



**Starfall**<sup>®</sup>  
**Kindergarten**  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS  
with SCIENCE and SOCIAL STUDIES

## **Appendix: FAQs & Reading Research**

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Why is it important to use the suggested “Ongoing Routines” outlined in the Read Me First?**

These daily routines reinforce language arts, science, social studies, and math. They establish, review, and integrate concepts, such as months of the year, days of the week, weather, and personal responsibility. Establishing these ongoing routines early in the year will ultimately make concepts introduced in the lesson plans easier.

## **Why are children asked to write letters before they learn to form them properly?**

Children come to school with diverse levels of small motor/eye-hand coordination. There should be no expectation that they perfectly form letters, or even write letters on the lines! Although letter-formation guides appear on pages within *Listening and Writing*, the book’s instructional focus is letter/sound relationships. As children become able to properly form letters, generate one of the many practice pages dedicated to this skill.

## **Why are so many letters, sounds, and high-frequency words introduced so early in the year?**

We introduce letters, sounds, and high-frequency words early to ensure that children have ample practice and review with these foundational skills before expected mastery by year’s end.

Children enter kindergarten with different levels of preparedness. For example, many have familiarity with beginning sounds. As a result, introducing this skill will seem “appropriate” because children have the background knowledge to understand it. Distinguishing final sounds or recognizing high-frequency words, on the other hand, will be skills to which many will be unaccustomed. For most children you will establish their fundamental understanding of this concept. Expect to see blank faces at first!

No need to worry, review and practice is fundamental to the lesson plans and practice materials.

## **It seems like a lot to ask for kindergarten children to write words in a dictionary. Why is this introduced so early?**

We agree, it is a lot to ask! However, the Starfall Dictionary is an essential and meaningful practice tool, and as such, must be introduced early.

Children use their dictionaries to:

- organize and reference information alphabetically.
- meaningfully review high-frequency words.
- assist them during writing.

We acknowledge that some children will struggle to write within the prescribed lines of their dictionaries initially. If children do not demonstrate the necessary motor skills to copy words from the board into their dictionaries, we encourage you to choose one of the following methods:

- Dot the words in advance for them to trace.
- Write the words in their books using a highlighter. Children then trace inside the highlighted area to form the words.

Periodically review the children’s dictionaries and, if necessary, rewrite the high-frequency words correctly. This is especially important at the beginning of the year, so that when children reference the words in their dictionaries, they are written correctly.

This process will be time consuming at first. Rest assured, the benefits will outweigh the initial frustration! As with any new skill, practice (and lots of it) makes perfect!

I am truly amazed as to what this program has done for my children. When I began, I was really very apprehensive and unsure and now that we are here on Week 30, I am so thrilled. All my children are reading and writing. I would have never been able to say that in years past.

—Pittsfield, Massachusetts



# Reading Research

## **Can I write the words on the board when doing phonemic awareness activities to give children visual clues?**

Research indicates a strong relationship between early phonemic awareness (the ability to identify, hear, and manipulate the smallest speech sounds) and later reading success. It is important that you conduct the short, daily, oral "Phonemic Awareness Warm-Up" independent of letters or words so as not to distract from the speech sounds.

Lack of phonemic awareness seems to be a major obstacle for some children in learning to read. When delivering phonemic awareness instruction it is more effective to be explicit than implicit. Our brief, daily, explicit Phonemic Awareness Warm-Up focuses purely on cultivating the children's awareness of spoken sounds through explanation, demonstration, and practice. Phonemic Awareness topics are broken down into small parts and taught individually all year long.

In a study with kindergarten children by Ball and Blachman, seven weeks of explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, combined with explicit instruction in letter/sound correspondences, was more effective than instruction in letter/sound correspondences alone and more effective than other language related activities conducted by the control group.

In summary, by developing the children's awareness of the individual sounds in our spoken language, you ensure that they are prepared to map those sounds to letters.

Vellutino, F.R., Scanlon, D.M. (1987b). "Linguistic coding and reading ability," *Advances in Applied Psycholinguistics* (1-69). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wagner, R., Torgesen, J. (1987). "The nature of phonological processing and its causal role in the acquisition of reading skills," *Psychological Bulletin*, 101, 192-212.

Cunningham, A.E. (1990). "Explicit versus implicit instruction in phonological awareness," *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 50-, 429-444.

Ball, E.W., Blachman, B.A. (1991). "Does phoneme awareness training in kindergarten make a difference in early word recognition and developmental spelling?," *Reading Research Quarterly*, 26(1), 49-66.

Karimkhanlooeia, Giti & Seifiniya, Hadis (2014). "Teaching Alphabet, Reading and Writing for Kids between 3-6 Years Old as a Second Language." *Science Direct*. Elsevier B.V. 11-14.

Suggate, Sebastian P. PhD. (2016). "A Meta-Analysis of the Long-Term Effects of Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, and Reading Comprehension Interventions." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Volume 49, 77-96.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## ***I noticed there is a lot of partner sharing. Isn't this disruptive?***

Actually it is engaging! Partner sharing prior to responding provides each child the opportunity to engage in the comprehension process. Often you find the same children raising their hands to answer questions. Many children are reluctant to answer, or process information more slowly. Partner sharing gives those children the opportunity to actively participate and build self-confidence. It is also a social activity and breaks up teacher talk so children are active during instruction.

## ***Why is adult writing important? I thought it was more important for children to just write freely.***

The kidwriting/adult writing dynamic creates a safe, responsive environment that eliminates the requirement to "get it right." Children freely and confidently take risks and apply their knowledge of letters, sounds, and mechanics because they know you will be there to interpret, guide, and celebrate their efforts.

*Here's how it works:*

When it comes time for children to write, encourage them to put their thoughts in writing in whatever way they can. Some may scribble or pretend write. Others may attempt to write the letters that stand for the sounds they hear in words.

All of these efforts are kidwriting. As children write, you circulate around the room, reading and responding to their kidwriting, and adding adult writing to capture their ideas (see samples). Adult writing must occur during, not after, the writing session. It is equally important that children share their writings with each other when they finish.

