

# Florida Center for Reading Research

## Rigby Literacy

### What is Rigby Literacy?

*Rigby Literacy* is a K-3 reading program utilized by some teachers as a comprehensive instructional program in reading and writing. The program is comprised of four main components: Shared Reading, Guided Reading, Word Works, and Wonder Writers, each containing their own set of materials. Shared Reading and Guided Reading lessons are detailed in a teacher's manual along with assessment tips, assessment forms and book leveling descriptions. Fourteen big books with matching small books and audiocassettes are part of the Shared Reading segment and Guided Reading includes leveled books. Word Works includes 32 Rhyme Posters, Teaching Cards, Song Posters, and 16 magazines for independent practice. A book of Assessment and Evaluation forms, Benchmark Books and Phonics Assessment Tests are also included in the program. Although the order of instruction of the various components of *Rigby Literacy* is left to the teacher, *Rigby* suggests a whole-part-whole structuring of the reading lesson. The class meets as a group for Shared Reading and Word Works, then, smaller groups of students participate at the various centers while the teacher leads small group Guided Reading instruction, concentrating on reading and phonemic awareness and phonics skills. Finally, the entire class meets again to bring closure to the day's reading activities by sharing ideas, thoughts and experiences. This report will focus on the *Rigby Literacy* first grade program.



The Shared Reading segment of the lesson centers around the Big Book reading in which the teacher models fluent reading, offers explanations to the meaning of the story, demonstrates think-aloud strategies, and students listen and gradually begin to participate in the reading of the story. Lessons for each big book span 10 days, allowing the students ample opportunities to read and reread together with the teacher and to explore the various levels of comprehension offered by each story.

Guided Reading takes place in small groups and the teacher serves as facilitator and observer, supporting the students as they become independent readers. Leveled books are used with highly predictable text and illustrations that reflect the story's meaning. Based on assessment, reading groups are formed according to the students' developmental level. Teaching objectives for each book center around one main comprehension strategy and four literacy skills. Very detailed lesson plans for each book clearly outline the teacher's role, indicating questions, prompts, and suggesting strategies for reading. Before the reading of each new book and in order to engage the students, the teacher "sets the scene" by encouraging predictions, examining the text by reading words and sentences, and by activating or building prior knowledge. Reading of the text occurs in 3 steps: the Book Talk, Individual Reading, and Returning to the text.

The Word Works segment of *Rigby Literacy* presents work in phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, using rhyme and song charts as the medium. Teaching Cards that coordinate with the Rhyme Charts give teachers specific instructional tips. The Rhyme and Song Charts allow students the chance to practice particular phonics skills in the context of a rhyme and also offer the chance for repeated readings.

Wonder Writers is woven throughout the components of *Rigby Literacy*. A Wonder Writers Book along with Strategy Cards provides several opportunities for the teacher to include writing within the reading program.

### Is Rigby Literacy aligned with Reading First?

*Rigby Literacy* has thoroughly incorporated comprehension strategies into every segment of the reading lesson. Questions are generated to activate prior knowledge, set a purpose for active reading, and to help students reflect on their reading. Before, during and after reading strategies include prediction, story retell, summarizing, comparing and contrasting information, and finding the main idea. Students are given the chance to respond and express their understanding verbally within a group, and individually while writing.

Fluency development is addressed through repeated readings of the rhymes, songs, readings of the Big Books, and in Guided Reading. Students also participate in paired reading, and listen to and/or read along with the audiocassette version of the Big Books.

Vocabulary instruction is implicit rather than explicit, occurring in the context of discussions, questioning and the building of background knowledge, or during modeled and shared writing. High frequency words are not taught and practiced outside of reading except on a few very limited occasions. *Rigby Literacy* believes that these words should be practiced in the context of actual story reading.

An assortment of activities addresses phonemic awareness and phonics in the Word Works segment of the program. There is however, a mixing of developmental levels of phonemic awareness instruction within lessons, which is appropriate for first graders who have already acquired skills in phonemic awareness but would be problematic for struggling readers.

Phonics instruction is not systematic. Consonants are not taught explicitly, assuming that they have been learned and assimilated in Kindergarten. In early lessons, for example, a specific vowel is the focal point of the lesson. Students participate in a word building activity with phonograms that include four different vowels that have not yet been explicitly introduced, underscoring the program's lack of systematic instruction and possibly confusing students who are not secure with that lesson's targeted vowel. There is nevertheless, direct and explicit instruction in vowels, variant vowel spellings, digraphs and inflected endings. Ample practice opportunities for segmenting, blending and applying that skill to stories read is not consistently present. Additionally, phonics activities of varying developmental levels occur within early lessons. An example of mixing developmental levels in phonics instruction occurs with *Rigby Literacy's* early introduction of phonogram work. Using phonograms is a later phonics skill that students use after they are fluent in segmenting individual sounds in words.

