

Florida Center for Reading Research

ReadAbout

What is ReadAbout?

ReadAbout is an adaptive reading technology program designed to supplement a school's core reading program for students in grades 3-6. The goal of the program is to enhance comprehension and vocabulary understanding of nonfiction text in the broad content areas of science, social studies, and contemporary issues. *ReadAbout* strives to reach a wide variety of readers through leveled text with instruction that adapts according to student response, thus offering differentiated instruction for struggling readers and English Language learners (ELL), and enrichment for more advanced readers. Students work individually at a computer with minimal supervision for a minimum of 20 minutes at least 2 times a week, and use the supplemental print materials for a minimum of 20 minutes at least once per week. When implemented with this frequency, it takes approximately 2-3 weeks to complete one topic.

ReadAbout lends itself to flexible use in the classroom and in a computer lab setting.

The *ReadAbout* program contains 70 different topics from the three content areas, and each topic has 3 related reading passages that accompany it. The nonfiction topics with their related passages are aligned with the national standards for English language/arts, science, and social studies. Passages represent a range of mid-2nd grade to mid-10th grade using The Lexile Framework® for Reading, with 14 topics for Level 1, 16 topics for Levels 2 and 3, and 12 topics for Levels 4 and 5. Passages reflect one of the following text types: magazine article or interview, newspaper article, nonfiction book or textbook, journal, letter, encyclopedia, and web page. At the conclusion of every topic, students create a Knowledge Card by choosing a prompt and writing a response.

Lesson formats within the *ReadAbout* program consist of a before, during, and after reading framework. The student first selects a topic, which initiates a series of before reading activities designed to prepare the reader for a successful reading of all three passages. Think About It is an open-ended conceptual question posed aurally and visually to the student to stimulate their initial interest in the topic and to act as a reference for all three passages. Next, a Skill Brief introduces the primary comprehension skill of the passage with a brief video that illustrates the concept and provides examples of everyday application. A collectable Skill Card is built that reinforces understanding of the skill through a description, an image from the Skill Brief, an audio caption, and an example of the skill in context. After this, another, high-interest video of 45-60 seconds taps into and/or builds background knowledge by introducing the topic's main ideas through maps, animations of scientific concepts, and historical information. Five collectable Smart Cards are built, each with a key vocabulary word from the passage, called Smart Words. Smart words serve as the basis for many activities throughout instruction that are intended to increase vocabulary knowledge and understanding of the passage.



During reading, a variety of supports are available to scaffold understanding. Students may read the text silently, or choose to have it read aloud with phrase-by-phrase highlighting. Additionally, they may click on vocabulary words, idioms,

metaphors, and other challenging words to see definitions. Once the first page has been read, a quick, literal comprehension question focuses students on the main idea of the passage. The Skill Cards and smart cards described above are available for student review during reading and with vocabulary activities.

After reading, a skills assessment addresses the primary and secondary comprehension skills taught in the passage with three question formats: multiple choice, highlighting the passage text, and graphic organizers. This is followed by a Performance Recap and then concludes with several vocabulary activities that reinforce and extend student understanding of the vocabulary words.

Completion of a topic's three passages brings students to the final level of *ReadAbout* called Topic Challenge. Although presented in a game-like format, they are higher level skill assessments for the student to demonstrate mastery of the comprehension skills and vocabulary words presented and practiced during that topic.

For initial placement in *ReadAbout*, a student first takes the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), which is included with the program. The results of the SRI will automatically put students at the correct level in *ReadAbout*. Alternatively, if another assessment product is being used, teachers can place students based on performance results using four different levels: Above Grade, On Grade, Below Grade, and Far Below Grade Level.

Materials accompanying the *ReadAbout* program are well organized and teacher friendly. The following materials are included with the purchase of the program: Topic Planners, which are guides to the program's 70 topics with vocabulary, critical thinking skills, ELL and writing support; an overview guide to *ReadAbout*; an assessment, reports, and differentiated instruction guide; a software manual; a data management guide; the software with installation guides; and Student SmartFiles with answer sheets. These activity cards are linked to the program topics and offer students the possibility for independent practice, either before or after they have worked in the software. The differentiated instruction guide offers such explicit lesson plans for teaching the comprehension skills that it enables teachers to use the teaching format for applying the teaching of these skills to a variety of texts.

How is ReadAbout aligned with Current Reading Research?

