

Florida Center for Reading Research

Open Court Reading Pre-K

What is Open Court Reading Pre-K?

The Pre-K level of *Open Court Reading* is an early literacy program designed for pre-kindergarten children. The goal of this program is to teach oral language skills, book and print awareness, alphabetic principle, and phonological awareness in an explicit and systematic format. Skills in each of these areas are listed in a general scope and sequence for all grade levels of the Open Court Reading program. *Open Court Reading Pre-K* materials consist of four teacher manuals, a teacher's resource book, a home connection book, large alphabet sound cards, blackline or color pre-decodable take-home books, word cards, picture cards, two big books, 32 unit trade books, finger puppets, game mats, and a listening library audiocassette/CD-ROM.

Open Court Reading Pre-K is organized around 8 thematic units based on typical preschool topics (i.e., Self, Families, Friends, Community Helpers, Transportation, Senses, Farms, Changes). Each unit consists of 20 daily lessons designed to take approximately 45 minutes for two large-group activities and one small-group activity. The whole class participates in the Sounds and Letters part and the Reading and Responding part. The third part of the lesson, which focuses on integrating the curriculum, is designed for small-group writing activities. Related center activities for small groups are included within each part of the lesson. The classroom teacher creates a plan for integrating these activities into the daily schedule. While the level of teacher support for these activities is ambiguous, the materials to be used require advance preparation by the teacher.

The first part of the daily lesson consists of sounds, letters, and language activities using the Big Books, *Over in the Meadow* and *From A to Z*, and the Alphabet Sound Cards. Children are involved in several teacher directed activities that involve rhyming words in songs and poems, oral blending and segmenting onset and rimes, identifying letter names and sounds, and learning high-frequency sight words. The next part of the lesson is intended to develop oral language skills by engaging the children in discussions about the literature selection. A different comprehension activity accompanies the re-readings of each story, poem, or folktale. Children may be involved in acting out the story using flannel board figures, answering literal questions about the story, or exploring story-related vocabulary words. The final part of each day's lesson integrates the story with a writing activity where children draw and tell about the characters and events. In addition, there is an optional Home Connection Book designed to share the curriculum with families. Each unit has several letters, written in English and Spanish, to describe what the children are learning in school and to share literacy-related suggestions to complete at home.



Open Court Reading Pre-K provides a pre-assessment form to approximate the literacy status of each child and eight unit assessments to monitor the child's progress. Teachers use the observational checklist during the normal classroom activity to record the child's response to skills taught in the unit. In addition to the checklists, teachers are encouraged to keep anecdotal records and portfolios for each child and use the results of all assessments to group children by instructional need. The program

does not include examples of how to integrate the results of the assessments to determine program placement or modifications to instruction. Additional assessments that offer a valid and reliable method to screen and monitor progress are not provided with this program.

How is Open Court Reading Pre-K aligned with Current Reading Research?

Open Court Reading Pre-K contains instructional content and methods to support growth in the following areas: oral language, phonological awareness, and print knowledge. Instruction in each area follows a progression of skill levels with the intent to provide exposure, not mastery of the skill.

Methods to develop oral language focus on word play, listening and responding to the literature selection, and vocabulary development. During the first and second reading of every story, the teacher is prompted to let the children ask questions and talk about the book. In four of the twenty lessons in each unit, there is an "Exploring Vocabulary" activity to introduce several words from the literature or unit theme. After reading the story, the teacher selects two or three words, explains their meaning, and uses them in a sentence. Although the children are encouraged to use the words in sentences, the program does not direct the teacher to provide opportunities to repeat the word once it is introduced until Unit Three. Another concern is the lack of context or props (e.g., picture cards or storybook) to aid in understanding the word and opportunities to hear and use the new vocabulary words in other settings. It is also interesting to note that words the children are likely to know (e.g., mother, parent, eyes, nose, helper, morning) are part of this vocabulary activity whereas words they are unlikely to know from the stories (e.g., haul, flapped, crow, cracks, Unit One, Lesson 11) are included in the activity only if time permits.

