

Reading Guide to Program Selection, Kindergarten

A core reading program is the backbone of your reading instruction. It provides many of the texts your students will read and the curriculum that will assist their development. This curriculum includes the knowledge, strategies, and attitudes students need to become engaged and skillful readers. To read well students need knowledge of letters, sounds, word meanings, genre, and concepts of the world. Knowledge without strategies, however, is largely inert. So, students need strategies for identifying words, inferring word meanings, comprehending a passage, and monitoring comprehension. A core program should provide lessons so that teachers can teach these strategies effectively. Finally, good reading is more than a set of skills and strategies; it is also the will to plunge into text, engage with it, and enjoy it. A core reading program should help to develop engagement.

In this document you will find a number of activities that will help you evaluate the instruction in core reading programs. *This is not a checklist.* Checklists cause you to look for specific components—phonemic awareness lessons, little books, activities for English-language learners, and progress-monitoring tools. Publishing companies are sophisticated and know what components you are seeking, so they place them in the program clearly labeled. Only by looking deeply and examining critically will you be able to discern the quality of the instruction and the match between the core program’s instruction and your school’s or your district’s curriculum goals.

This document will take you through a series of inquiries about reading instruction in a core program. You will be asked to look at a limited number of features but your examination will require some time and thought. You will be inspecting the core program as if you were about to teach from it, planning a lesson and considering how the instruction in the program will affect your students. Let’s use shopping for a car as an analogy. All things considered, you want a car with certain components. Of course, the salesman says, “Yes, this car has cruise control and an antilock braking system.” But without a test drive, you cannot know how easy it is to operate the cruise control or how well it maintains the speed of the car on uphill and downhill slopes. Only a similar test drive will enable you to evaluate the components of a core reading program. Keep in mind that you may break the following tasks up among members of your textbook adoption committee, helping everyone to manage their time and efforts in an efficient way.

Rating and Scoring Components of a Core Reading Program

Directions

You will examine five components of a core reading program: its texts; phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight word instruction; knowledge and vocabulary instruction; comprehension instruction; and differentiation of instruction. These examinations are organized as a series of inquiries into the programs. At the end of each inquiry you will find a 4-point rating guide. Use the 4-point rating guide to provide a summary rating of each component, using the following rubric. In determining your rating you should consider both the quality of the text or the instruction and how frequently the program meets that level of quality. To earn a high score the program must demonstrate a consistently high level of quality.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 4 = Excellent | All of the selections or lesson components examined meet a very high level of quality on a consistent basis. |
| 3 = Strong | Most of the selections or lessons examined meet a high level of quality on a consistent basis, or meet a very high level of quality on an inconsistent basis. |
| 2 = Adequate | All of the selections or lessons examined meet an average level of quality on a consistent basis, or fail to include some important instructional characteristics at all. |
| 1 = Weak | All of the selections or lessons examined fail to meet some important characteristics despite an occasional strong attribute. |

The overall rating for each section is important, but so are the impressions you gain from studying the core reading programs.

The last page of the Reading GPS guides you to integrate and summarize all of your impressions of each core reading program. Be sure to comment on the navigation of the program, noting how easy it is to locate and use its various components. Use one complete set of these forms for each core reading program you evaluate.

Part I: Texts for Reading

Big Books and Student Anthology

Good readers are proficient with a wide range of genres. A strong reading program has a balance of genres because a strong diet of fantasy will not develop a student's skill in reading poetry or informational books. Beyond balance, a strong program will provide enough experience with a genre so that students understand the structure and features of that genre.

Directions

Read all of the selections in the program and tally the number of each genre you locate. Look at the Big Books and student anthology. Compute the percentage of selections for each genre, and then compare the results for this program to other core programs you are considering.

Unit/Theme	Fiction					Poetry and Plays	Nonfiction	
	Historical Fiction	Realistic Fiction	Fantasy	Mystery	Folk Tales and Fables		Expository	Narrative
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
Totals								
Percentages								

Provide an overall rating for the diversity of genre in the program by circling one response.