Children benefit because they:

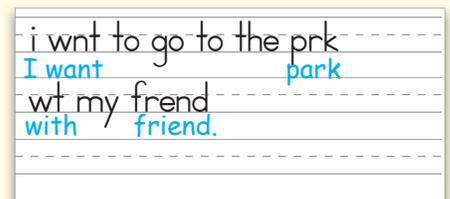
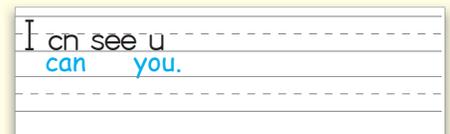
- take risks without worrying about being correct.
- receive immediate feedback delivered in a friendly, constructive, and collaborative fashion.
- can refer back to adult writing in previous compositions and self-correct.
- receive one-on-one affirmation of their efforts and successes.
- recognize what they write is important to themselves and others.
- associate writing with meaning, cooperation, and pleasure.

Teachers benefit because they can:

- quickly assess and diagnose each child's application of what they've learned.

- note trends that might indicate the need for whole group instruction.
- demonstrate correct spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.
- observe phonetic and speech errors such as /computer/ (computer) and /wat/ (rat).
- clearly communicate their expectations to each writer.
- scaffold feedback to meet individual learners' needs.
- encourage children to further develop their thoughts and reward their successes.

Example of kidwriting and adult writing:



Do adult writing, then say: **I wish I had gone to the park with you! What did you do next? I'll come back to see what you did!**

The child is sure to write more to share his or her experience with you!

You will also notice that in Starfall classrooms, children do not write daily. Instead we nurture enthusiasm for a topic. When children are finally asked to write on that topic, they are bursting to express what is meaningful to them and share it with others.



# Reading Research

**There are times when I think the activity during Session 2 might work better in a Whole Group Setting and vice-versa. Can I make this change?**

Yes! However, the lessons need to be done sequentially. Session 2 is structured to last for a full 30 minutes to accommodate the Computer and Practice Activity rotations. The Practice Activities were designed specifically to be done independently to accommodate classrooms that do not have a paraprofessional or volunteer to direct the group. If you have a paraprofessional or volunteer present, you may wish to make some adjustments. There are many factors, such as the size of your class, maturity and readiness of your children, daily schedule of specials, etc., that will enter into how you structure your day. Arrange the lessons in a way that works best for you.

We love to hear from you. Keep the feedback coming!

The Authors,

**Pam Ferguson, Florida**

35 years teaching early childhood education

**Joan Elliott, Texas**

31 years teaching early childhood education

Key findings from scientific research on phonics instruction by the National Institute for Literacy tell us that systematic and explicit phonics instruction significantly improves kindergarten children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension. It is effective for children from various social and economic levels, and is particularly beneficial for children who are having difficulty learning to read and who are at risk for developing future reading problems. NIL research found that phonics instruction is most effective when introduced early. Phonics knowledge is essential to children's successful reading and writing development. Exemplary phonics instruction builds on a strong foundation of phonemic awareness explicitly taught and integrated into a total reading program.

Our focused and explicit phonics instruction establishes children's understanding of the Alphabetic Principle. Starfall children develop a deep and thorough knowledge of the systematic and predictable relationships between the letters and spelling patterns of written language and the individual spoken sounds.

Children demonstrate their growing phonic skills and high-frequency word recognition when writing in their Starfall Journals.

Armbruster, B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (2001). *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*. (11-19). Washington, DC: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.

Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, (409-424). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Stahl, Steven. (1992). "Saying the 'P' Words: Nine Guidelines for Exemplary Phonics Instruction", *Reading Teacher*, 45, 618-625.

Suggate, Sebastian P. PhD. "A Meta-Analysis of the Long-Term Effects of Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, and Reading Comprehension Interventions." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Volume 49 (2016): 77-96.

The children were able to "write" sooner than I thought using their dictionaries and kidwriting. They love the adult writing. I'm amazed!

—Tampa, Florida



# Frequently Asked Questions

## ***What's the best way to utilize the Starfall Seasonal Plans?***

Each of the Seasonal Plans contains three activities. During the weeks of Columbus Day, Thanksgiving, President's Day and Earth Day, we suggest you take a break from the scheduled Weekly Plans and integrate the relevant Seasonal Plan into your traditional holiday lessons and activities. Take advantage of this break to celebrate, practice, and reinforce previously introduced skills.

## ***I notice that there is emphasis on vocabulary words. I thought vocabulary words were sight words. How does this differ?***

Often we assume children understand the meanings of words used in stories and in oral conversations. Children appear to understand a word in context, but when asked to tell what it means in isolation they are unable to do so. Vocabulary words are words that children encounter during a read-aloud or in daily conversations that they may or may not understand.

We encourage you to get into the habit of questioning children about the meanings of words. This will help you know which words they do not understand. They will begin to value listening actively for understanding and asking for clarification.

At the outset of the year we suggest vocabulary words inspired by the literature or topic. Please do not feel limited to our suggestions. Expand or modify these words to meet your children's needs. Later in the year we will encourage children to listen for, and then choose, vocabulary words they do not know the meaning for and would like to learn.

## ***I have children who are reading above grade level. What accommodations should I make for these children if they can already read the stories? Should they be in a group of their own?***

We can be fooled into thinking that children with good visual word memory are advanced readers. Often, these children are in fact excellent memorizers. They may have skipped some essential developmental stages and therefore have not mastered the foundational skills that will support them when

the number of new words they encounter outnumbers what they can memorize. These children may also be "reading" without comprehending.

There is a tendency to perceive children who can read as mature, and assume they will not enjoy or benefit from group activities. No matter how skilled they appear, they are still just five or six! All children love the magic of the lessons and benefit from the camaraderie that comes from shared experiences with their peers.

To meet the needs of these children:

- Provide opportunities for them to mentor other children. This practice will simultaneously solidify their knowledge and help others (including you!).
- Provide reading material at their reading level to read for pleasure. (See the Bibliography at the end of each unit.)
- If you have several children at approximately the same reading level, form a "Challenge Book Club." Members meet occasionally to discuss a book, with a focus on comprehension.



I love having my higher children mentor those who need extra help. Today, I heard one of my lower children tell another child he could mentor him if he needed help. I loved it!

—Fairview, N.C.



