

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Horizons

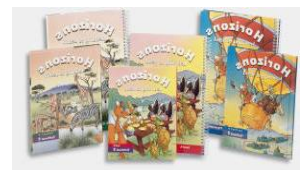
### What is Horizons?

*Horizons* may be implemented as a core or intervention program for use in the regular classroom or resource room. The program is comprised of two parts, *Horizon's Learning to Read* Level A and B or Fast Track A-B and *Horizon's Reading to Learn* Fast Track C-D. *Horizon's Learning to Read* Level A is a beginning-level program for below-average and average students in grade 1 or for non-readers in grades 2 and above. Level B is for students in grade 2 and above who have completed Level A or passed the placement test. The Fast Track A-B is an accelerated reading program to teach two years of instruction in one year for students who have letter-name knowledge but are non-readers in grades 1 or 2. *Horizons* Fast Track C-D is also accelerated for students who have completed *Horizons* Fast Track A-B or read at the beginning third-grade reading level.

In the *Horizons* program, the teacher delivers comprehensive reading lessons to homogeneous groups of 10 to 15 students using the Direct Instruction approach. The goal of this teaching methodology is to teach systematically and explicitly the precise concept needed to master a specific task. To be effective in reaching this goal, teachers are expected to closely follow the instructional guidelines through scripted lessons. In this way, the program intends to help the teacher teach like an expert by controlling the details that determine how well the students will learn. Each lesson focuses on several essential reading skills that are directly taught and practiced in more than one lesson. The instruction is structured to insure high levels of student engagement, immediate corrective and positive feedback, and cumulative review of skills. These techniques are designed to help students develop mastery in the skills they need for upcoming tasks.

The duration of the daily lesson varies according to the program level. In Levels A, B, and Fast Track A-B, the main part of the reading lesson is 30 minutes and consists of word attack and story reading. After every 10<sup>th</sup> lesson, another 30 minutes is scheduled for the Literature Book component. In Levels B and Fast Track A-B, an additional 20 minutes is applied to story extensions, independent work, and spelling. In the Fast Track C-D level, 40 minutes is devoted to the main part of the daily reading lesson for the core reading skills, 10 minutes for writing and spelling, and another 30 minutes for independent work. At another time during the day, students have a workbook check for 10 minutes and periodically do project lessons and literature lessons that require 40 to 80 minutes each. The Teacher's Guide for each level of *Horizons* has a scope and sequence chart that summarizes the skills presented in each lesson and a related Appendix to provide more details.

Each level of *Horizons* includes a Teacher's Guide, Presentation Books, Literature Guide, Writing and Spelling Guide, and an Audiocassette Tape for pronouncing sounds. For students, the materials include Textbooks, consumable Workbooks, and a Literature Anthology for Fast Track C-D. The Literature Collection for Levels A, B, and Fast Track A-B are an additional resource. All student materials are directly aligned with each lesson's objective. The Teacher's Guide is clear and highly detailed with complete explanations of how to teach the program. It also includes the placement test, directions for administering the in-



program mastery tests, summary sheets for recording test results, test remedy guide, a sound pronunciation guide, and a list of all the reading words and spelling words for that level. Ongoing progress monitoring is achieved through the in-program mastery tests. These tests occur every tenth lesson to determine if the student has mastered the skills in the preceding lessons and is prepared for the upcoming lessons.

### How is Horizons aligned with Current Research?

*Horizons'* instructional design and content align with the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) and the tenets of Reading First through its explicit and systematic instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension. While the program focuses more on these components of reading, vocabulary is woven into instruction with activities for vocabulary critical to understanding content. All lessons include teacher modeling, guided student practice, and multiple opportunities for independent practice. Integrated into the lesson materials are suggestions for how the teacher can scaffold the instruction to support the struggling reader. Consistent with Direct Instruction, *Horizon's* teaching routines offer additional support in that students are able to focus on the lesson's content and the teacher is able to concentrate on student responses.

Phonemic awareness activities follow a continuum of word types and tasks that are arranged by level of difficulty. Blending activities progress from compound words to individual sounds in short words (saying it slowly without a pause and then with a pause between sounds) and finally longer words with double-consonant beginnings or endings. Segmenting activities also occur at the word and then the phoneme level. The words used in the phonemic awareness activities are applied to subsequent phonics activities.

*Horizons* uses a novel approach to teach letter sounds. All letters are grouped into families according to how the sound is identified. The first family is composed of the consonant letters: F, L, M, N, R, S, X, Y. Students listen closely to the last part of the letter name to hear the sound the letter makes, (e.g., when saying the letter name F, the last part makes the sound of that letter /eee...fff/ ). For the second family of consonant letters, students listen to the first part of the letter name to identify the letter sound. These letters are B, D, J, K, P, T, V, Z, (e.g., for the letter name T, the letter sound is the first part of the name when it is said a part at a time /t...EEE/). Once the common consonants in the first family are taught, the long vowel family is introduced because the letter's name makes the sound. The theory is that this derivation of letter sounds from letter names makes the relationships highly explicit and may avoid confusion for students. Even before the students are reading, they apply the known letter sounds to writing regularly spelled words from dictation. Throughout the program, spelling activities are integrated into each lesson to strengthen specific reading skills. Once the students have mastered a few letter-sounds, they immediately apply them to reading words in isolation and then in context.