Rating the Genre Balance			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Leveled and Decodable Books

In addition to the student anthology, core programs contain a number of little, leveled books. These books help students read at their instructional level and apply decoding skills and allow teachers to differentiate instruction. It is important to examine the quality of these leveled books because they play such a central role in your instruction.

We suggest that you read the leveled and decodable books that accompany at least five of the anthology selections or Big Book selections. When reading the leveled and decodable books, you will examine three characteristics: (1) word count or length, (2) genre, and (3) interest level.

Directions

Word count is important because students reading below level need extensive reading to catch up. They need to read as much as the better readers, or more. Write in the number of words in each book for below-, on-, and above-level texts.

The **genre** of the anthology selection should receive additional focus when students read the accompanying leveled books. Identify genre for the anthology selection and the leveled books with an appropriate one- or two-letter code. Look for some relationship or consistency between the selections.

Interest or engagement should be coded 5 (high) through 1 (low). Consider the following criteria:

Are the ideas important; are the ideas personally, socially, or culturally relevant?

Is there development of an idea, a character, or a theme?

Does the text stimulate thinking and feeling?

Evaluating Leveled and Decodable Texts

Unit or Theme and Lesson	Word Count or Length			Genre			Interest and Engagement		
	Below Level	On Level	Above Level	Below Level	On Level	Above Level	Below Level	On Level	Above Level
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									
Theme ___ Lesson ___									

Provide an overall rating for the quality of the leveled and decodable books in the program by circling one response.

Rating Leveled Books			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Part II: Instruction for Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, and Sight Words

Phonemic Awareness Scope and Sequence

You will need to examine the core program's scope and sequence in the light of best practice. It is important to remember that the sequence of instruction for developing phonological awareness is not rigid, but rather some early knowledge (e.g., letter names), facilitates later learning like awareness of onsets, rimes, and phonemes.

Directions

As you read through parts of the program, place check marks when an element of phonemic awareness instruction appears at the beginning, middle, or end of the year. A strong program should approximately follow the sequence in the left-hand column in chronological order.

Research-Based Sequence of Instruction	Kindergarten Curriculum		
	Beginning of Year	Mid Year	End of Year
Alphabet names—perhaps 8 letters before letter sounds are introduced			
Associate letters and sounds			
Segment and blend syllables			
Identify individual phonemes—begin with continuants (<i>m, s, l</i>)			
Sort and match phonemes at the beginning and end of words			
Onset and rime—segmenting and blending			
Phoneme segmenting and blending			
Deletion and substitution of phonemes			

Phonemic Awareness Instruction

Research has shown that a number of factors are critical to effective phonemic awareness instruction.

Directions

Examine five lessons across the year. Fill in each column as the criterion is met.

- The program should provide all necessary materials.
- Students should be taught in small groups (S), not whole groups (W) or individually (I).
- The lesson length should be between 15 and 20 minutes.
- The teacher and the students (TS) should model the response, not just the teacher (T).
- The teacher should be directed to provide feedback on incorrect (I) and correct responses (C).
- There should be a sufficient number of items so that students can practice the skills thoroughly: sufficient practice (S), insufficient practice (I).
- Phonemic awareness is applied to the spelling and reading of real text.

Unit or Theme and Lesson Number	Materials Provided (Yes, No)	Instructional Group (W, S, I)	Lesson Length in Minutes	Modeling (T, TS)	Feedback (C, I)	Sufficient Practice (S, I)	Application to Real Text (Yes, No)

Provide an overall rating of phonemic awareness instruction by circling one response.

Rating Phonemic Awareness			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Phonics and Letter Identification—Scope and Sequence

You will need to examine the core reading program’s scope and sequence for phonics and letter identification against guidelines suggested by research. Research-based guidelines for an effective phonics scope and sequence are listed in the left-hand column.

Directions

For each unit of the program, check off which skills are taught. During this examination keep in mind how well this core program’s scope and sequence match up with the other programs you are considering.