# Reading Research

Just as phonemic awareness and phonics are important to reading success, vocabulary development is crucial to reading comprehension. What is missing for many children who master phonics but don't comprehend well is vocabulary, the words they need to understand in order to comprehend what they are reading. Research tells us that a substantially greater teacher-directed effort is needed to promote vocabulary development, especially in the kindergarten and early primary years. Jeanne Chall, a leading teacher, researcher, and writer in the field of reading, points to the need for a more planned, but contextualized, introduction of vocabulary, especially in the pre-reading years.

Starfall's vocabulary component includes the deliberate introduction of a wide range of vocabulary through oral reading of quality

fiction and theme-related nonfiction. We find, and our pilot teachers confirm, that vocabulary instruction is especially effective when the reading is accompanied by class discussion about the difference between the new word and related words the children already know. Children are given instruction in word meanings and provided with many playful opportunities to use new words through games, riddles, and other activities.

Research by Andrew Biemiller (Associate Editor of the *Journal of Educational Psychology*) indicates that children can acquire and retain several words a day when teachers introduce and explain the new words in context. We carefully choose vocabulary words that children may have heard before but do not comprehend out of context, words that are key to understanding the story, and words children are likely to encounter in other texts.



Once introduced, the vocabulary words are posted to the Starword Wall for ongoing contextualization, reference, and review.

As the year progresses, we encourage teachers to use their own judgment to select the vocabulary words to best meet their children's needs. When choosing appropriate vocabulary, teachers use criteria advocated by research:

- The word's meaning must be definable in terms the children can understand.
- The word must be interesting and usable in the children's everyday lives.

Biemiller, Andrew. (2001). "Teaching Vocabulary: Early, Direct and Sequential." *The American Educator*, 25 (1), 24-28.

Chall, Jeanne. (2000). *The Academic Achievement Challenge: What really works in the classroom?* New York: Guilford.

Beck, I., McKeown, M., and Kucan, L. (2002). *Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction.* New York: Guilford, 28-29.

Leung, Cynthia B. (2008). 'Preschoolers' Acquisition of Scientific Vocabulary Through Repeated Read-Aloud Events, Retellings, and Hands-On Science Activities, *Reading Psychology*, 29:2, 165 -193.

Shari Butler, Kelsi Urrutia, Anneta Buenger, Nina Gonzalez, Marla Hunt, and Corinne Eisenhart. (2010). "A Review of the Current Research on Vocabulary Instruction." National Reading Technical Assistance Center, RMC Research Corporation.

My students love clapping and counting syllables in words. They often ask to do this with the vocabulary words from new stories.

—Bakersfield, CA

I have found that students listen more carefully to the story when they know we are listening for meaning and new words. I pause frequently during the read-aloud portion to keep students on track.

—Fort Leonard Wood, MO

I love all the vocabulary in the read-alouds. The children think they are so cool when they signal me because they heard a vocabulary word in the story.

—Bakersfield, CA

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **Why do you place so much importance on final sounds?**

In kindergarten classrooms of the past, teachers focused almost exclusively on initial sounds. Today we know in order for children to successfully decode and encode words, it is essential they understand words are comprised of a combination of smaller sounds or phonemes. They must also understand that within a single word a given phoneme can appear at the beginning, end, middle, or even more than once! We strive to teach children to identify a phoneme regardless of its position or frequency in a word.

In the course of normal speech, people tend to drop or slur final sounds. As a result, children may not hear or learn to pronounce words correctly. Modeling emphasis on final sounds supports not only children's proper articulation, but also attunes them to listen to the entire word and determine whether or not they heard it correctly. These skills will contribute greatly to their ability to encode, or spell, words.

The students participated in the activity with enthusiasm and completed the lesson quickly. They display confidence and competence when blending; this activity supports and reinforces strategies that we've shared with the children as we've begun to introduce word families.

—Las Vegas, Nevada

Apart from clearly articulating final sounds when we speak, how can we emphasize final sounds? The answer of course is through activities where children identify and produce rhyming words. Identifying and producing rhyming words indicates children's awareness of final sounds.

## **Isn't it early to begin substituting sounds in words?**

A child's ability to manipulate spelling patterns is a key principle of reading and writing success. As such, we introduce this skill early during the first semester, and practice it increasingly during the second.

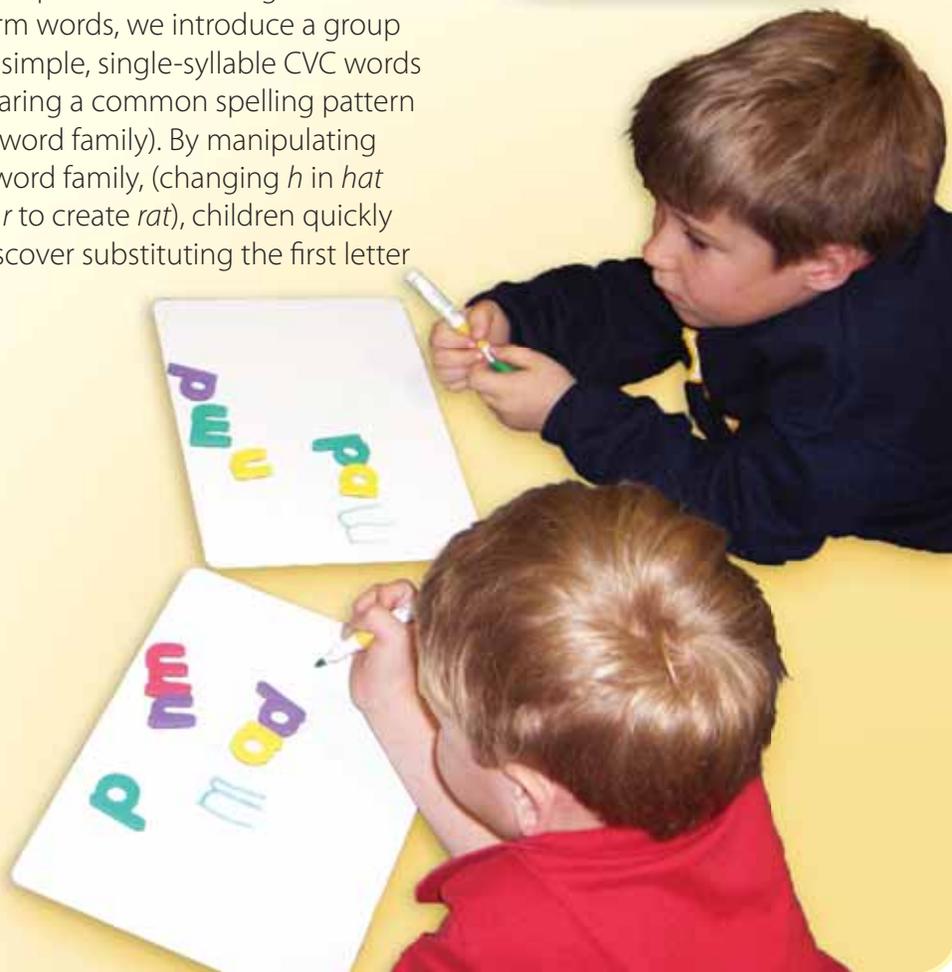
After children have learned a number of sound spellings, and have practiced blending them to form words, we introduce a group of simple, single-syllable CVC words sharing a common spelling pattern (a word family). By manipulating a word family, (changing *h* in *hat* to *r* to create *rat*), children quickly discover substituting the first letter