Another characteristic of the Word Works segment of *Rigby Literacy* is to introduce consonant blends such as sl-, bl-, gl-, fl-, sk-, sm-, sn-, -mp,-nd, -nk, etc. and phonograms as units of sound. The concern is that students who struggle to hear individual sounds in words may experience more confusion when a blend that has 2-3 consonant sounds is presented as one unit of sound. The directions on the Teaching Cards show the following segmenting tip: /s/-/s/-/s/- /i/-/p/ then contrast that with /sl/-/sl/-/sl/-/i/-/p/ to show the difference in a single consonant versus a consonant blend. Although this contrasting strategy may be helpful, these lessons occur early in the school year before solid skills in segmenting and blending individual sounds in

words might be established. It also does not address the developmental sequence of phonics instruction in which students recognize individual sounds in words before moving on to units of sound, such as digraphs and word endings. For struggling readers, it is particularly difficult to hear individual sounds in words, which makes it preferable to not include blends and phonograms as units of sound until much later in instruction (Gaskins, Ehri, Cress, O'Hara, Donnelly, 1996-1997). By teaching blends and phonograms as units of sound early in the instructional sequence, *Rigby Literacy* ignores the four phases of sight word development demonstrated in the research of Ehri (Ehri, 2002; 1998). She outlines four phases of sight word development in beginning readers: pre-alphabetic, partial alphabetic, full alphabetic and the consolidated alphabetic phase. It is only in the final phase, the consolidated alphabetic phase, that students are able to fully analyze word parts such as morphemes, syllables, and onset and rime, and then use this knowledge to read unknown words. This occurs when the system of mapping all the letters to sounds is secure and students are able to connect the spelling of the 5-letter word *block* to its 4 sound units, or phonemes.

As part of "Fix-up Strategies" during the Guided Reading segment, the teacher will often ask the students if they sounded out a word when it was difficult. Yet there is no consistent, guided practice in this skill so that the students would employ it on a regular basis. Additionally, the skills in Word Works lessons are not directly practiced in stories from Guided Reading since there is no prescribed sequence for teaching the stories. Although stories from Guided Reading suggest using particular Rhyme Cards linked with the skill of that story, the skills most probably will not reflect that day's Word Work lesson.

Rigby offers a large variety of customized workshops in professional development. The amount of workshops a school district receives depends on the particular needs of the schools involved and funds available.

### Research Support for Rigby Literacy

Rigby was developed in 1986. *Rigby Literacy* is a fairly new program and, at this point, lacks well-conceived research to demonstrate its effectiveness. One study conducted in an Oregon school district in the fall of 2000 yielded some preliminary feedback on program effectiveness. *Rigby Literacy* was implemented in grades K-3 throughout the district. Student reading performance was measured using Oregon's state-adopted standards-based test. Because this test is available only to second grade and above, no information is available about the reading performance of the kindergarten and first graders. The standards-based measure was given to 2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade children before and after implementation of *Rigby Literacy*. Progress was documented for the 2nd graders after the first year of implementation, and for the two years after implementation for the 3rd graders. The percentage of second graders who met or exceeded the benchmark established by Oregon rose from 73% to 82% after the first year, but then declined to 78% the second year. The decline is attributed to the increase of ELL students into the 2nd grade student test population in the second year of use. In the 3rd grade, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the benchmark rose from 73% to 79% in the first year, and to 84% in the second. Rigby reports that the increases are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level, whereas the 2nd grade decrease in the second year of implementation is not statistically significant. The information yielded in this study is incomplete, as there is no data for K or 1st grade, and must be interpreted cautiously as a control group was

not used to measure the actual effect of the program relative to other instruction. In other words, without a control group, it is difficult to know whether the improvements (and decline) seen are attributable to the Rigby program or to other factors.

In sum, the five instructional components of reading found to be essential by current scientifically based reading research are included in *Rigby Literacy*. However, scientific evidence supporting the effectiveness of the program needs to be quantified through well-designed research and thoroughly reported results.

## Strengths & Weaknesses

### Strengths of *Rigby Literacy*:

- A variety of well illustrated informational and narrative texts are used in Shared and Guided Reading covering a broad range of topics to engage the students.
- The teacher models detailed think-aloud strategies demonstrating the thought processes good readers use to understand text.
- Descriptive language is modeled and encouraged during all segments of the reading lesson.
- Students are taught a variety of important comprehension strategies.
- Use of song as a medium to enhance phonemic awareness instruction will motivate students and provide sensory appeal.
- Assessment tips throughout each segment of *Rigby Literacy* help focus the teacher on important aspects of the students' reading development. The Teacher's manual provides various performance assessment records and a schedule that suggests when to implement them.
- In the Word Works segment of *Rigby Literacy*, the suggested spelling lists reflect the phonics skills being developed that week, enhancing the students' ability to apply what they are learning.

### Weaknesses of *Rigby Literacy*:

- Phonics instruction is not systematic and ignores the developmental stages underlying reading acquisition.
- There is no cohesiveness in the program linking the various segments together. It is not clear which Shared Reading lesson should be linked with the Word Works lesson or the Guided Reading Lesson. *Rigby* suggests that this is done so that the teacher may choose her own sequence according to the various developmental levels among students. This only augments the lack of systematic instruction. To ensure that systematic instruction of the Word Works section is aligned with the Shared Reading and Guided Reading segments, the teacher is obliged to figure out which skills are addressed in the individual books for Guided and Shared Reading, since there is no index providing this information.
- A heavy reliance on picture cues and predictable text throughout all book levels is encouraged and directly taught to help students when they encounter difficult words. Segmenting and blending is suggested but not consistently taught.
- The book talk portion of Guided Reading reveals the meaning of the story before the students have the opportunity to apply their skills to read the story.
- During Guided Reading, discussion of potentially problematic phonics skills occurs after reading the story rather than before reading when it would be most beneficial for a successful reading experience.

### Which Florida counties have schools that implement Rigby Literacy?

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|-------------------|--------------|
| Manatee County    | 941-708-8770 |
| Palm Beach County | 561-434-8200 |
| Sarasota County   | 941-927-9000 |

### For More Information

<http://www.rigby.com/>

### References

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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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