

# HOW WE TEACH READING AT SCA



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At SCA, we are deeply committed to delivering on the promise of education and equipping every child with the ability to read - and read well!

Learning to read is such an essential skill to not only find success in school and to thrive in society, but to also experience the joy that reading brings to life. Research continues to provide more information about how children learn to read, how to make sure every scholar learns to read, and what to do when a child encounters difficulty in learning to read. The research that we're referring to is called the Science of Reading.

# WHEN WE KNOW BETTER, WE DO BETTER

The reading scores of American children have remained somewhat stagnant for over 40 years! Each year, the data shows that only about 35% of 4th graders (measured on the NAEP) are proficient in reading! While the nationwide trend has been to accept that that is the way it is; we at SCA want more for our kids. SCA's educational approach has been designed to provide high-quality systematic, explicit instruction for reading, language. The research is telling us that while reading is more challenging for some students than others, with evidence-based reading instruction, nearly every child can become proficient by the end of 3rd grade.

Decades of research have determined that reading occurs in a specific way in the brain in all people. It does not occur naturally the way that speech does. The process must be taught. It is a process of building neural-pathways in the brain that link sounds of speech to written symbols or letters. The strings of letters are attached to meaning, and then those letter strings with meaning are stored in the brain's letterbox for late retrieval that is instantaneous and effortless. This process is called orthographic mapping and it is our goal to help our scholars build a giant letterbox of instantly retrievable words. That translates into fluent reading and subsequent comprehension. Guessing at words based on context does not aid in orthographic mapping, phonic decoding does.

“If a child memorizes ten words, the child can read only ten words, but if the child learns the sounds of ten letters, the child will be able to read 350 three-sound words, 4,320 four-sound words, and 21,650 five-sound words.” (Kozloff, 2002)

## WHAT YOU WILL SEE IN READING INSTRUCTION AT SCA

**EXPLICIT AND SYSTEMATIC PHONICS INSTRUCTION:** To understand the meaning of the text, children must first learn to decode/sound-out words; therefore, at SCA, we emphasize acquiring the skills to crack the code of the English alphabet in grades K-2. There is an order or continuum of phonics skills, progressing from simple to complex, followed throughout the early grades. In the 2019-2020 school year, SCA staff members received training on the Reading Horizons method. Full implementation began in August 2020, and SCA now uses the Reading Horizons method for teaching research-based explicit, systematic, and sequential phonics-based instruction in elementary classrooms. The Reading Horizons method makes reading instruction more enjoyable and effective for scholars and teachers alike—by making it both simple and engaging. By teaching the core framework of the Reading Horizons method—the 42 Sounds of the Alphabet, 5 Phonetic Skills, and 2 Decoding Skills—scholars are empowered with skills that allow them to prove they are reading, spelling, and pronouncing the majority of the words in the English language with accuracy. Because each skill is introduced using multi-sensory teaching techniques, scholars can make new connections in their brains that help them quickly grasp each concept—keeping them engaged and motivated throughout the process. Scholars will progress through the continuum as they master skills. In the intermediate grades (3-5), word study will continue with more grammar and morphology (learning about word parts such as Greek and Latin roots).

**PHONEMIC AWARENESS:** Phonemic awareness is the ability to understand that spoken words are made up of individual sounds. Scholars at SCA are using a research-based phonemic awareness program called Heggerty. This curriculum will be emphasized in grades K-2 to ensure that all SCA scholars have this necessary foundation. However, don't be surprised if you have a 3rd-5th grader who is working on phonemic awareness! Phonemic awareness is an area that the research has indicated is extremely important.

**KNOWLEDGE BUILDING, VOCABULARY, & COMPREHENSION:** Research has indicated that reading comprehension is closely connected to the background knowledge we have on a topic we're reading about and by understanding the vocabulary contained in the text. SCA uses the EL Education Curriculum as a guide to reaching the Georgia Standards of Excellence ELA standards. Our scholars have the opportunity to build a broad knowledge base of history/social studies, science, and the arts using this curriculum. Scholars have access to complex text and, in the process, gain more complex vocabulary. The research tells us that building knowledge and vocabulary contributes significantly to reading comprehension and should be taught beginning in the earliest grades. The ultimate goal of all reading instruction is for scholars to understand what they read.

**DECODABLE READERS:** Our early readers will be working with decodable readers. These are books or passages that only include words that the scholars can 'decode' (sound-out) according to the skills they have been taught thus far. Our scholars need practice with the phonics skills they are learning, and these books and passages provide that practice.

**FLUENCY:** Fluency is the ability to read text with accuracy, appropriate rate, and good expression. Scholars will be assessed on Oral Reading Fluency multiple times throughout the school year. These nationally normed one-minute assessments provide a good indication if your child is reading on grade level and how easy or difficult reading is for your child.

**PHONICS APPLICATION TEST:** As opposed to the antiquated and often ineffective Friday spelling test where scholars simply memorize words, scholars in grades 1-2 take a Phonics Application Test. This allows scholars to apply their knowledge of the phonetic skill learned and explain how a particular spelling pattern works.

## WHAT YOU WON'T SEE IN READING INSTRUCTION AT SCA

**THREE-CUEING SYSTEM:** This is the practice of teaching kids to identify words by using strategies other than decoding. In the three-cueing system, scholars are taught that they can identify a word by deciding if it makes sense, if it would structurally/grammatically 'fit' in a sentence, or if it looks right rather than closely examining the phonics patterns in the word and sounding it out. This is a practice that the research has indicated that we must abandon. Your child will not be taught to check pictures to identify words or make guesses based on the first letter they see. We want our scholars to look at every letter in the words, apply phonics knowledge, and sound words out!

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**LEVELED READERS:** Your child will not be assigned a reading level that corresponds to a letter of the alphabet; instead, they will work with a variety of texts. Some text will address specific phonics needs, some will be grade-level text to build knowledge, some will be interest-based, some will be at a determined level for fluency practice, but they will not be confined to a certain 'level.' Kindergarten and first-grade students will not bring home books with patterned sentences that are easily memorized.

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**GUIDED READING:** Although we are still guiding scholars through reading lessons, we have chosen to distance ourselves from the term 'Guided Reading' because that term is connected closely with the teaching of the Three-Cueing system, which has been debunked by research. Scholars will be grouped according to various reasons: needs in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, writing projects, or knowledge building/interest, but they will not be grouped based on a reading level.

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**ACCELERATED READER:** One of our greatest goals at SCA is to create lifelong readers. We believe that "rewarding" scholars with the opportunity to take a computerized quiz at the end of a novel greatly misses the mark. As adults, when we have finished a phenomenal book or magazine article, we talk about it with others. We lend the magical title to our friends. We may even share it on our social media accounts. At no time do we, as adult readers, scramble to complete ten multiple-choice questions as quickly as we can. We believe this time and focus can be better spent allowing scholars to talk about what they are reading, share their questions and ideas, and become the readers we know they have the potential to be.