(the onset) will result in a new word even though the spelling pattern (the rime) remains unchanged.

The result of this discovery is an increased ability to decode and encode words within that word family, and transfer of this principle to other word families such as —*ight* or —*ay*.

The students caught right on to the word families. We tried substituting the letters through the alphabet to make nonsense words that would also fit the word families such as "jall," etc. The students got the hang of it quite quickly.

—Bakersfield, California





# Reading Research

The reading coordinator noticed that my class was really able to decipher rhymes and beginning and ending sounds. I related that this was a daily warm-up activity that we always do each day, which was different than I had done it in the past. I think the daily warm-ups are invaluable as they allow the children to practice their listening and cognitive skills. What a difference from the beginning of the year!

—Cuddebackville, New York

A key principle of the written English language is that it is replete with recurring and predictable spelling patterns. Children able to recognize and manipulate these spelling patterns early on are well on the road to reading and writing success.

Research by Marilyn Jager Adams, author of the landmark *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, has shown a child's oral rhyming ability is a reliable measure of his or her reading readiness. Adams recommends first establishing oral rhyming and then extending that knowledge to print through word family exercises reinforcing the integrity of predictable and recurring spelling patterns.

But when is the right time for word family instruction to begin? Louisa Moats, author of *From Speech to Print*, tells us the core activity of decoding is blending individual sounds into words. Her research advocates that children learn to blend the constituent sound-letter associations of a spelling pattern before manipulating a word family. Elfrieda H. Hiebert, known for her research in reading fluency, asserts that children are able to generalize (or master) a word family when they are able to see a variety of words using the same rime. The positions of these two researchers suggest that a number of letter and sound associations must be learned and applied before word family instruction begins.

Adams, M. (1990). *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p 75.

Moats, L. C. "Teaching Decoding." *American Educator/American Federation of Teachers*, Spring/Summer, 1998, p 3.

Menon, Shailaja and Hiebert, Elfrieda H. (2005). "A Comparison of first grader's reading with little books or literature-based basal anthologies." *Reading Research Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 1, p 18.

Solveig-Alma Halaas Lyster, Arne Olav Lerva, Charles Hulme. "Preschool morphological training produces long-term improvements in reading comprehension." Springerlink.com. Published online 17 March 2016.

John R. Kirby, S. Helene Deacon, Peter N. Bowers, Leah Izenberg, Lesly Wade-Woolley, Rauno Parrila. "Children's morphological awareness and reading ability." Springer Science+Business Media B.V. Published online 25 March 2011.



# Frequently Asked Questions

## *Is it okay for my paraprofessional or parent helper to administer formal assessments?*

It is important for you, the teacher, to administer formal assessments. Through the assessment process you can effectively diagnose and remediate or challenge each child, and establish a trusting relationship. Due to confidentiality, parent helpers should not be involved in the assessment process.

## **Diagnose and Remediate**

The most valuable information you obtain from the assessment process arises from your *observation of how children arrive at the answers*. Errors made in a child's response can alert you to:

- Speech substitutions
- Visual perception or discrimination problems
- Auditory discrimination errors
- Possible vision difficulties

When you assess, watch and listen closely to the child's responses, and then record your observations. In doing so, you will be able to diagnose errors, and plan remediation or challenges accordingly.

## **Build Trusting Relationships**

Formal assessments provide an opportunity for you to meet with each child, one-on-one. This dynamic fosters a unique relationship and trust between you and the child. Formal assessment, combined with

your daily observations, and anecdotal records, all contribute to your overall understanding of a child's progress.

We specifically designed Day 5 of each week to enable you to conduct formal assessments. The six Learning Center rotations are designed to function independently and without instruction.

## *Why is it important to assess so often, and how can I integrate the information ascertained from assessment into the lesson plans?*

Ongoing informal assessment is present in the daily lesson plans. Children demonstrate their understanding of the skills you've introduced by making signals such as "thumbs up" or writing their responses on whiteboards and holding them up for you to see. Observing your children's responses in these moments offers insight into how well they are receiving the information, but it is insufficient for understanding how much they have assimilated and retained. This is why ongoing, individual progress monitoring is so important.

Our bi-weekly Progress Monitoring Assessments, downloadable from the *Teacher's Lounge*, are a succinct, sufficient review of the previous two weeks' instruction. Administering these assessments individually and over time gives you a snapshot of each child's mastery, need for additional practice, and learning deficiencies (if any).

Analyze the results of your Progress Monitoring Assessments to determine trends that apply to the entire class. We encourage you to modify the lesson plans to include greater emphasis in areas of common weakness. For example, if children commonly miss a series of high-frequency words, choose these words for review. The same can be applied to rhyming or blending errors.

Should the results of your Progress Monitoring Assessments reveal children with common gaps, create skill groups around these areas. Choose children who have mastered these skills to mentor the skill groups and lead their classmates to similar success.



# Reading Research

Curriculum and instruction are increasingly driven by test content and accountability. While formal testing helps teachers and administrators know how students are performing compared to other students across the nation or state, many educators and researchers have misgivings regarding the consequences of test content and format dictating curriculum instead of assessing it. Driven by comparison and achievement, many current assessment methods may be missing their mark.

