

## Reading Partners' Core Instructional Beliefs

The Reading Partners program model is rooted in the belief that trained community volunteers can help students unlock their strengths and reading potential that have been stifled by the systems that do not support them so that they become proficient, lifelong readers by providing one-on-one literacy instruction. Reading Partners reflects on specific core beliefs to inform decisions about this instruction and the curriculum materials we provide.

### What we believe:

#### We believe instruction should be evidence-based.

- Reading Partners teaches in ways that have been shown to work by reputable and compelling research, in alignment with the science of reading, and consults with national literacy experts and current research findings when considering curriculum updates.
- Since 2015, Reading Partners has been building our own evidence base through external evaluation studies. Our MDRC, APA, and Child Trends rigorous evaluations with large numbers of students have proven the effectiveness of the program model in improving students' literacy skills. We continue to revise and update our program model, including our curriculum, training materials, assessment tools, and other instructional resources, to ensure strong, effective instruction leading to positive student outcomes.
- Our national program team continues to meet annually with our Program Advisory Committee to ensure that current research informs our programmatic decision-making and our work in the areas of curriculum and instruction.
- For example, the strategies we ask tutors to use to review vocabulary words are based on the research of Isabel Beck, Margaret McKeown, and Linda Kuncan.

#### We are committed to equitable and inclusive learning experiences for students impacted by systemic inequities through our instruction, texts, and training.

- Reading Partners actively seeks to interrupt systemic racism by bringing high-quality instructional language, culturally diverse texts, and ongoing training for staff and tutors.
- We partner with and prioritize schools in historically under-resourced communities that are impacted by systemic inequities.
- For example, our curriculum is filled with texts that honor our students' cultures and lived experiences. We actively seek untold stories to be included in lessons and the Tutor Read Aloud Library.

#### Reading Partners is a supplemental program that augments classroom instruction. We believe instruction should be focused and aligned to specific learning standards.

- Reading Partners supports kindergarten to fourth grade students not yet reading at grade level *in addition to* their classroom instruction.
- We choose what we teach carefully, focusing on state standards that are the best fit for our program model, so we can be effective in the time we have.
- For example, we focus on comprehension standards that ask students to extract information from one text, as these are more manageable in our twice-a-week model.

**We believe students who are not yet reading at grade level must read *more* and read for *meaning* to improve their knowledge and skills.**

- All skill instruction is directly linked to authentic reading experiences.
- All levels of our curriculum emphasize comprehension and vocabulary development.
- For example, students reading at a first grade level apply phonics principles by reading a decodable text matched to the phonics skill being taught. Comprehension instruction and practice directly link to the texts the students read.

**We believe students can master skills over time when responsibility is gradually released using a process of explicit introduction and modeling, guided practice, and independent practice.**

- Reading Partners' instruction reflects an "I do, we do, you do" approach both within lesson tasks and over time.
- For example, phonological awareness activities for kindergarten level readers include an explicit introduction to a skill, guided practice with the tutor, and a game during which the tutor encourages increasing independence. Over time, each activity demands more student understanding.

**We believe that a thoughtful, mastery-oriented, coherent scope and sequence and text-to-lesson match are key for student success.**

- We carefully design curriculum "roadmaps" for each grade level to support student mastery of our target learning standards.
- Books used during lessons are chosen to match lesson content as well as student reading levels.
- For example, students reading at a third grade level are first taught to identify the main idea in informational book sections, then magazine articles, and finally entire books. The texts provided progress in a gradient of difficulty (established using Lexile levels, Fountas and Pinnell levels, and qualitative analysis) and were specifically selected to allow application of the target comprehension skill.

**We believe student motivation is key to successful learning experiences. Personal connection to tutor and task and opportunities for (controlled) choice are important.**

- Reading Partners prioritizes student engagement.
- We provide carefully selected choices to motivate students while ensuring we can still meet our goals.

- Social emotional learning gives students the language needed to advocate for themselves and navigate their emotions when reading or learning.
- For example, students choose books for different lesson tasks, such as the tutor read aloud, from within defined collections. We take care to offer high-interest book choices that reflect a diversity of characters, experiences, and topics.

**We believe technology is a dynamic tool to actively engage students in rigorous instruction that impacts literacy growth.**

- Technology provides many engaging opportunities.
- We are careful in choosing when and how to use technology to ensure that it translates to growth for our students.
- For example, Reading Partners Connects materials and platforms are carefully selected to ensure learning objectives are met.

**Implementing the Science of Reading: Research based reading instruction & practices**  
**Interactive read alouds:**

- Each Reading Partners session begins with a tutor reading aloud to the student at their grade level to increase exposure to grade level vocabulary and have comprehension-based discussion.
- Reading Partners students in early stages of developing basic skills, vocabulary, and understanding of the reading process have opportunities to see and hear a good reader model fluent reading practice, and to engage in a Q&A or a "serve-and-return" dialogue about the book, which is why we begin every tutoring session with a tutor read aloud.

**Comprehension strategy instruction:**

- Reading Partners explicitly teaches comprehension strategies that can be used in and across texts and different genres.

**Explicit phonemic and phonics instruction:**

- One of our key practices is to ensure that instruction in each Reading Partners curriculum level, including phonemic awareness and phonics, is systematically taught through a thoughtful, mastery-oriented scope and sequence.
  - We have 53 lessons devoted to explicit phonics instruction because we recognize that a strong foundation in phonics is the base on which all future reading success is built.

**Application of phonics knowledge in reading**

- Students in our phonics based curriculum, Beginning Readers, read a decodable text in every lesson. This text is directly tied to that lesson's phonics skill.

**Fluency-building techniques**

- Students build their fluency through repeated readings of familiar texts.

- Early readers also build their fluency through high frequency word practice. Students explicitly learn new high frequency words each lesson, and then practice reading these words in sentences with previously taught decodable words.

### **Knowledge building**

- Early readers begin to build greater knowledge of the world, learning about important figures in history and scientific concepts, among many other topics and subjects, while also learning how to manipulate sounds and improve spoken and written language.