same irregularity as *come*
do	Spelling does not match expected long *o*
to	Same irregularity as *do*
of	Grapheme–phoneme mismatch
one	Irregular mapping of o and *ne*
two	Spelling does not reflect pronunciation
they	Diverges from typical *ey* / ē / pattern
were	Irregular vowel spelling
does	Diverges from typical *oe* long vowel spelling
done	Irregular vowel sound
give	Final *e* does not signal long vowel
have	Final *e* does not signal long vowel

Table 1

Ehri (2005), in her phases of high-frequency word development theory, postulates that as children become better readers they eventually consolidate words in the form of visual words in what she refers to as consolidated alphabetic phase (CAP). In CAP, frequent words become "chunked" as orthographic patterns and are processed automatically.

Teaching decoding and recognition of sight words may seem antithetical, but must be woven together in a way to create instructional reciprocity in the classroom. As Snow and Matthews (2016) postulate, this sets up a fluid back-and-forth between learning phonics and high-frequency words and developing an understanding that these two methods of reading are connected in some way. A meta-analysis of phonics research by Castles et al. (2018) states that the best way to teach reading is a combined method of both systematic phonics instruction (practiced with decodable texts) and instruction of high-frequency words through distributed practice and in context. On the neurocognitive level, both the dorsal, phonological and ventral, orthographic neural pathways are active at the same time when reading (Dehaene & Cohen, 2011). This biological foundation for high-frequency word reading in the brain adds to the evidence that instruction should include both a decoding and sight word recognition emphasis.

Scholastic Read to Know Text Sets and other decodables align closely with the research by providing structured opportunities for students to practice phonics skills through an authentic reading experience while also addressing the limits of relying on regular grapheme-phoneme correspondences alone. Scholastic Read to Know texts are at a minimum 75% decodable and intentionally include explicit instruction in high-frequency words, which mirrors the need to scaffold irregular words that cannot be fully decoded using typical GPCs (e.g., *was, said, the*). These decodables are organized around a systematic phonics scope and sequence and are designed to help students apply recently taught phonics skills while simultaneously building automatic word recognition, supporting Ehri's consolidated alphabetic phase (2014). By integrating phonics practice, high-frequency word instruction, and repeated reading across connected texts, Scholastic's decodables reflect the "fluid back-and-forth" between decoding and sight word recognition emphasized in the research.

Reading Practice with Decodable Texts

Decodable texts are not magic. To help make them effective, teachers should use assessment data and/or their own observations to align the characteristics of decodable texts with students' orthographic knowledge. In addition, the teacher should model how to use appropriate decoding strategies, and provide ample opportunities for students to practice with immediate corrective feedback.

Gradual release of responsibility (Pearson and Gallagher, 1983) is a method for developing independent reading and should be followed with decodable texts. When first introducing a new spelling pattern, the teacher should model the decoding process and make the thinking process visible to students. Initially, the students should focus on decoding as they practice with new texts, and gradually on the reading itself.

Research has surfaced several strategies to make the decoding process more efficient:

1. Students may be asked to reread the same decodable text, which will help with the automaticity of decoding (Rasinski, 2012).
2. Students should read decodable texts that will allow them to revisit previously learned spelling patterns so that patterns are not learned in isolation (Ehri, 2014). Remember, the ultimate goal is orthographic mapping, which is the process that occurs when readers make links between spellings, pronunciations, and meanings of words they are reading in their memory (Ehri, 2014).

3. Decodable texts should be used in combination with phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence activities. For example, before reading a decodable text, students might be asked to segment the sounds and then blend them back into the word (Perfetti & Hart, 2002).

4. Analysis of errors will help the teacher determine the next steps of the instruction and will be an efficient source of assessment data (Perfetti & Hart, 2002).

5. Teachers should provide explicit instruction on irregular high-frequency words using strategies such as orthographic mapping, visual memory cues, and semantic anchoring to help students store them efficiently in long-term memory (Ehri, 2014; Kilpatrick, 2015).

It is important to keep in mind that decodable texts are a transition to regular books; the more students' decoding skills improve, the more they should gradually be introduced to a broader range of texts that offer varied vocabulary and sentence structures, allowing them to apply and extend their decoding skills in more authentic reading contexts (Perfetti & Hart, 2002). As students' decoding skills increase, their reliance on more efficient decoding will gradually free up capacity to perform higher-level comprehension skills. This is consistent with Perfetti's (1985) verbal efficiency theory. This means that students will be using more decodable texts in the early stages of phonics instruction, and gradually move to partially decodable texts, and then to texts not controlled for orthographic features.

In Ready4Reading™, Short Reads Decodables offer short, compelling decodable texts that incrementally target individual sound-spellings. After working with these, students can progress to the Read to Know Text Sets that are built on an aligned scope and sequence. In the Read to Know Text Sets, the scope and sequence is aggregated, combining phonics elements to allow for cumulative application and reinforcement of decoding skills. Through this consolidated practice, children build the skills and agility they need to bridge to authentic grade-level text.

