

Information for Schools: Decodable Reading Books

Key principles for phonics and application to reading books

- It is essential to have a clear order for teaching phonics that is consistent in the school.
- The phonic progression of the decodable readers needs to match the phonics progression of the programme being used. These books should introduce new grapheme phoneme correspondences (GPCs) in the same order as the teaching programme. The progression within the books should be cumulative so children can practise GPCs they have already learned earlier in the programme.
- Ensure that decodable words and Common Exception Words are taught before the children read the book for the first time.
- It is worth considering decodable books that are labelled as: phonics books, fully decodable or linked to Letters and Sounds.
- Avoid books that make links to phonics but are not fully decodable. They may have some decodable words within them; however, they are often have a mixed approach that does not provide a clear progression and will not support the children’s growing phonic knowledge.
- Avoid books which are not decodable and use the ‘whole language’ approach and the outdated searchlights model (where a repetitive sentence structure is used, which encourages ‘guessing’ strategies to work out unknown words).
- Books should be matched to the children’s secure phonic knowledge, so they can at 90%+ fluency – enabling them to transfer and apply their phonic knowledge.

Advice to consider when selecting books to ensure they are decodable

	Advice	Notes	Points to consider
1	Choose books that match the phonic progression of the systematic synthetic phonics teaching programme that is being used by the school.	<p>Different decodable readers follow different phonic progressions.</p> <p>Match the books that the children will practise reading with to the teaching progression. It may be possible to rearrange the book order to do this.</p> <p>If a specific programme such as Read Write Inc. or Floppy Phonics is used, books purchased need to exactly match that programme’s phonic progression.</p>	Do all staff know the phonic progression of the programme they are teaching?
2	<p>Choose books that have a cumulative phonic progression.</p> <p>Ensure the books review and practise GPCs from earlier</p>	When assessing books look for a chart that shows progression of the GPCs. Books should not include GPCs that the children haven’t met yet e.g. /ee/ y in a book with Phase 3 graphemes.	Children need to be introduced to blending words with adjacent consonants before they apply this in the decodable books.

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	<p>levels and the GPCs the children are currently learning.</p> <p>Do not choose books that have GPCs the children have not been taught.</p>		<p>If following the Letters and Sounds Phases, early books Phase 2 should not have adjacent consonants except for plurals.</p>	
3	<p>Choose books that gradually become more complex and longer in length.</p>		<p>The length and word count in the books should increase gradually. A sudden increase in complexity and length in the books will increase cognitive load and could lead to diminished success.</p>	
4	<p>Ensure books include sentences (except for very early books).</p>		<p>At the earliest stages, the text in decodable books may not be in full sentences due to the limited number of graphemes covered.</p> <p>Children do need to practise reading in books with sentences as soon as possible.</p>	
5	<p>Make sure the books practise a small number of 'exceptions' words, but these should be ones already taught as part of the programme.</p> <p>Avoid books with too many 'exceptions' words especially at the early levels.</p>		<p>These are the Common Exception Words/ Tricky words.</p> <p>Letters and Sounds Tricky Words: <i>Phase 2: the to I no go into</i> <i>Phase 3: he she we me be was you they all are my her</i> <i>Phase 4: said have like so do some come were there little one when out what</i> <i>Phase 5: oh their people Mr Mrs looked called asked could</i></p> <p>National Curriculum Appendix 1 Spelling: Year 1 <i>the, a, do, to, today, of, said, says, are, were, was, is, his, has, I, you, your, they, be, he, me, she, we, no, go, so, by, my, here, there, where, love, come, some, one, once, ask, friend, school, put, push, pull, full, house, our – and/or others, according to the programme used.</i></p>	<p>Ensure these are flagged up in the teacher notes so they can be reviewed before the child reads the book.</p> <p>Books should have some Tricky Words / Common Exception Words. Children need to practise these words in context, so they can become fluent readers.</p> <p>Tricky Words / Common Exception Words should be introduced incrementally and have been taught in the phonics lesson before being practised in the book.</p>

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6	<p>Think carefully about books that include non-decodable words e.g. challenge words/ topic words.</p> <p>Avoid books that use these words at the early stages.</p> <p>Avoid books more than 3 or 4 challenge words in them.</p> <p>Ensure books with challenge words offer repeated practise of these words.</p>		<p>These books are not fully decodable.</p> <p>The amount of non-decodable words within the book. More than 3 or 4 will put unnecessary cognitive load upon the reader, which must be avoided.</p> <p><i>It is a priority that children practise reading words using their phonic knowledge rather than remembering words or guessing them.</i></p>	<p>Check the non-decodable words are clearly identified in teacher notes, so they can be practised/taught before the child reads them in the text.</p>
7	<p>Choose high quality books which are engaging and link to the children's interests and experiences.</p>			<p>It is important to invest in these books as they are the first books with which children practise their emerging reading skills.</p>
8	<p>Choose books which are easy for a beginner reader to read and navigate.</p> <p>Avoid books at the early stages with too many design features on a page.</p>		<p>Check readability: Look for clear font and uncluttered pages that help a beginner reader.</p>	
9	<p>Choose books that have a simple assessment that matches children's secure phonic knowledge to the correct level book.</p>		<p>Look for a chart that shows progression of GPCs, so they can easily be matched to the school's current assessment.</p>	<p>Ensure that staff know the books well and can match the books to the children's secure phonic knowledge confidently.</p> <p>Children should be able read the matched level of books at 90%+ fluency – so they can transfer and apply their phonic knowledge whilst reading the book.</p>

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