At its best, assessment informs decision-making about the needs of individual learners. Research conducted at Harvard by the late Jeanne Chall, a leading expert in reading research and instruction, confirms frequent and timely assessment is effective because it establishes time for both teachers and students to celebrate progress, and enables teachers to see when and how methods and materials need to change to meet each child's learning needs. Properly designed and implemented, ongoing assessment informs us about students' weaknesses and strengths. This essential information makes us better decision makers and our students more accomplished learners.

In a Starfall Kindergarten classroom, assessment is an ongoing and integrated part of the instruction. Our bi-weekly Progress Monitoring Assessment Tools are aligned with the previous two weeks' instruction to accurately reflect your children's ongoing progress. Our Entry, Mid-year

and Exit Assessment Tools inventory children's assimilation and retention of skills at key intervals throughout the year.

It can be challenging to figure out what to do with assessment results! Ray Reutzel, Distinguished Professor of Early Childhood Education at Utah State University, suggests you evaluate each assessment to determine where a child is in his or her reading development. Once you understand this, you will know what instruction should come next.

**Pam Ferguson, Florida**

35 years experience teaching early childhood education

**Joan Elliott, Texas**

31 years experience teaching early childhood education

Hiebert, Elfrieda & Calfee, Robert (1989). "Assessing Literacy: From Standardized Tests to Portfolios and Performances," In S. Jay Samuels & Alan E. Farstrup (Eds.) *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, (2nd ed. 70-100). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Chall, Jeanne & Curtis, Mary, (1992). "Teaching the Disabled or Below-Average Reader." In S. Jay Samuels & Alan E. Farstrup (Eds.) *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, (2nd ed. 253-276). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Reutzel, Ray & Cooter, Robert. (2003) *Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction: Helping Every Child Succeed*, (2nd ed. 32-35). Pearson Education.

Renee Williams Graham, Emily Dennis, Jan Korenich, and Marilyn Cornell. "Scoring a Goal for Learning." *Science and Children* (NSTA) 1 November 2013.

Jones, Jacqueline. "Assessing Young Children's Learning and Development." *Early Childhood Principal* 90 No. 5 (naesp.org) May/June 2011.

The assessment is great - I love the progress monitoring! My parents like to see these, so I send a copy home bi-weekly to keep us all on track.

—Bakersfield, California

The assessments are the best that I have seen. Very simple to use

—Tampa, Florida



# Frequently Asked Questions

***I have a verbal and easily distracted group of students. How can I best meet their needs?***

Determining the learning styles of your children will help you address this situation, the three most common being: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. While most use a combination of learning styles, one usually dominates.

When delivering instruction, it is important to present information such that it communicates to everyone. Often we teach from our own learning styles without realizing it! For example, visual learners tend to use verb phrases such as “look here” and “see this,” thus inadvertently diminishing the attention of auditory and kinesthetic learners.

See the table on the facing page for attributes, recommendations, and key verbs for getting and keeping the children’s attention.

***How do I determine the learning style of each child?***

A preliminary way of determining learning styles is to observe a child’s eye-movement when answering questions. While this method is not sufficient to confirm a child’s learning style, it is a useful indicator.

Ask a “thinking” question such as, “What did you do on your last birthday?” Watch the child’s eye movement as he or she thinks about the answer.

- *Visual*—Eyes look straight up and the head may tilt back. They are remembering what

they saw or will see, or are visualizing the answer.

- *Auditory*—Eyes move to the right or left. The head may move sideways. They are recalling where they heard something, or listening to themselves think of the answer.
- *Kinesthetic*—Eyes go straight down and the head may tilt down. They are remembering how they did something, or how they would do it.
- *All three*—Eyes stay forward, no movement at all, indicating a balance of all three learning styles.

Children may demonstrate both visual and kinesthetic eye-movements. The eye movement that occurs first indicates their primary learning style.

## Reading Research

There are three generally accepted learning styles: *visual*, *auditory*, and *kinesthetic*. These styles represent biological and developmental characteristics affecting how each child learns, and determine how he or she begins to concentrate on, process, and retain new and difficult information. Research indicates that after IQ, a child’s learning style contributes most significantly to his or her academic achievement.

For over 40 years, Rita Dunn, Professor in the Division of Administrative Instructional Leadership, Director of the

Center of the Study of Learning and Teaching Styles at St. John’s University, Jamaica, New York, has advocated that teachers use multiple strategies to meet the learning styles of all learners. Because no one instructional method or resource will work for all children, her research suggests some children do not perform well simply because their learning styles have not been met.

When there is no correlation between a child’s learning style and the way the teacher is teaching, the child often becomes inattentive and restless. What is a teacher to do?

Starfall Kindergarten teachers aim for balance in their instructional approach, and use multi-sensory techniques and strategies to engage children within each learning style. Starfall teachers recognize their own dominant learning style and purposefully develop their capacity to communicate to other learners. Our balanced approach provides:

- *visual learners* vibrantly illustrated books, posters, and computer activities, sign language, graphic organizers, and student-created stories and illustrations.



### The Kinesthetic Learner

- Makes feelings known and expresses them physically—gestures when speaking
- Seems distracted and has difficulty paying attention to auditory or visual presentations—loses interest in long discussions
- Fidgets while looking at books

### Meeting Kinesthetic Needs

- Involve kinesthetic learners directly in the instruction—they are excellent volunteers and helpers
- Incorporate movement, use ASL.
- Make up a tune and sing directions
- Drop the pitch of your voice

### Key Kinesthetic Verbs

act out, draw, give, feel, make, write, do build, get, touch, want, use



### The Auditory Learner

- Can be working on something unrelated and still hear directions and instructions
- Enjoys listening to others but can't wait to talk
- Likes hearing himself/herself and others talk during recitation, stories, and discussion

### Meeting Auditory Needs

- Encourage auditory learners to verbalize information to themselves and others—partner sharing and discussion is a must
- Stand to the right of the group when delivering directions
- Make up a tune and sing directions

### Key Auditory Verbs

ask, discuss, explain, listen, say, answer, hear, sound, talk, whisper



### The Visual Learner

- Looks around and examines
- Has great recall of words presented visually
- Recognizes words by sight and relies on configuration of letters for spelling
- Sometimes stops and stares into space

### Meeting Visual Needs

- Invite these children to help you create lists during whole group instruction. They learn best when they write things down
- Charts, webs, and images are sure means of keeping their attention
- Show the pictures during read-alouds

### Key Visual Verbs

look, show, watch, picture, see, visualize, view, imagine

- *auditory learners* computerized stories read orally, discussions, partner-reading, music, rhymes, and oral vocabulary games.
- *kinesthetic learners* manipulatives such as play dough and magnetic letters, puzzles and sequence cards, frequent movement, and interactive computer activities.