The Impact of Decodable Books on Vocabulary Instruction

For explicit vocabulary instruction, a primary instructional goal when reading any text should be to assist students with reading words with sufficient automaticity. In the context of vocabulary learning and comprehension, another critical concern is ensuring that students are able to engage with texts at an appropriate level of complexity to facilitate meaningful language development. Here, the instructional use of decodable texts can play a pivotal role in providing an optimal balance between linguistic complexity and readability. Decodable texts are designed to align with students' phonics skills, which means that their readability can be carefully controlled. Educators can use this feature to their advantage by selecting decodable texts that align with the phonics skills being taught. As a result, the books can be used as tools to support and practice these skills while still promoting a level of vocabulary acquisition that is both challenging and achievable for students.

Research by Foorman et al. (2016) indicated that the use of decodable books at the outset of literacy instruction has a positive effect on vocabulary growth, even for at-risk readers. For higher-order comprehension skills, the reading level of decodable texts can often support this. Many of the texts have complex and interesting narratives.

Perfetti's (1985) Verbal Efficiency Theory becomes a highly applicable principle to support the rationale for using decodable texts with students to help them grow their reading abilities. In the case of vocabulary learning, as decodable books increase automaticity skills, students can focus more cognitive resources on the higher-level process of vocabulary development.

One aspect that should be closely considered with respect to vocabulary development and comprehension is the narrative aspect of decodable texts. Modern decodable texts are not as simplistic or dry as in past years. They often have engaging storylines with characters, settings, plots, problems, and resolutions. They also have accompanying pictures that support these narratives. Most importantly, they have increasingly sophisticated design elements that help support their dual instructional role as meaning-makers and decodables (Mesmer, 2001). Words that a teacher wishes to explicitly teach can often be bolded or otherwise made to stand out in a text. A study conducted by Slavin (2009) showed that teachers who used both code instruction (teaching students how to read) and instruction that focused on meaning (supporting students in developing comprehension skills) were able to greatly support their students in developing both sets of skills at the same time.

Scholastic's decodables offer a range of compelling narratives and content-area-based informational texts that include rich vocabulary in context. Short Reads Decodables and Read to Know Text Sets offer informational texts that introduce students to science, social studies, math, and other topics. In addition, students encounter decodable fiction texts of different genres. In these stories, students meet new characters, explore different settings, and follow simple, and then more involved, plot lines. Accompanying lessons provide teachers with guidance for introducing content words and/or story words that children will encounter in these texts. These words may not always be decodable based on the scope and sequence elements already covered, so instruction provides support for preteaching these vocabulary words so that students are equipped to read and understand them when they encounter them in the text. In this way, the texts and instruction build vocabulary and comprehension along with automaticity in decoding.

The Role of Decodable Books in Supporting Writing and Encoding

The relationship between the reading and writing processes is symbiotic, which makes decodable texts a potentially rich resource for encoding practice. The interconnected nature of the decoding and encoding processes is established by Graham and Hebert's (2011) meta-analysis, which found that systematic instruction in decoding resulted in positive, corresponding gains in encoding, and vice versa. Additionally, Graham and Hebert (2011) found that student writing about reading material, such as through summaries, reflections, or short constructed responses, led to significant comprehension gains, which verifies that writing allows students to internalize skills learned from reading.

Decodable texts are designed with one or more particular orthographic patterns in mind, which provides logical targets for parallel encoding practice. The systematic progression of phoneme-grapheme correspondences in decodable text sequences creates a coherent framework for encoding instruction. As students decode and process specific orthographic patterns in a decodable text, they form mental representations that can support encoding of the same patterns in their writing.

This appears to match Ehri's (2014) phase theory of sight word acquisition. In her theory, orthographic mapping, or creating connections between letters and sounds to remember how words are spelled, how they sound, and what they mean, serves as a neurological foundation for automatic word recognition during reading, as well as automatic spelling during writing. Controlled use of orthographic patterns and sequences through decodable texts allows this mapping to happen while building the neural networks for decoding and encoding. Writing about text that they have read allows students further opportunity for orthographic mapping to become permanent as they must retrieve and use the exact patterns and strings they have just read. This generative practice with words strengthens the connections between phonology, orthography, and meaning-making that Ehri (2014) describes as necessary for automaticity.

Graham and Hebert's (2011) meta-analysis of 43 reading-writing connection studies, which included 16 studies with explicit instruction in transcription skills (spelling, handwriting, keyboarding), demonstrated a significant impact of transcription instruction on writing quality and reading comprehension. Decodable texts provide models of these transcription skills through their systematic presentation of orthographic patterns, morphological structures, and syntactic frames.

Aligning writing instruction with the orthographic patterns presented in decodable texts, therefore, can lead students to develop integrated literacy processes that support both reading and writing. This instructional approach supports the development of what Berninger and Abbott (2010) described as the "functional writing system," the integration of orthographic, phonological, morphological, and syntactic knowledge that underlies skilled writing.

Orthographic patterns presented in decodable texts can be applied to encoding instruction through a variety of pedagogical approaches. Word-sorting activities that are organized around orthographic features found in decodable texts develop pattern recognition skills that can transfer to encoding. Dictation activities provide practice that reinforces orthographic patterns through production. When these instructional activities are systematically aligned with the progression of patterns presented in decodable text sequences, a coherent cross-modal literacy experience is created that can strengthen neural connections for both decoding and encoding.