	Unit __					
<i>a, m t, s, i, f</i>						
<i>d, r, o, g, l, h</i>						
<i>u, c, b, n, k, v</i>						
<i>e, w, j, p, y, T</i>						
<i>L, M, F, D, I, N</i>						
<i>A, R, H, G, B</i>						
<i>x, q, z, E, Q</i>						
High-utility sounds (e.g., /a/, /m/, /s/, /t/, /r/) are taught before low-utility sounds (e.g., /x/, /y/, /z/)						
Short-vowel patterns (CVC) are introduced (e.g., <i>cat, pig, wet</i>)						

Provide an overall rating for the scope and sequence of phonics and letter identification by circling one response.

Rating Letter Scope and Sequence			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Phonics Instruction

Having considered the sequence of phonics instruction, you now need to evaluate the quality of that instruction. The chart on this page lists characteristics of strong phonics instruction.

Directions

Read the characteristics and then read at least 10 lessons within the core program. For each characteristic, rate how often that instructional characteristic is found in the lessons.

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program provides the materials necessary for conducting the whole-group lesson.				
The program provides the materials necessary for differentiating the letter identification and phonics instruction in small groups or at learning centers.				
Letter-sound patterns are taught to mastery and reviewed regularly.				
Students are given an opportunity to decode (pronounce) and encode (spell) the sounds that have been taught.				
The teacher is directed to explicitly model decoding strategies.				
The program provides the opportunity for students to apply their knowledge of letter-sound principles to reading real words in short, decodable text.				

(continued)

Phonics Instruction (continued)

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program differentiates and gives you the option to teach phonics features based on students' needs or skill levels.				
The program provides additional small-group instructional time for students needing more help with decoding.				
The program provides different materials and different texts to teach phonics to below-level students.				
When the students are reading connected text, the program provides teachers with help or guidelines explaining how to coach students to apply decoding strategies.				

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of phonics instruction by circling one response.

Rating Phonics Instruction			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Sight-Word Instruction

Having considered phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, you now need to evaluate how the program teaches sight words. Sight words are high-frequency words that readers learn to immediately recognize. This page helps you evaluate the characteristics of sight-word instruction.

Directions

Read the characteristics and then read at least six lessons within the core program. For each characteristic, rate how often that instructional characteristic is found in the lessons.

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
High-frequency words taught in the program have both regular (<i>can</i>) and irregular (<i>was</i>) spelling features.				
Sight words typically taught in your school appear in the core program (Dolch or Fry lists).				
Function words are taught in the program (<i>and, but, for, on, in</i>).				
Important content words are taught before students read or listen to a selection.				
The decodable parts of irregular words are stressed when these words are taught and the irregularities are described.				
The program provides opportunities and activities for students to practice sight words.				

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of sight-word instruction by circling one response.

Rating Sight-Word Instruction			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Part III: Knowledge and Vocabulary Development

Before you begin to examine the knowledge development and vocabulary instruction in the core reading program, you need to read all of the selections in one theme or unit of the student edition, approximately five lessons. Do not use the teacher's edition for your first reading, because we want you to make judgments about which words are taught, independent of the suggestions in the teacher's edition.

Select one theme from the core program and read all of the selections in the pupil's edition. You may want to repeat all of these activities with a second theme or have another person on the committee complete the evaluations with a second or third theme.

Teaching Word Meanings

For this criterion, look at the teacher’s edition and examine how the words are actually taught. We have provided a checklist for you to evaluate the quality of vocabulary instruction.

Directions

Place a plus (+) or a minus (–) in the box for each characteristic of vocabulary instruction. When you are done, total the number of pluses.

The Vocabulary Lesson Includes the Following:	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
Definitions of the words					
Contextual information about the words (uses the words in context)					
Encouragement of the teacher to do the following:					
• relate the words to the students’ personal experiences					
• give examples and nonexamples of the use of the words					
• discuss similarities and differences between new and old words					
Discussion of multiple meanings of words					
Direction for the teacher to have students do the following:					
• put definitions into their own words					
• use the words in sentences					
• recognize appropriate and inappropriate uses of the words					
Review or rehearsal of words before, during, and after reading					
Discussion of word meanings and use of words in a variety of contexts					
Total Number of Positive Elements in the Lesson (+)					

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of vocabulary instruction by circling one response.

Rating Vocabulary Instruction			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Developing Prior Knowledge

Using the five lessons that you read when studying vocabulary instruction, think about the prior knowledge that your students will need to understand the selections.

