

Florida Center for Reading Research

Sing, Spell, Read, and Write

What is Sing, Spell, Read, and Write?

Sing, Spell, Read, and Write (SSRW) was originally published in 1972 under the name, "Sing, Spell, Read, Fun Indeed!" In 1983, rights to the program reverted to the curriculum researcher, designer, teacher, and author Sue Dickson, who changed the name to *Sing, Spell, Read, and Write*. *SSRW* is designed to be a comprehensive core reading program for teaching literacy skills to emergent and early readers in Pre-K through second grade. The goal of *SSRW* is for students to learn to read through mastering the 36 steps to independent reading that are the foundation for *SSRW*. Seven of these steps have phonics songs with coordinated wall charts for practice and mastery of phonics skills through point, listen, and sing along activities. Whole class instruction by the classroom teacher is the recommended format for introduction of each new song and chart.

Students progress through the Kindergarten program together, as a class, or in small groups, at the teacher's discretion. The scope and sequence in Kindergarten is depicted as a train on a chart and the teacher moves the train engine to indicate class or group progress on the path of sequenced instruction. In first grade, as students master each step, they move individual racecars on a raceway chart. Grammar instruction and process writing are also introduced at the first grade level and are continued through the second grade, along with other skills such as basic punctuation, capitalization, and alphabetizing. At the second grade level, there is less individualization as the class shifts from a "learning to read" to a "reading to learn" mode. The class moves as a whole or by reading groups on a tour bus path of the southern and eastern states. A greater number of sight words and decodable words are introduced as students read about animal characters and children living in states along the eastern and southern borders of the United States in the storybook readers.

The materials for each level vary, but all have a Teacher's Manual that includes instructions for how to teach each lesson, reader, game, and song, and how to administer and grade the book end assessments. The manual also includes tips to help implement *SSRW*: ideal room arrangement, frequently asked questions, a sample parent letter, a supplemental reading list, and suggested extra chalkboard lessons. A tab indicates assessments, reproducible sheets, and extended activities. Instructional materials include the sing along phonics songs that are professionally recorded with young vocalists. There is a CD for each grade level with two versions of each song (word and instrumental), teacher editions of student workbooks, decodable readers, a lesson and student achievement tracking chart, letter/sound cards, manuscript writing desk strips and wall cards, a set of three training seminar videos, and an extensive assortment of interactive charts. A variety of games (with a box of prizes) are used for teaching and reinforcement. Teacher and student materials are well organized, easy to use, and error free. There is an assessment book at level one to assess mastery of phonetic story books and three achievement tests. The achievement tests may be used for student placement in the program. Ongoing assessment is completed through teacher administered one-on-one mastery checks and whole group achievement tests. Mastery of these skill checks is necessary to progress to the next level.



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How is Sing, Spell, Read, and Write aligned with Current Research?

Sing, Spell, Read, and Write incorporates, to varying degrees, each of the five components of instruction designated by the National Reading Panel (2000) as being critical for early instruction in reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. *SSRW* includes many workbook and teacher led activities labeled Phonemic Awareness/Auditory Discrimination and Phonetic Analysis. There are ample practice opportunities for students to match initial letter sounds to pictures of words in the early levels. After students learn individual consonant and short vowel letter sounds they learn and practice blending all the consonants with all of the short vowels. They additionally practice adding various ending letters to make many words using an activity in step 4, the Ferris Wheel. The Ferris Wheel Song accompanies the activity and is taught for students to gain practice manipulating phonemes with the workbook activities, wall charts, and games.

The kindergarten and first grade levels cover the phonics instruction. In kindergarten, decodable texts are introduced after students have learned all letters of the alphabet and how to blend consonant vowel consonant (cvc) words. Manuscript writing is taught as the letters are introduced. The lyrics to the seven phonics songs are designed to help reinforce skills needed to learn to read: letter names, letter sounds, short and long vowels, vowel combinations, and consonant clusters. The instructional sequence of phonics is different from that of many other curricula in several ways: (1) letters and their sounds are sung and taught based on their sequence in the alphabet rather than on frequency or ease of use; (2) after all letters are taught, the short vowel sounds are reviewed in a song for preparation in blending consonant and short vowel sounds to make short vowel words; and (3) all consonants are taught as separate sounds when they are first introduced; however, when blends (referred to as consonant clusters) are introduced they are taught as a unit of sound rather than as individual sounds to be blended together. The sound is then practiced in a song for memorization. Fluency is encouraged through repeated readings, with students reading with the teacher, alone, and with partners.

Vocabulary words consist primarily of decodable and high frequency sight words at the kindergarten and first grade level. This includes introduction and a brief explanation of the words and their meaning by the teacher, follow up student work where students are asked to use the word in a sentence, and workbook pages with lists of vocabulary words for the students to read. In second grade students are introduced to a wider variety of words as they 'tour' the United States. Reading and speaking vocabulary are taught through vocabulary activities provided in the daily spelling/phonics lessons.