Decodable texts also support the development of morphological awareness, the recognition, understanding, and use of meaningful word parts, which is an important predictor of skilled writing (Bowers et al., 2010). The controlled vocabulary of decodable texts often includes a systematic presentation of inflectional and derivational morphology, which models the combination of morphemes to convey meaning. This, in turn, supports students' manipulation of morphological elements in their own writing, which contributes to vocabulary sophistication, syntactic complexity, and overall writing quality.

The application of orthographic knowledge to authentic writing tasks is an important extension of skills that are developed through engagement with decodable texts. Graham and Hebert (2011) noted that writing instruction is most effective when it includes opportunities for authentic application of skills in meaningful contexts. Decodable texts can be used as models for student-generated writing and can be used to provide scaffolds for both orthographic patterns and text structures.

Ready4Reading lessons for Short Reads Decodables provide sentences with targeted decodable words for children to write from dictation. The contents of these sentences are closely aligned to the texts students have read. Students have opportunities to practice their spelling skills along with their reading. The spelling patterns they practice align to the system's scope and sequence.

Lessons for Short Reads Decodables and Read to Know Text Sets offer Write About Reading prompts and Respond & Write activities to encourage students to think about what they have read and share their ideas in writing, building and extending comprehension. In addition, students naturally use decodable, high-frequency, and key vocabulary words from the text in their own sentences.

Summary of Using Decodables in K–3 Instruction

Decodable books can be used to practice and reinforce the process of orthographic mapping. The use of decodable text is a bridge between isolated phonics practice and connected, authentic reading. Decodable books give students the opportunity to be successful at reading early on. This success provides confidence and motivation, which will help students become successful readers.

The strategies above and others like them are intended to result in improved decoding, greater reading confidence, and improved comprehension. Ultimately, such progress is linked to long-term impacts like grade-level reading proficiency, sustained motivation, and a reduced need for intensive intervention services. With lessons that are intentionally planned with research-backed practices in mind, Scholastic's decodable texts can help support literacy for all students.

Scholastic's decodable text products for Grades K–3 (i.e., Short Reads Decodables, Read to Know Text Sets, and Our Stories Decodables) can be used across a range of instructional purposes and practices, including whole-class lessons, small-group instruction, intervention, summer-school learning, and take-home practice. Teacher supports (guides, rubrics, fluency routines, spelling lists, etc.) provide the classroom educator with practical resources to provide consistent, high-quality instruction, and digital resources allow for printable books, assessments, and student activities to easily supplement practice.

Decodable Texts in and Beyond Grade 3

Literacy instruction for students in the intermediate and middle-school grades, typically encompassing third grade and onward, involves distinct considerations and challenges compared to early literacy education. As students progress through these grades, they encounter increasingly complex literacy demands that often require targeted instructional approaches to support their ongoing development as readers. One such approach that has been the subject of debate is the use of decodable texts. While decodable texts have traditionally been associated with early reading instruction, their role in intermediate literacy instruction warrants critical examination. The following explores the multifaceted role of decodable texts within the broader context of comprehensive literacy instruction for students in and above Grade 3.

Addressing various dimensions of literacy development, decodable texts and aligned instruction contribute to the advancement of students' reading abilities. Strategically designed Scholastic Short Reads Decodables Advance, Read to Know Advance, and Our Stories Decodables can support multiple dimensions of literacy development while addressing the various needs of intermediate and middle-school readers. These include more advanced decodable texts that can play a significant role in reading instruction for older striving readers by providing targeted practice with the use of syllabication strategies and morphological understanding to read multisyllabic words. At the same time, these texts also foster knowledge-building through nonfiction texts and promote engagement through student-centered fiction.

The instructional design of Scholastic's decodables for intermediate grades and middle school is grounded in evidence-based practices, which closely correspond with program inputs, as described in the logic model. In Read to Know Advance and Our Stories Decodables, a primary focus is on systematic phonics practice through decodable texts that are strategically ordered to promote review of early-grade phonics targets, as well as advanced sound-spelling correspondences, multisyllabic word decoding, and morphological structures. Texts are designed to enable older striving readers to encounter words that they can decode with greater accuracy and automaticity and rely less on guessing or using context to predict unknown words.

Another essential component is knowledge-building with informational texts that build student background knowledge and vocabulary while providing additional opportunities to apply decoding skills. By including words with controlled orthographic patterns in decodable nonfiction passages, Short Reads Decodables Advance and Read to Know Advanced texts offer students increased word-recognition practice while simultaneously building schema for science, social studies, and other content areas. This integration of skill development and content knowledge reinforces comprehension skills and prepares students for the increasing emphasis on disciplinary literacy across the curriculum.

In contrast, Our Stories Decodables offers student-centered decodable fiction texts that represent different perspectives and includes authentic and relatable themes for learners.