As you achieve balance in your instructional approach, you guarantee all of your children learn, at least part of the time, in the style best suited to them. This contributes to their increased comfort and ability to learn. It even enhances their willingness to

practice learning styles with which they may not be as comfortable!

McDermott, P. (1984). "Comparative Functions of Preschool Learning Style and IQ in Predicting Future Academic Performance." *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, Volume 9, (1), 38-47.

Dunn, R, Dunn, K, and Perrin, J. (1994). *Teaching Young Children Through Their Individual Learning Styles*, Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, Inc.

Gilbert, J, Swainer, C. (2008). "Learning Styles: How Do They Fluctuate?" *Institute for Learning Styles Journal*, Volume 1, 29-40.

**Pam Ferguson, Florida**  
35 years experience teaching early childhood education

**Joan Elliott, Texas**  
31 years experience teaching early childhood education

What great activities, especially from the kinesthetic aspect. My students need to MOVE! —Wasilla, Alaska

The Starfall kindergarten program has made every attempt to address the varied learning styles and modalities of the early childhood student. —Las Vegas, Nevada

I love how you incorporate ASL in the plans. This is so great for the visual and kinesthetic learner. —St. Petersburg, Florida

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Most states list few comprehension standards for kindergarten children, yet we notice Starfall includes many comprehension activities. Is this necessary at this age?**

Comprehension skills and strategies teach children to remember what they read, communicate to others about what they have read, and monitor and reflect upon their own understanding. These reading habits are worth instilling early, and practicing often, as *understanding* is the desired outcome of all communication, whether written or spoken. Children attuned to understanding recognize that reading, listening, and conversing require their active participation.

When teaching comprehension, it is most effective to explicitly name the skill or strategy, demonstrate how it helps the child's

understanding, and explain how the strategy might be applied in other cases. In so doing, the children receive a "comprehension toolbox." With practice, children learn to pull from their toolboxes to creatively and skillfully build their own understandings.

The benefits of this practice are revealed in the children's writing. When children understand textual features they use those features in their own compositions.

**Does vocabulary instruction affect comprehension?**

Vocabulary instruction awakens children's interest in word meanings. A child who is curious about the meaning of words monitors his or her understanding and asks for clarification—two key comprehension strategies.

**What is the difference between a comprehension skill and a comprehension strategy?**

Comprehension skills help us recognize and express features of the text. Comprehension strategies are processes that help us to become interactive readers, and thereby to better reflect upon what we read and deepen our understanding.

**Pam Ferguson, Florida**

35 years experience teaching early childhood education

**Joan Elliott, Texas**

31 years experience teaching early childhood education

The Story Element Cards required higher level thinking, but the children were amazing. A first grade teacher walked in while they were interacting with them and she was blown away! — Bakersfield, California

In reviewing the book and asking questions the children have begun to discuss different topics. Instead of simply saying a character was sad or happy, they add topics and build off each other's ideas. —Las Vegas, Nevada

The children's comprehension skills have increased. Their responses are thoughtful & there is real discussion among the partners. —Tampa, Florida



# Reading Research

Extensive research conducted by P. David Pearson (et al.) at the University of California at Berkeley defines comprehension instruction as a complex and fluid process of teacher-student interaction in which the teacher plays a pivotal role in helping students gradually construct meaning. A teacher's instructional practices must explicitly demonstrate how readers make sense of text.

We help children construct meaning when we teach and apply comprehension skills and strategies to the stories we read aloud, to those they read themselves, and to classroom discussion.

A comprehension skill is an activity that children complete for the purpose of learning about the features of text. A comprehension strategy is a specific procedure readers use while they are reading to help them better understand the meaning of text.

The National Reading Panel report recommends when teaching reading strategies that the educator

explicitly name the strategy, tell why it was selected for the current situation, and show how it can be applied to other situations. In this way, children will become independent of the teacher. (For a list of skills and strategies below.)

Starfall Kindergarten teachers explicitly introduce and model comprehension skills and strategies, gradually transferring their application and practice to the children. Children demonstrate their growing comprehension abilities through:

- symposium-style discussion based on Bloom's Taxonomy.
- partner sharing, at which time they discuss the text with a classmates.
- identifying unknown vocabulary words in oral reading.
- writing.

A Starfall Kindergarten classroom is a lively environment full of discussion, as conversation between peers enhances comprehension. Discussion is a prime opportunity for children to relate new information and refine their understanding.

Pearson, D, et al. (1992). "Developing Expertise in Reading Comprehension." In S. Jay Samuels & Alan E. Farstrup (Eds.) *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 145-190). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Armbruster, B. B., et al. (2001). *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read* (49-53). Washington, D.C.: Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Stewart, M. (2003). *Building Effective Practice: Using Small Discoveries to Enhance Literacy Learning*. The Reading Teacher, Vol. 56, No. 6, 540-547.

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## Comprehension Skills

- Cause/Effect
- Classify/Categorize
- Compare/Contrast
- Story Details (setting, characters, problem/solution)
- Sequence
- Fact/Opinion
- Identify Genre (fiction, nonfiction, folk tale, poetry)
- Author's Intention
- Draw Conclusions

## Comprehension Strategies

- Predict/Verify
- Visualize
- Make connections between self, other texts, and the world
- Ask Questions
- Summarize
- Monitor for Understanding
- Ask for clarification
- Open Discussion



# Frequently Asked Questions

**My children seem to be more motivated to learn with Starfall. To what do you attribute this?**

Keeping your children motivated is a key, underlying objective of every component of the Starfall Kindergarten Curriculum. Every lesson plan, practice activity, online activity, and event is written with the awareness that the following are intrinsic to inspiring a desire and love of learning in people of all ages, but especially in the kindergarten-aged child.