The program includes many decodable phonics books that require students to read only the phonic elements that have been taught. These stories include many questions for the teacher to ask that require students to retell, find the main idea, sequence events, and to analyze. Listed below each question, in the teacher's guide, is the name of the strategy the child will use to answer the question. However, there are not explicit teaching routines to teach these strategies or prompts to remind teachers to model explicit think aloud strategies as they encounter text during shared reading experiences. In order to improve a student's reading comprehension, the National Reading Panel (2000) emphasizes the importance of teaching and modeling the use of cognitive strategies then guiding the student through the acquisition of the strategies.

Professional development includes a 3-hour training video, a 3-hour initial training with the faculty implementing the program, and additional follow-up assistance as needed. A productive use of the training video would be for teachers to refer back to it for follow-up assistance with the various teaching methods. There is toll-free number for teachers and a *SSRW* curriculum specialist (who may confer with the author) to assist with the varying needs of teachers. The professional development that is offered is included with the cost of the program. The program does not require school wide or grade level participation. The author of the program is also available for consulting for this program as well as two other programs: *Winning: The Race to Independent Reading* (for Grade 4 to Adult) and *Canta, Deletrea, LEA, & Escribe, How to Read, Write, and Spell Spanish* (Pre-K-Grade 1).

Research Support for Sing, Spell, Read, and Write

A beginning level of evidence suggests that *SSRW* has potentially positive effects on the areas of phonics (specifically letter name knowledge, word reading skills, and decoding skills) and reading comprehension. However, the results were somewhat inconsistent across grades and children from different SES backgrounds. Furthermore, in writing, although there was a positive effect for first graders, a potentially negative effect was observed for kindergartners and second graders. A number of studies have been conducted on *SSRW*. However, only one of these studies with a quasi experimental design met the FCRR standards for research designed to examine program effectiveness (see http://www.fcrr.org/FCRRReports/PDF/Research_Criteria.pdf).

Bond and her colleagues (1995) examined the effect of *SSRW* on the reading achievement of beginning readers in kindergarten, first, and second grades in Memphis, Tennessee. This study was based on a total of 1,591 students who were participating in either the *SSRW* program or in the basal reading program; 596 kindergartners, 640 first graders, and 355 second graders. Students in the treatment classes received 20 lessons in *SSRW* as the main source of reading instruction. Comparison classes received instruction from the district adopted Burdett basal series. Eight *SSRW* schools were matched with nine comparison schools based on socioeconomic status, race, and standardized achievement scores. These schools were divided into three socioeconomic strata for each grade: high, middle, and low. In second grade, all the children were from middle class families. Results from a stratified random sample of 252 students showed no differences in reading skills between treatment and control groups in the beginning of the study. Post test results were obtained from a 50% stratified sub-sample "from each class whenever feasible" (p. 124). The effect of *SSRW* was compared for children in different strata across grades K, 1, and 2 in the following areas: letter name knowledge and word reading skills (Letter-word Identification, Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery, 1984), decoding skills (Word Attack, Woodcock Language Proficiency Battery, 1984), reading comprehension (Durrell & Catterson, 1990), spelling, and writing (samples). The results showed that *SSRW* had positive effects on letter-word identification across the grades (K-2), but only for children from middle SES stratum. *SSRW* also had positive effects on children's word decoding skills for all the grades (K-2). However, the positive effects on decoding skills were not consistent across all the SES strata in different grades. Specifically, positive results were observed for low SES children in kindergarten, middle and high SES children in first grade, and middle SES children in second grade. The most pronounced effect was observed for kindergarten low SES

children. For reading comprehension, significant and positive results were found only in second grade. In spelling, which was assessed for first and second graders, a positive effect was observed only for first graders from low SES families. In writing, first graders (composite of all the strata) in the *SSRW* program outperformed those in the control group. However, negative effects were found for kindergarteners from low SES families and second graders (middle SES families).

Conclusion

In summary, the *Sing, Spell, Read, and Write* program provides instruction and practice in beginning reading skills. Music is used to reinforce and motivate learning in this program. However, because *SSRW* is marketed as a comprehensive core reading program, the inclusion of more explicit instructional routines for the teacher during comprehension instruction may strengthen the program. It appears that there is an initial level of research support for the use of *SSRW* to support letter-word knowledge, word reading skills, and decoding skills. However, additional well-designed studies, using random assignment and an update of the results from the Bond et al. study may be useful in determining the efficacy of this program.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Strengths of *Sing, Spell, Read, & Write*:

- The musical format of instruction may be motivating for students learning phonics skills.
- The grade 2 introduction to non-fictional text makes a nice transition in preparing the students for increased expectations for textbook reading in grades 3 and 4.
- At grades K and 1, mastery of skills is tested and documented by the teacher before the student progresses.
- Children are taught to write manuscript letters in the form of letters found in all the *SSRW* reading books.

Weaknesses of *Sing, Spell, Read, & Write*:

- None were noted.

Which Florida counties have schools that implement Sing, Spell, Read, & Write?

Citrus County	352-726-1931
Dade County	305-995-1428
Duval County	904-390-2115
Escambia County	850-469-6130
Hernando County	352-797-7001
Jefferson County	850-342-0100
Palm Beach County	561-434-8200
Santa Rosa County	850-993-5000
Taylor County	850-838-2500

For More Information

<http://www.pearsonlearning.com/singspell/ssrwmain.html>

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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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