Scaffolded progression is incorporated in the design, with a carefully sequenced series for multilingual learners. Spanish-language decodables, Cuentos fonéticos, are available to support foundational literacy skills in both English and Spanish and address the needs of bilingual and dual-language classrooms. The program is designed to be flexible, supporting instruction in small groups, whole-class lessons, intervention or core reading programs, summer learning, and/or take-home practice.

Along with each upper-grade decodable text product, Scholastic offers comprehensive teacher support materials, including a Teacher's Guide, rubrics, fluency routines, and other components to help ensure that students receive high-quality instruction. A suite of digital and printable resources further extends access, including supplemental activities for students, assessments, and instructional support materials that can be easily integrated into classroom practice.

Developmental Differences in Instructional Needs Between Primary Grade Students and Older Students

In K–3 instruction, the use of decodable texts is more closely aligned with the establishment of neurological reading pathways. At this stage, children's brains are actively developing the circuits necessary for reading fluently. Therefore, the instruction is more prescriptive, including a focus on phonological awareness and the alphabetic principle. The decodable books used must be carefully selected to match the systematic and explicit phonics instruction being received. They should provide ample opportunities for practice of recently taught grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) and minimize the inclusion of untaught or complex phonics elements that could lead to confusion or frustration. Ehri's model of word reading development illustrates that K–3 readers are often in the pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, or consolidated alphabetic phases of reading development. Decodable books support this development by providing repeated exposure to words that help solidify the orthographic mapping of words (Kilpatrick, 2015).

In contrast, the integration of decodable books into instruction in and beyond Grade 3 must consider the neurological shift from phonological to orthographic and morphological processing that typically occurs around this stage. While some students in this age range may still require phonics instruction, decodable books for this group can begin to incorporate more complex morphological elements and multisyllabic words. This supports the development of automaticity in word recognition and the transition to more advanced literacy skills (Seidenberg, 2017). According to the 'orthographic mapping' theory by Ehri, older students who struggle with reading may not have fully formed orthographic maps of words in their memory (2014). Decodable texts for this age group can be used to retroactively address these gaps in phonological processing while also providing support for the development of more advanced literacy skills.

Scholastic Read to Know Text Sets, Short Reads Decodables, and other early-grade decodable texts align with students' neurological and developmental needs by emphasizing systematic, explicit phonics instruction that is tightly matched to students' stages of reading development. Scholastic decodables are carefully aligned to a research-based scope and sequence, ensuring that early readers practice recently taught grapheme-phoneme correspondences with a high level of decodability, which supports the formation of phonological reading pathways and orthographic mapping. As students progress beyond Grade 3, Scholastic offers decodables designed for Grades 3+ that include more complex spelling patterns, multisyllabic words, and meaningful content, reflecting the neurological shift toward orthographic and morphological processing. This design allows decodable texts to both remediate gaps in foundational word reading for older struggling readers and support the transition to fluent, automatic word recognition and more advanced phonics and word study skills.

The Role of Decodable Texts in Enhancing Multisyllabic Decoding and Morphological Understanding with Older Students

As students progress through intermediate and middle-school grades, they are exposed to more advanced texts that include multisyllabic words and require more advanced decoding skills than just phonemic awareness. Apel et al. (2021) have shown that explicit instruction in more advanced phonological and morphological structures via decodable texts has a positive effect on students' decoding and comprehension of multisyllabic words. Decodable texts for intermediate grades can be used to help students decode morphological structures like prefixes, suffixes, and Greek and Latin roots, which are the building blocks of most multisyllabic content-area vocabulary words.

Decodable texts can be used to support students with morphological analysis because they can be created to focus on specific morphological structures within the context of meaningful text. For example, a decodable text that emphasizes words with common, high-utility suffixes, such as *confusion*, *decision*, *location*, *nations*, and *pollution* would allow students to see how the meaning and part of speech of the affixed word changes in consistent ways. Apel et al. (2021) show that with explicit instruction in morphological analysis, students use metacognitive skills to decode multisyllabic words on their own using decodable texts.

In addition, there is a neurological basis for this, as morphological knowledge appears to be processed in different parts of the brain than phonological processing (Kearns et al., 2016; Dehaene et al., 2011). If a decodable text includes morphologically complex words within a meaningful context like a story or informational passage, it gives students more points of entry for recognizing a word they do not know by sight. This could be especially helpful for students in later grades who have already learned to decode simple words using phonological skills, but have not yet learned to decode the multisyllabic content-specific words they are encountering.

Finally, an appropriately written decodable text for intermediate grades can also be designed to help students read multisyllabic words by including the syllabication types they are expected to be able to recognize by then: open, closed, vowel-consonant-*e*, vowel teams, *r*-controlled, and consonant-*le* syllables in predictable stress patterns in English. By providing students with procedural practice of syllabication skills using decodable texts with interesting and age-appropriate content, students will build the skill necessary to transfer this knowledge to new words.

The systematic use of decodable texts to scaffold instruction for decoding multisyllabic words helps students make the leap between the simple phonics that students are first introduced to and the more complex morphological knowledge they need in upper elementary and middle school.