- fantasy
- being first, having a turn, and a sense of control or direction
- ownership and responsibility over materials

The Starfall Characters, with which the children interact virtually online, and imaginatively in the classroom, tap into the children's innate sense of fantasy. They "know" the characters are not real, but they "believe" they are. These characters are the heart of the program and are integrated into every learning setting. They are familiar and constant friends, encouraging the children to stretch and explore without trepidation.

Our unique instructional balance between teacher and child-directed learning styles ensures every child has an opportunity to be first, have a turn, and direct his or her learning experiences. This technique empowers the children. They become actively engaged and invested because they are able to recognize themselves as learners and teachers. Starfall children have a greater sense of self and accomplishment because they see themselves as part of the process, rather than passive recipients.

Finally, children own their Starfall materials. They learn to care for their dictionaries and journals throughout the year. They recognize the little books they take home weekly are theirs to keep as rewards for their efforts.

Starfall motivates children, because they have complete ownership and investment in the process.

**Pam Ferguson, Florida**

35 years experience teaching early childhood education

**Joan Elliott, Texas**

31 years experience teaching early childhood education

My children love writing! They use their books to spell words they do not know. They do amazing things with their dictionaries, books, and writing. I had 6th graders who struggled with these concepts. —Bakersfield, California

My children love the online games, stories, and activities! It's amazing how much they know about it. They have discovered all on their own that if they click on some items things move, make noises! —San Antonio, Texas

The Starfall Kindergarten Program has made every attempt to address the varied learning styles and modalities of the early childhood student. —Las Vegas, Nevada

When they see something with Backpack Bear's picture on it they are so excited and ready to learn all about it. —Ridgecrest, California

Starfall children feel so empowered! —Bakersfield, Calif.

The students actually got impatient with me and many went ahead and completed the L&W page on their own. They said, "We get it already!" That certainly shows their motivation and proficiency! —Valencia, California



# Reading Research

Engaged reading is a combination of motivation and thoughtfulness. Engaged readers seek to understand; they enjoy learning and are intrinsically motivated using multiple strategies to comprehend. They use prior knowledge and interact socially to construct new understanding from text. Children who have never experienced purposeful and pleasurable experiences with books and literacy are apt to be unenthusiastic about learning to read and write. Those who experience continued failure tend to avoid reading and thus deny themselves the most important means to improve their reading abilities.

Creating classrooms that foster the continuing desire to learn for all readers begins with carefully observing the children's responses and recognizing their needs. Effective teachers know that what children understand *now* determines what they can learn *next*. Your awareness of their understanding

tells you how to scaffold their learning and to ensure motivation.

Children with high intrinsic and social motivation are active readers and high achievers. These qualities can be learned and cultivated. A Starfall Kindergarten classroom fosters reading engagement and motivation by making the role of the teacher that of facilitator. The children own the events in their student-directed classroom. You facilitate their engagement when you:

- provide real-world connections to reading.
- select interesting texts.
- assure frequent social collaboration for learning.
- give them responsibility to share information or "teach."
- explicitly teach reading strategies that empower children to succeed.

This empowering approach provides children with numerous op-

portunities for making choices, for working with their peers in hands-on activities, and for becoming fully engaged and enthusiastic about learning. Even the most reluctant reader can't help but be inspired. While engagement in reading increases the occurrence of reading outcomes (e.g., achievement, knowledge, and practices), the positive outcomes naturally increase engagement.

Wood, Brunner, & Ross, as cited in Oldfather, P. & West, J. (1999). *Learning through children's eyes: Social constructivism and the desire to learn*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, p 16.

Snow, C.E., Barnes, W.S., Chandler, J., Goodman, I.F., & Hemphill, L. (1991). *Unfulfilled Expectations: Home and School Influences on Literacy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Guthrie, John, (2000). "Contexts for Engagement and Motivation in Reading." In Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, (Eds.), *Handbook of Reading Research: Volume III*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.



It is so exciting for the children to come to the board and be the teacher! It really keeps the rest of the class on task as they can't wait to have a turn! —Safety Harbor, Florida

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Fluency is not included in most state standards for kindergarten. Do you think kindergarten is too early to be concerned about fluency?**

Reading fluently is so much more than rate and speed. Ultimately it is the outcome of a combined mastery of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension skills. To master these skills requires considerable practice and kindergarten is the perfect place to start!

Consider how practice in each of these domains contributes to reading fluency.

## Phonemic Awareness/Phonics

Ongoing and applied practice of sounds and spellings develops the child's ability to recognize and apply the alphabetic principle to the words they encounter in print.

Word family instruction teaches children to generalize spelling patterns, and lessens the cognitive load.

Mastery of a controlled set of high-frequency words, comprised of words most frequently found in print, ensures confidence.

## Vocabulary

Focused and explicit vocabulary development awakens a child's interest in meaning (and multiple meanings).

Encouraging children to listen for vocabulary they may not

understand establishes their ability to monitor their own understanding and ask for clarification.

## Comprehension

Pausing to break open the text and reflect on its meaning reinforces the value of understanding the text.

Direct instruction of punctuation, including quotation marks, alerts children to a text's mechanical features and demonstrates how they contribute to understanding the text.

Fluent reading can be described simply as reading that sounds like natural speech. When what we read sounds like what we hear, our chances of understanding it rise considerably. As teachers, we know that children who have been read to at home have an advantage over those who have not.

This is because they have had years of modeled fluent reading. We develop reading fluency when we:

- model fluent reading from a variety of texts with expression, inflection and intonation.
- repeat the reading of skill level stories.
- provide multiple opportunities for group, paired, or partner reading.
- dramatize texts and perform them for other classes.
- encourage children to use the "ear button" online to listen to examples of fluent readings.

### **Pam Ferguson, Florida**

35 years experience teaching early childhood education

### **Joan Elliott, Texas**

31 years experience teaching early childhood education



My students meet or exceed grade level expectations. I mean, they are reading words like "math" and "plants" and "thick" which is beyond K standards. They fluently read new sentences. I am so proud of them! —Valencia, California

# Reading Research

The ability to read fluently is a critically important component of becoming a proficient reader. Most reading authorities agree that fluency refers to the smooth and natural oral production of written text.