Directions

Review each of the stories and write down in the chart below which concepts and ideas will be difficult for your students to understand. Then read the knowledge development portion of the lesson in the teacher’s edition and note if the program directs you to develop the same knowledge that your students will need to understand the passage.

	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4	Lesson 5
What ideas, concepts, and experiences will your students need to know to understand the selection?					
What ideas, concepts, and experiences are developed in the teacher’s edition?					

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of knowledge development instruction by circling one response.

Rating Knowledge Development			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Part IV: Comprehension Instruction
Guiding Students' Comprehension

While you are reading to the students, they should be encouraged to use strategies to comprehend the selections. Modeling a strategy starts with the teacher but responsibility is gradually released to the students.

Directions

Read at least six lessons from two different themes or units in the core program. Pay close attention to the teacher directions for before, during, and after a reading selection to determine if guided practice is taking place.

Criterion	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
The program has the teachers and the students set a purpose for reading the selection.				
The program directs teachers to model strategies and to think aloud during guided reading.				
The program directs the students to model and use comprehension strategies while reading.				
Teachers and students are directed to ask questions while reading.				
The teacher is directed to assist students' comprehension by providing hints and directing students to reread a passage.				
The teacher is directed to assist students' comprehension by helping them make connections between what they know and what they are reading.				
The program encourages students to use multiple strategies while reading.				

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of guiding comprehension instruction by circling one response.

Rating Guiding Comprehension			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Teacher Read-Aloud—Storybook Reading

Reading good stories to children is a crucial part of oral language development, vocabulary growth, and comprehension acquisition. Read-aloud experiences should be evaluated for the quality of the literature and the instructional suggestions provided to the teacher.

Directions

Read four teacher read-alouds in the core program and evaluate the literature and the instruction. Use the same 4-point scale for each element as for the overall rating.

Characteristic of Interactive Read-Alouds	Story 1	Story 2	Story 3	Story 4
The program uses interesting and engaging literature.				
The literature contains vocabulary that can expand the students' word knowledge.				
The program provides teaching suggestions that engage students in a stimulating discussion by doing the following:				
• linking text ideas to students' prior knowledge				
• developing word meanings				
• expanding on word meanings after reading the story				
• focusing on text structure				
• modeling strategies such as self-questioning, making inferences, and summarizing				
The storybook read-alouds are linked topically or thematically to the students' reading selections.				
Total Points				

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of the storybook read aloud by circling one response.

Rating Storybook Reading			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Part V: Small-Group Differentiated Instruction

DIRECTIONS

The instruction in the core program should provide the teacher with the tools to differentiate instruction. Differentiation requires small-group instruction, so that the needs of students can be targeted, and meaningful independent work to keep other students actively engaged. Evaluate the core program on the following criteria. Place a check mark for each attribute of differentiated instruction that is provided.

		Advanced Readers	On-Level Readers	Below-Level Reader	English-Language Learners
Small-group differentiated lessons are provided.					
The manual provides sufficiently detailed lessons so that teachers can target students' needs in the following areas:					
	Phonemic awareness				
	Letter-sound knowledge				
	Word identification				
	Text reading				
The teacher's manual is organized so that the small-group lessons are easy to locate.					
The teacher's manual is organized so that materials for small-group lessons are easy to locate.					
The program provides interesting and challenging independent work for students to complete at their seats or at a workstation.					

Provide an overall rating for the characteristics of small-group differentiated instruction by circling one response.

Rating Differentiated Instruction			
Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak
4	3	2	1

Summary Findings

Program Name _____ Publication Date _____

Publisher _____ Reviewer _____

	Excellent	Strong	Adequate	Weak	Comments and Impressions
Texts for Reading					
Big Books and Anthology					
Leveled and Decodable Books					
Word Study					
Phonemic Awareness Instruction					
Letter Identification					
Phonics Instruction					
Sight-Word Instruction					
Vocabulary and Knowledge Development					
Vocabulary Instruction					
Knowledge Development					
Comprehension Instruction					
Guided Reading					
Teacher Storybook Read-Alouds					
Differentiation of Instruction					
Navigation and Ease of Use					