With each passing grade level, texts become more complex. This means that many older striving readers are likely to encounter more multisyllabic words that do not behave the same way as the CVC words they were used to decoding in their early years of schooling. Older students who have not been taught explicit strategies for navigating this change are likely to make use of less reliable strategies, such as using the pictures and context to guess or using partial decoding strategies such as attending only to initial sounds. Reliance on these less-effective strategies can frustrate students and put a ceiling on their progress. Decodable texts with aligned direct instruction provide older students an opportunity to review phonics and word study elements and use specific and reliable decoding strategies as they practice their decoding fluency and work toward comprehension (Apel et al., 2021; Kearns et al., 2016; Dehaene et al., 2011).

A typical scope and sequence for phonics instruction starts with the simplest sound-spelling patterns and gradually introduces new elements. Scholastic Short Reads Decodables Advance, on the other hand, is designed with the needs of older striving readers in mind. Most of these readers have been exposed to far more text than their younger peers and don't need to revisit the first or most straightforward phonics targets. They need decodable texts that are heavy in advanced phonics, syllabication, and morphology so they can learn to effectively unlock the complex words they encounter in content-area texts in the upper grades. (Castles et al., 2018) highlighted this need in their research on self-teaching and vocabulary growth in older readers.

Read to Know Advance titles are also informed by a well-researched, aggregated scope and sequence that allows phonics elements to be taught in "useful chunks," grouping phonics elements together into sets, such as consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words or long vowels with final *e*. The intention of this scope and sequence is to allow for the creation of richer, deeper texts that allow for more cumulative practice, building on existing decoding skills and strengthening these skills by growing student knowledge (Recht & Leslie, 1988; Cervetti & Wright, 2017). This approach to scope and sequence and the consolidation of phonics elements it allows can help students gain the agility to make the leap to fluent, comprehending reading of authentic grade-level text.

By using an aggregated scope and sequence to organize phonics elements, the Read to Know Advance and Our Stories Decodables Advance books also allow for more efficient practice. Rather than isolating a single phonics element for decoding practice, each book in these series is designed to let students practice two, three, and sometimes even four decoding strategies at once. This is an important consideration for the instruction of older readers as every moment in their instruction needs to be accounted for. Slower decoding of commonly used multisyllabic words in content-area texts not only can impact comprehension but can also disrupt the already limited time for phonics intervention in this age group (Lindsey, 2022). The ability to provide older readers with rigorous, age-appropriate decoding practice is one more reason the materials are built the way they are.

Read to Know Advance and Short Reads Decodables Advance also feature a broader word choice than many decodable readers. These books have been designed to give students access to the types of words they might encounter in content-area and other authentic classroom texts. This expanded inventory of decodable words can help prepare students to decode the language of school and life.

Scholastic Short Reads Decodables Advance are built around the research-backed needs of older striving readers and are designed to give these students the tools and opportunity to practice decoding multisyllabic words and become more morphologically aware in an age-appropriate way. Through age-appropriate texts with phonics elements organized in a consolidated scope of targets, this series helps older struggling readers master advanced phonics, gain the agility to crack grade-level texts, and build the confidence and knowledge they need to move from intervention to authentic content-area reading in the upper elementary grades and middle school.

Effective Intervention Strategies for Striving Readers in and Above Third Grade

Decodable texts have been recognized as a valuable tool for striving readers in later grades when used as part of a comprehensive literacy intervention strategy. Lindsey (2022) asserts that effective reading interventions need to address both the cognitive and affective factors associated with reading difficulties, in addition to skill deficits in decoding.

Striving readers benefit from decodable texts, as they can focus more on comprehension and less on the mechanics of decoding. In their meta-analysis of reading interventions for struggling readers in intermediate grades, Mesmer and Kambach (2022) reported that interventions that combined decodable text with systematic phonics instruction led to statistically significant improvements in measures of reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. They also found that text decodability was a moderating variable in intervention effectiveness, specifically the match or mismatch between students' current decoding skills and the grapho-phonemic regularities of the intervention texts.

For striving readers in later grades, using decodable texts for intervention requires diagnostic assessment to identify specific gaps in decoding skills that need to be targeted. Once a student's decoding deficits have been identified, decodable texts can be used to provide practice with the particular syllable types or morphological patterns that the student struggles with. Intervention materials should be carefully selected or designed to ensure they are decodable at the word level, while still presenting age-appropriate themes and complexity of ideas, to avoid frustration or feelings of being patronized in the struggling reader.

The use of progressively decodable texts, where the difficulty level of the text increases as students master the targeted patterns, may be a promising strategy in intervention design. Lindsey (2022) found in a longitudinal study that interventions using progressively challenging decodable texts produced better outcomes than interventions using either consistently simple decodable texts or non-decodable grade-level texts. This method allows for continuous challenge within a student's instructional level while also systematically building their decoding skills. Evidence-based intervention protocols using decodable texts will often include elements of explicit instruction, repeated reading practice, and corrective feedback.

The composition of decodable texts allows for these instructional components to be more easily incorporated into the intervention. By repeatedly encountering decodable words and word parts in a controlled context, students can develop the automaticity of word recognition that is necessary to free up cognitive resources for comprehension.