Beginning readers alternate their attention between decoding the printed words and comprehension. With practice, the mechanics of decoding becomes automatic and requires less attention. Readers are then able to focus on understanding. The ability to decode and comprehend simultaneously is known as automaticity. Readers with high automaticity have progressed from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," or fluency.

Fluency instruction is an integral part of the Starfall Reading Program. A variety of methods are used to enhance fluency:

- Explicit teacher modeling through read-alouds of a

variety of text types, reading high-quality children's literature (fiction, nonfiction, nursery rhymes) to children in lively, engaging, and thought-provoking ways.

- Participation in repeated readings of decodable texts, predictable texts, and texts based on high-frequency words.
- Partner reading and choral reading.
- Direct instruction and feedback regarding expression, speed at which the text is read, when stops or pauses occur, etc.
- Integrated online activities woven into the kindergarten curriculum that provide authentic and meaningful literacy experiences.

Beginning readers need many opportunities to practice with texts they can read with ease. It is particularly important to create situations in which children can see legitimate purposes, or mo-

tivation for reading texts over and over to increase accuracy and speed, and to read with more expression. It is helpful to have children practice in preparation before reading in front of real audiences such as peers, Backpack Bear, or other Starfall characters, adults in the school, in a dramatization for another class, or for any listeners who motivate them to develop fluency with the text.

Rasinski, T. "Fluency for Everyone: Incorporating Fluency Instruction in the Classroom." (1989) *The Reading Teacher*, Vol. 42. p. 690-693.

Samuels, S., Schermer, N, and Reinking, D. "Reading Fluency: Techniques for Making Decoding Automatic" from *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, (2nd ed) Samuels, S and Farstrup, A., eds, 1992.

Teale, W. and Yokota, J. "Beginning Reading and Writing: Perspectives on Instruction" from *Beginning Reading and Writing* (Strickland, D. and Morrow, L., eds.), 2000, p 3-21.

Suggate, Sebastian P. PhD. "A Meta-Analysis of the Long-Term Effects of Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, and Reading Comprehension Interventions." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Volume 49 (2016): 77-96.

Oh my goodness, I almost cried. The children were able to read this book... I had them read the words on the back first and then we read the book. I could not believe it! I was so proud and they were soooooo happy!  
—San Antonio, Florida



The children get so excited when they see that they are really reading. I think teaching this way will really help with fluency not only in Kindergarten, but also in first and second grades. —  
Vinita, Oklahoma



# Frequently Asked Questions

*My children will be using a different program in first grade. How can I be sure they will have the necessary skills to enter any first grade program?*

Starfall has done extensive research to ensure that children receive the necessary instruction to successfully integrate into any first grade program.

Occasionally, children move to other schools, districts or states. It is of primary importance to Starfall, that children be prepared to integrate into any situation with the necessary skills. Testimonies from first grade teachers assure us that children are not only prepared, but are more than ready to be successful first graders after having completed the Starfall Kindergarten Program.

*How can I effectively communicate to the first grade teacher the skills covered in the kindergarten program?*

It is customary for first grade programs to provide a review of the skills presented in kindergarten. While this review is necessary, it is helpful to communicate with the first grade teacher the skills in which your children have demonstrated proficiency. For example, if in the first few weeks of school the objective is to introduce the high-frequency words 'is,' 'the,' and 'for,' it would be helpful for the first grade teacher to know that these words were previously introduced, practiced, and mastered throughout the kindergarten program.

A copy of the Kindergarten Progress Monitoring tool will provide

the first grade teacher with an overview of the skills introduced, reviewed, and expected to be mastered. A summary for each child will show the level at which those skills were mastered. It will also provide a list of high-frequency words introduced in kindergarten.

Meeting personally with the first grade teacher, or sending letters if children will be moving to other schools, to communicate what children accomplished during their kindergarten year, will help make the transition easier.



I know the first grade teachers will be very much surprised at how much the children learned from the Starfall program, and how well the children can read, plus the vocabulary words they know!  
-Vinita, Oklahoma

A first grade teacher walked in when the children were using the Story Element Cards, and she was blown away! I loved the prompting we give for finding the correct card. I always save the last card for a struggler. We did the game three times, so everyone got a chance.  
-Bakersfield, California

**Will all of my students be ready for first grade after completing the Starfall Kindergarten Program?**

Readiness for first grade must be determined on an individual basis. Children who demonstrate significant learning challenges may need additional support prior to entering a traditional first grade classroom.

Starfall strives to meet the needs of each child through repeated review, and most importantly provides the motivation needed for children to see themselves as successful learners and readers. However, at times this is not enough for some children. This, of course, is true of any kindergarten program. Home access to Starfall.com assists children with learning challenges. This tool provides children with continued reinforcement over the

summer, and will assist in providing meaningful practice in skills they may still struggle with during the year.

Often children who are not ready to enter a first grade program struggle in areas of maturity, such as limited attention span or small motor coordination. These are areas that must be developed with maturity if they are not due to a diagnosed learning difference.

**Pam Ferguson, Florida**

35 years experience teaching early childhood education

**Joan Elliott, Texas**

31 years experience teaching early childhood education

My substitute was shocked that the kids know so many high frequency words. He said that some first graders don't know as many words as my students. -Valencia, California



They are learning so many high-frequency words! The first grade teachers will be thrilled. -Bakersfield, California

I am truly amazed as to what this program has done for my children. It has really given them a gift and I am so happy to be sending them off to first grade reading and writing. I really am truly amazed. You have developed a wonderful program and I am so happy that I became one of the pilot teachers this year.

Thank you again, I am really excited for next year!  
-Pittsfield, Massachusetts

After teaching kindergarten for over 31 years, this is absolutely the best reading program that I have used. I am so excited about next year and looking forward to doing an even better job with Starfall. -Jesup, Georgia



All who visit our class are impressed with the students' skill level. The principal and assistant principal regularly stop by to hear the children read and to celebrate their successes. Administration has already requested that we meet with first grade to begin planning for the kindergartners' transition in the fall. They want to make certain that the first-grade teachers are prepared to "pick up the ball and run with it", given our students' reading and writing levels in comparison to years past. We simply can't thank you enough for what Starfall has contributed to our children's growth and development. - Las Vegas, Nevada