The importance of instruction in vocabulary (Baumann & Kame'enui, 2004; The National Reading Panel, 2000) and comprehension (The National Reading Panel, 2000; The Rand Study, 2002) has been well documented. Instruction in the *ReadAbout* program addresses both vocabulary and comprehension in two important ways. It attempts to foster in young readers an understanding of the text currently being read, while it strives to broadly develop their comprehension capacities in general. The reader, the text, and the activity figure prominently within the *ReadAbout* program and were conceived with the intention of developing an intrinsic motivation to read and learn.

Several instructional features in the *ReadAbout* program encourage active learning and contribute to a deeper understanding of the text, particularly for struggling readers and English language learners of Spanish-speaking backgrounds. Vocabulary words and comprehension skills are taught explicitly before, during, and after reading. The skill is modeled and clear explanations with specific examples are given. Students are provided ample and supported opportunities to practice with immediate corrective feedback. Many chances for review and reteaching help to ensure understanding when students haven't acquired mastery of a skill. Additionally,

instruction is differentiated in a number of other ways beginning with initial placement in the *ReadAbout* program at an appropriate reading level based on assessment. If students are not achieving mastery during the skills assessments, they are given the chance to try reading at a lower text level. If they decide not to try the lower text level, and their performance does not improve, the program will automatically place them in a new topic at a lower reading level. Students may listen to the text being read with phrase-by-phrase highlighting, click on a word to hear it pronounced, and listen to its definition. Additional support for Spanish speakers includes Spanish translation of vocabulary words and translations of the topic preview.

The *ReadAbout* program explicitly teaches ten comprehension skills which include discovering the author's purpose, main idea and details, drawing conclusions, fact and opinion, problem and solution, making inferences, cause and effect, compare and contrast, sequencing of events, and summarizing. Each passage from a topic is written to support one of the program's ten comprehension skills and emphasizes two other comprehension skills. Many types of graphic organizer activities assist students in deepening their understanding of a skill and the meaning of the passage. Five key vocabulary words from each passage are pretaught and students are offered multiple exposures to the words throughout instruction with activities that are motivating and increasingly challenging. With the three passages from each topic, students are taught 15 new vocabulary words.

An important consideration for schools with struggling readers is that if students are reading below a mid-second grade level, the *ReadAbout* program would be too difficult. Also, audio support is not available for all aspects of vocabulary and skill instruction.

If a school purchases the basic *ReadAbout* package, there are two professional development trainings offered. One is a 7-hour training that introduces teachers to the program. A second follow up training is given 6-8 weeks after implementation of the program for extra support. Additional trainings as well as technical support are available for a fee.

Research Support for ReadAbout

The *ReadAbout* program was developed in 2005 and has been selected for evaluation by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to participate in a national research study on the effectiveness of reading comprehension interventions. It is one of four programs that will be randomly assigned to 5th grade classrooms in 9 districts across the country. Year 1, 2005-2006 was the pilot study. In year 2 of the study, 2006-2007, full implementation will occur.

A quasi-experimental study (2005-2006) with the *ReadAbout* program has just concluded. A total of 250 students participated from 5th grade classrooms in a New York school and included five experimental and five control classes. Results are expected at the end of summer 2006.

In sum, the instructional content and design of the *ReadAbout* program are derived from a strong research base. The studies described above may yield helpful results about the *ReadAbout* program's effectiveness with specific samples of students.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *ReadAbout*:

- A range of 70 topics in the content areas of science, social studies, and contemporary issues can be found within the *ReadAbout* texts, all of which are aligned to English Language Arts standards.
- *ReadAbout's* wide range of topics and related reading passages offer the possibility of high interest, motivating reading experiences. Other motivators include student choice of topic and reading activities within a highly interactive context.
- Students work at their own pace and at their own reading level.
- The program generates a variety of reports that enable teachers to further differentiate instruction in the classroom.
- The comprehension skill lesson plans found in the differentiated instruction guide serve as an excellent resource for teachers.

Weaknesses of *ReadAbout*:

- None were noted.

Which Florida districts have schools that implement ReadAbout?

Orange 407-317-3202

Seminole 407-320-0006

For More Information

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/readabout/>

References

- Bauman, J. F., & Kame'enui, E. J. (2004). *Vocabulary instruction: Research to practice*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- 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*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Washington, D.C.
- The Rand Study Group (2002). *Reading for understanding. Toward an R & D program in reading comprehension*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

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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.

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