Scholastic Read to Know Advance, Short Reads Decodables Advance, and Our Stories Decodables align closely with research on effective intervention for striving readers in later grades by combining systematic phonics and word study instruction with age-appropriate, engaging texts (Lindsey, 2022; Mesmer & Kambach, 2022). Scholastic decodables for older students are designed to be developmentally respectful, targeting specific decoding and word study needs, such as syllable types and multisyllabic words, while focusing on sophisticated topics that support engagement and motivation. These texts are intentionally structured, allowing students to focus less on decoding effort and more on fluency and comprehension, which reflects findings that decodability must match students' current skill levels for maximum impact. Additionally, Scholastic decodable texts and accompanying teacher guidance supports diagnostic-driven, differentiated intervention, with opportunities for repeated reading, explicit instruction, and increasing text complexity, key components shown to improve accuracy, fluency, and comprehension for struggling readers.

Fostering Knowledge-Building Through Informational Texts in Grades 3+

As students move from "learning to read" to "reading to learn" (Cabell & Hwang, 2020, p. 2), informational texts are leveraged to create comprehension opportunities beyond expository narrative text, and to make the topics at hand more interesting and engaging for students (Cabell & Hwang, 2020). Research by (Recht & Leslie, 1988; Cervetti & Wright, 2017) illustrated the critical role of domain knowledge on reading comprehension outcomes. Students who were lower-level readers in general showed that with some domain knowledge, they could read and comprehend grade-level texts in their area of expertise at levels on par with students who had a stronger overall ability to read (Recht & Leslie, 1988; Cervetti & Wright, 2017). This finding has notable implications for the incorporation of informational decodable text into intermediate literacy instruction.

Carefully crafted informational decodable texts can support both decoding ability as well as accruing students' expertise of science, social studies, and other content-area background knowledge. Constraining the orthographic but not conceptual nature of the text, informational decodable materials can provide a dual-purposed instructional tool to address both code-based as well as meaning-based components of reading. Content knowledge is seen as a resource for reading comprehension, and by helping students create a schema for a topic or by revisiting a topic through reading, students accrue content knowledge and reading ability concurrently (Recht & Leslie, 1988; Cervetti & Wright, 2017).

Given the constraints of instructional time, using informational decodable texts allows educators to efficiently support both decoding development and content-knowledge acquisition (Cabell & Hwang, 2020). Cabell and Hwang (2020) found that using decodable informational text as a means of knowledge-building over the course of a year led to notable improvements in both reading comprehension outcomes as well as content-knowledge growth when compared to both uncontrolled informational text as well as narrative decodable text conditions. The researchers' posited explanation for this phenomenon was that reading decodable text that is constrained orthographically but not conceptually provides a framework in which the mental load of decoding individual words is lessened, freeing cognitive resources to create schema through knowledge-building (Cabell & Hwang, 2020).

Informational decodable texts can be written in a way that is conducive to teaching morphological structures as well as content-area knowledge. The grammatical construction of informational decodable texts might include the purposeful inclusion of words that follow a morphological pattern being explicitly taught (root or suffix, for example) and work toward students' recognizing the morphological meaning of a word even in an unknown context (Baumann et al., 2003). In a science informational decodable text about photosynthesis, words with the Greek root "photo" might be purposefully and systematically included (*photosynthesis, photon, phototropism, photosynthesis*, etc.) while other orthographic features are controlled to create a decodable text. This pattern might be leveraged for both the purpose of content-specific vocabulary as well as of morphological awareness. In the knowledge-building study by Cervetti et al. (2016), students' building of background knowledge was essential to their learning to read more complex informational text about the topic being studied. This could easily be a similar argument made for informational decodable text, as the academic vocabulary and syntactical complexity of informational texts can be scaffolded and leavened for reading through the creation of entry points into disciplinary discourse. The creation of entry points into new and complex content, by both directly teaching academic vocabulary, as well as giving students the ability to decode and build schema through text, is in line with cognitive science research into the nature of knowledge and knowledge structures on reading ability.

Scholastic Short Reads Decodables Advance and Read to Know Advance collections intentionally use informational decodable texts to build both decoding skills and content knowledge at the same time. These knowledge-building decodables are designed to systematically target phonics and word study instruction while simultaneously developing background knowledge in science, social studies, and other content areas. By constraining orthography while maintaining rich and age-appropriate concepts, these texts allow students to devote less cognitive effort to decoding and more to schema-building and comprehension. Scholastic informational decodables for Grades 3+, along with vocabulary support and explicit instruction in phonics and word study focus, demonstrate how informational decodables can efficiently and simultaneously support both "learning to read" and "reading to learn," while also creating entry points into disciplinary language and academic vocabulary.

Promoting Engagement Through Teaching with Meaning and Purpose

Hammond (2014) and Hollie (2018) have provided insights on how teaching practices that make learning relevant and relatable for all students can improve cognition and academic success.