To promote oral language development, large group discussions related to the literature selection are included daily. Children orally respond to comprehension questions after listening to the story or poem. *Open Court Reading Pre-K* has included a section on "Story Making" to introduce elements of stories (i.e., characters, events, settings) and to encourage children to become the storyteller. The children listen to the teacher read a folktale then they act out or retell the story through flannel board figures created by the teacher. Reading aloud to children is an important activity; however, the whole group setting is likely to limit the opportunity for all children to participate and for individual children to obtain sufficient opportunities for practice and feedback.

Phonological awareness instruction is included daily through a variety of game-like activities that follow an appropriate developmental hierarchy. Each lesson includes a song or finger play to encourage the children to recite and create rhymes. Beginning lessons introduce identification of environmental sounds, isolation of words in a spoken sentence, and recall of words missing from a sentence. The activities progress to oral blending and segmenting words involving two-syllable compound words, deleting parts of a word (e.g., say starfish without the star), and onset and rimes. Finally, students engage in phoneme manipulation using blank cards to represent each sound. Many opportunities for children to practice each skill are provided throughout the unit.

Each of the three-part lessons includes activities to develop print and book knowledge. Teachers rely on the program's big book of poems, pre-decodable take-home books, theme books, and writing experiences to teach the conventions of print (i.e., title, author, print directionality, word boundaries). Children are taught high-

frequency words on flash cards and other unfamiliar words using small picture cards or rebuses in order to “read” the story in the pre-decodable take-home books.

Knowledge of the alphabet is addressed through exposure to letter names and shapes in the first three units and letter sounds in the last four units. The last unit also teaches children how to write the letters. Using the Alphabet Sound Cards and the Big Book, *From A to Z*, the teacher presents the capital and lowercase form of the letters in ABC order. Children play games with individual letter cards by matching the letter they have to the same letter on Word Cards or searching the room for words containing a designated letter. The Alphabet Sound Cards are used again to teach the letter sounds beginning with high-frequency letters. Rather than directly pairing the letter with its sound, the sound is taught according to an action made by the object on the Alphabet Sound Card. For instance, the letter K shows a picture of a camera that says /k/ when it takes a picture or the letter N with a picture of a horse who has a cold so when he tries to sniff his nose says /n/. In contrast to this method, the teacher linked the letter name to the initial letter in the object’s name in the book, *From A to Z*.

The professional development that accompanies the *Open Court Reading Program Pre-K* consists of a half to full day of initial training followed by demonstration lessons in the classroom once the teachers have begun implementing the program. Two additional coaching sessions are available for each teacher. For an extra cost, SRA/McGraw-Hill will customize the professional development to meet the needs of the school.

Research Support for Open Court Reading Pre-K

Open Court Reading Pre-K curriculum was published in 2003, and does not yet have published studies supporting the efficacy of the program. Although the content of the instructional procedures and activities are aligned with current reading research, randomized control studies by third-party evaluators are needed to determine if the methods used to teach this content actually result in effects.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Open Court Reading Pre-K*:

- The program includes instruction and practice in all the major components of early literacy as identified by Early Reading First.
- The big book format for the song and rhyme books permit adequate viewing during whole group instruction.
- Children may be motivated by the game-like format of the activities.

Weaknesses of *Open Court Reading Pre-K*:

- There are no current data to support the effectiveness of the program.
- The teacher’s manual does not contain information on how the teacher can structure the large group activities to provide for participation of all the children.
- Small storybooks may impede viewing by all children during the large group story time.
- Workshop Centers are small group activities designed to expand on the lesson’s concepts; yet, no information concerning the role of the teacher in supporting the child’s learning is provided.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement Open Court Reading Pre-K?

The following Florida districts have schools piloting *Open Court Reading Pre-K*.

Duval	904-390-2115
Leon	850-487-7147
Orange	407-317-3202

For More Information

<http://www.sraonline.com/index.php/home/curriculumsolutions/reading/ocrprek/95>

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