For reading difficult words, orthographic prompts guide the student to the appropriate strategy for decoding the word. Letter combinations may be underlined to indicate that they go together and make one sound (e.g., th, sh, ar) or the combination may include blue letters. The blue letter makes no sound and the black letter says its name (e.g., ai, ea, ay). The other major prompt is a squiggled underline that indicates an irregularity in the letter sounds (e.g., le, oo, oul). The underlining and blue letter prompts are gradually faded out as more advanced decoding activities

are taught: syllables, compound words, affixes. The lessons are constructed so that the students can apply the word-learning strategies to reading words in lists, sentences, and stories with fluency of response as the goal.

Comprehension and vocabulary are developed through story reading. Word attack activities that emphasize decoding and critical vocabulary words, phrases, or idioms prepare students for words that will appear in upcoming stories. The stories are presented in a series so that there is a repetition of the key words and phrases used by the characters. The intention is to provide practice opportunities for students to learn the new vocabulary words.

Comprehension strategies begin with sequencing and picture-to-word matching activities that demonstrate an understanding of the conveyed message from the story the student's read. The initial reading format presents the story with no picture reference. The second format has a slightly different version with illustrations to increase interest and discourage students from memorizing the text. Comprehension questions relate the text to the picture through questions based on prediction, literal questions, motives, and inferences. When students respond with an incorrect or incomplete answer, teachers are given examples of how to provide feedback that encourages a more complete response. In Levels C-D, the story reading procedures change. For most of this level, the story reading occurs twice, focusing on decoding in the first reading and decoding and comprehension in the second reading. An emphasis is placed on learning content information through facts, rules, and perspectives that can be applied to new contexts. In order to do so, comprehension skills focus on cause and effect, literal meaning, inferential meaning, main idea, sequencing of events, fact vs. opinion, viewpoint, and character development to understand and apply content information. These skills and the content information learned in one lesson are integrated into subsequent lessons so the student has an opportunity to review and apply to new applications.

All dimensions of fluency are integrated into the program daily. Letter-sounds and decoding strategies are practiced to promote automaticity. Paired-reading provides additional practice for students to meet the specific rate and error limit that is part of the ongoing progress monitoring.

The professional development for *Horizons* is provided on-site for three days during the first year of implementation. The initial training is very interactive and prepares the teachers to use the program. During the second visit, the consultant goes into various classrooms and models the program for teachers. On the third visit, the consultant works side-by-side with individual teachers to offer immediate feedback and support while observing the teacher teach the program. In order to build in school capacity, the reading coaches are asked to participate in the professional development.

### Research Support for Horizons

There have been several attempts to examine the efficacy of the *Horizons* program. However, these studies are not included in this report because they did not meet FCRR's standards for research, designed to examine program effectiveness: [http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/PDF/Research\\_Criteria.pdf](http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/PDF/Research_Criteria.pdf) .

### Conclusion

In sum, the *Horizons* program provides instruction and practice in the five components of reading, and the design of these materials is consistent with current

research suggesting that students who struggle with reading benefit from explicit and systematic instruction. However, we were not able to locate any studies meeting the FCRR research standards that evaluated the impact of the program on reading growth. Thus, empirical evidence of the effectiveness of *Horizons'* specific program components is not yet available.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Horizons*:

- The program includes features that may be helpful for struggling readers such as consistent teaching routines, repeated practice, and cumulative review.
- The design and content of this program are derived from research.
- Ongoing progress monitoring is integrated into the program through mastery tests every ten lessons.
- Stories end with some suspense to stimulate interest and motivate students to read.

Weaknesses of *Horizons*:

- None were noted.

## Which Florida districts have schools that implement Horizons?

Bay	850-872-7700	Palm Beach	561-434-8200
Flagler	386-437-7526	Pinellas	727-588-6011
Hillsborough	813-272-4050	Polk	863-534-0521
Lee	239-337-8301	Santa Rosa	850-983-5010
Levy	352-486-5231	Sarasota	941-927-2539
Manatee	941-708-8770	Taylor	850-838-2500
Orange	407-317-3202	Volusia	386-734-7190

## For More Information

<https://www.sraonline.com/products.html?tid=9&sid=67&open=>

## References

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. NIH Publication No. 00-4754. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Lead Reviewer: Mary VanSciver, M.S.

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Important Note: FCRR Reports are prepared in response to requests from Florida school districts for review of specific reading programs. The reports are intended to be a source of information about programs that will help teachers, principals, and district personnel in their choice of materials that can be used by skilled teachers to provide effective instruction. Whether or not a program has been reviewed does **not** constitute endorsement or lack of endorsement by the FCRR.

For more information about FCRR go to: [www.fcrr.org](http://www.fcrr.org)

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