Teaching with meaning and purpose applied to the principles of decodable text design and usage can be integrated into engaging and affirming literacy experiences for students. In the context of decodable texts for intermediate readers, student-centered materials include authentic characters, settings, and scenarios that reflect the experiences of all students; and themes and topics that are relevant and engaging. Hollie's (2018) work suggests that students are more engaged and comprehend and retain more when reading texts that align with their schemas as opposed to neutral or incongruent materials.

Neurological studies on brain responses to student-centered texts (Hammond, 2014) show that when students read materials that are relevant to them, there is less cognitive load and more positive emotional responses associated with learning. This is particularly important for striving readers who may have previously struggled or failed at phonics-based reading exercises that were devoid of context or personal meaning. Student-centered decodable texts give readers an opportunity to reconnect with reading by making the decoding practice relevant and personally meaningful. The affective aspect of reading is particularly important for adolescent readers who are in the process of forming their academic identities and are becoming more socially aware.

Scholastic Our Stories Decodables were written by authors from various backgrounds, providing a rich range of perspectives and voices. These richly illustrated decodable fiction stories reflect students' world—making phonics practice relevant and rewarding for all.

Implementing Comprehension Scaffolds and Fluency Routines

In using decodable texts effectively, it's important to strike a balance between code emphasis and comprehension, through appropriate scaffolding. Evidence for comprehension instruction (Duke & Cartwright, 2021) shows that when we teach comprehension strategies in a structured text environment, students who are working to improve their reading can take the cognitive strategies and tools they learn and apply them to other reading situations that are not as controlled.

Some examples of comprehension scaffolds we might use with decodable text include text structure graphic organizers, purposeful questioning that builds from literal to open-ended and inferential, and direct attention to the cohesive devices used in the text. In developing decodable texts for intermediate students, we can strategically use more complex syntax and discourse features while still maintaining orthographic control. In this way, we can progress the text complexity and support students in developing both word-level automaticity and sentence/discourse level comprehension. An intermediate decodable text focusing on a specific syllable pattern may also include increasingly complex sentence structures with embedded clauses, or a range of transitional phrases and patterns to give students multiple opportunities to develop syntactic awareness in the context of decodable text.

The link between fluency development and decodable text also deserves specific attention in later grades. Research by Rasinski et al. (2017) has shown that reading fluency continues to be a critical aspect of reading proficiency throughout the adolescent years, and there is a strong correlation between prosodic reading ability and overall reading comprehension. Decodable texts provide a prime opportunity for fluency development because they allow the students to remove the heavy cognitive load of decoding and focus on reading with appropriate phrasing, intonation, and expression.

Evidence-based fluency routines with decodable texts include repeated readings to a set performance criteria, paired reading protocols, Readers' Theater versions, and timed readings with graphed results. These approaches take advantage of the orthographic accessibility of decodable text and combine that with performance-based reading tasks that develop both automaticity and prosody. Implemented in a systematic way, these routines result in improved measures of reading rate, accuracy, and expression that can be transferred to non-decodable texts (Rasinski et al., 2017). Advanced decodable texts can use increasingly sophisticated text structures (comparison-contrast, cause-effect, problem-solution) and still be decodable. This may allow teachers to explicitly model comprehension strategies that work with each text structure in a decodable text before students are faced with the same structure in a less controlled text. Studies have shown that direct teaching of text structure (Pyle et al., 2017) improves comprehension, particularly of informational text that is more common in content area reading.

Scholastic Read to Know Advance and Short Reads Decodables Advance are designed to balance explicit code-based instruction with comprehension and fluency development. Both programs intentionally integrate knowledge-building informational texts and discussion prompts, allowing teachers to scaffold comprehension while students read orthographically controlled text. These decodables also include texts with a degree of syntactic and text-structure complexity, supporting sentence-level and discourse-level comprehension without overwhelming students' decoding abilities. Additionally, Scholastic decodables integrate fluency routines such as repeated readings and partner reading, enabling students to focus on phrasing, expression, and prosody once decoding demands are reduced, which helps transfer fluency and comprehension skills to more complex, non-decodable texts.

Encouraging Writing About Texts and Text-Based Discussions

Integrating writing and discussion activities with decodable text instruction results in significant synergistic benefits for intermediate and middle-school literacy development. A body of work on the reading-writing nexus (Graham et al., 2018) reveals that the act of writing about text bolsters comprehension through a variety of cognitive mechanisms, including the reorganization of textual information, elaboration of central ideas, and the precise articulation of one's understanding. When students write about decodable texts, they simultaneously reinforce orthographic patterns through encoding and deepen their comprehension.

Text-based discussions focused on decodable materials can fulfill a range of instructional objectives when implemented with purposeful questioning protocols. Structures for accountable talk (Michaels et al., 2008) that ask students to support their statements with evidence from the text, to build on each other's comments, and to articulate their reasoning about the textual information engage a variety of cognitive processes that promote deeper comprehension. When discussion protocols like these are applied to decodable texts, they ensure that the accessibility at the word level will not hinder, but rather support, higher-order thinking and collaborative meaning-making.

English learners and students who speak a variety of languages can benefit from the trifecta of decodable text, writing, and structured discussion, as these provide multiple pathways to language development. Gibbons' (2009) work on scaffolded interaction highlights how this instructional sequence fosters a language-rich environment that scaffolds students from contextualized to decontextualized language use. Decodable texts offer the initial contextualized input for language acquisition, writing activities necessitate greater control over language, and discussions cultivate academic oral language proficiency.

However, when integrating writing and discussion with decodable text instruction, it is crucial to ensure that cognitive demand remains high even within controlled text. Scholarship on effective literacy instruction (Arfé et al, 2018) cautions that while simplifying the text can aid accessibility, it should not lead to oversimplification of the cognitive processes involved in engaging with the text. Carefully crafted writing prompts and discussion questions can still demand sophisticated analytical thinking and engage students in higher-order processing of conceptually rich decodable texts. This way, the orthographic accessibility of these texts serves as a gateway to, rather than a barrier against, deep intellectual engagement.

Scholastic Read to Know Advance and Short Reads Decodables Advance are purposefully structured to integrate reading, writing, and discussion into instruction. Accompanying Teacher's Guides include text-based discussion prompts, writing activities, and response tasks that require students to explain ideas, use evidence from the text, and organize their thinking, reinforcing both comprehension and orthographic learning through encoding. These structured writing and discussion routines ensure that the accessibility of decodable text supports, rather than limits, higher-order thinking, aligning with research on accountable talk and the reading-writing connection. Additionally, Scholastic decodables provide strong support for multilingual learners by combining controlled text, explicit language scaffolds, collaborative discussion, and writing opportunities that promote academic language development while maintaining high cognitive demand.

Summary of Using Decodables in Grades 3 and Up

The combination of the key program features described here can help to produce an array of short-term outcomes, including increased decoding skills, confidence with independent reading, and improved text-level comprehension. By supporting continued gains in word recognition, fluency, and vocabulary, Scholastic's decodable programs contribute to the long-term impacts of reaching grade-level reading proficiency, maintaining students' motivation to read, and reducing the need for intensive intervention services. Decodable text coupled with writing exercises and structured discussions enable English learners and multilingual students to access language. Through a close alignment between instructional design and research-based practices, Scholastic decodables can offer a comprehensive and scalable solution for advancing literacy in third grade and above.

Conclusions

Decodable texts are integral to evidence-based literacy instruction in Grades K–3. As students learn to connect letters to sounds and construct words, developing the neurological circuitry needed for fluent reading, systematic and explicit phonics instruction is most effective with controlled texts where children can immediately apply what they have just learned (Moats, 2020). Decodable texts provide the bridge from isolated phonics practice to meaningful application in text. Working with decodable text allows students to practice grapheme-phoneme correspondences in connected text, to solidify orthographic mapping, and to build confidence as successful readers. By thoughtfully aligning instructional design with these research-based practices, Scholastic's decodable products provide an important opportunity for advancing literacy among a variety of student populations.

This paper has provided clear guidance for choosing decodable texts and using them well. The framework highlights the importance of clarity, cumulative progression, and diagnostic responsiveness in the use of decodable texts. Decodable books embed phonics practice in meaningful stories and informational text, supporting both code-based skills and comprehension. The texts, along with aligned instructional supports, include scaffolds for high-frequency word reading, vocabulary development, and connections to decoding, encoding, and writing.

Scholastic's decodable text products for Grades K– 3 (i.e., Short Reads Decodables, Read to Know Text Sets, and Our Stories Decodables) can be used across a range of instructional purposes and practices, including whole-class lessons, small-group instruction, intervention, summer-school learning, and take-home practice. Teacher supports (guides, rubrics, fluency routines, writing activities, etc.) provide the classroom educator with practical resources to provide consistent, high-quality instruction, and digital resources, some of which allow for printable materials that may include take-home books, assessments, and student activities to supplement practice.

Decodable texts have historically played a role in literacy education, but they have not been harnessed to the degree they could be to support older readers in need of additional support. Scholastic Short Reads Decodables Advance and Read to Know Advance Decodables (Grades 3+) and Our Stories Decodables (Grades K–5) are not remedial; they provide appropriately complex and content-rich texts. Decodable texts can support students in several different ways during this transitional reading phase, including review of early-grade foundations, multisyllabic word decoding, morphological awareness, fluency and prosody, knowledge-building, comprehension, comprehension scaffolds and routines, student-centered texts, and response through writing and discussion.

As students in the intermediate grades move from phonological to orthographic and morphological processing, Scholastic Short Reads Decodables Advance and Read to Know Advance texts (Grades 3+) and Our Stories Decodables (Grades K–5) provide practice for these skills and are useful tools in meeting their instructional needs. Decodable texts that are developmentally appropriate for the intermediate grades can support advanced phonics and syllabication practice, morphological analysis, and multi-syllabic word decoding within rich and meaningful contexts.

In short, decodable texts are a fundamental, rather than supplemental, component of comprehensive evidence-based literacy instruction. Students need the systematic, controlled practice offered by decodable texts to master phonics and word study skills, to build comprehension, and to develop the confidence needed to read authentic text successfully. When implemented with care, Scholastic's decodable product line can be a building block of literacy instruction across grades, helping students to become successful readers for a lifetime.

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