

FUNDATIONS

A Supplemental Reading and Spelling Program

“Foundations provides the foundation for life-long literacy for all children.”

-Barbara Wilson, Foundations Author

“To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable spelled is a spark.” –Victor Hugo

WHAT IS TAUGHT WITHIN THE FOUNDATIONS LESSON

The following skills are provided in the Foundations daily thirty minute whole group integrated Foundations lesson in grades kindergarten, first, and second.

Letter Formation

The Wilson Font is used as the manuscript form of print. Foundations introduces lower-case letter knowledge prior to capitals because lower case is used to read and spell. A multisensory approach is used to learn how to form the letters. Students practice first by skywriting. The gross motor memory is strengthened and this helps students remember how to form the letter correctly. Kindergarten students primarily skywrite and trace the letters during the first half of the year while following the teacher’s verbal cues to learn proper letter formation. These good writing habits are established early because students will be explicitly taught how to grip a pencil correctly and position their body properly.

Phonological Awareness

Phonological awareness is the understanding that spoken language consists of parts. Phonological awareness skill development advances from the simplest understanding of words (word awareness) to syllables (syllable awareness), and finally to the individual sounds within a syllable (phoneme awareness). Phoneme awareness is the most advanced phonological awareness skill. By the end of the Foundations Level K, students will be adept at blending, segmenting, and manipulating sounds in words with up to three sounds in a syllable. (e.g. tap) In Level 1, the students blend, segment and manipulate sounds up to six sounds in a syllable. (e.g. pranks) Level 2 advances to reading and writing multisyllabic words. (e.g. enjoyment)

Sound Mastery

Sounds are introduced in a careful sequence. The sound instruction is linked simultaneously by having students name the letter while forming it and saying the sound. Motor memory is strengthened by this and each letter is associated with a sound. A keyword with a picture is available to help the student remember the sound associated with a letter. A unique feature of Foundations instruction is that sounds are taught in two directions. *Letter to Sound* allows the student to see the letter and identify the sound. During *Sound to Letter*, students hear the sound and identify the corresponding letter(s).

Phonics

The Foundations instruction is much more than phonics instruction of associated letters to sounds. Students learn to blend sounds into words. The words are introduced through the six syllable types of the English language. Students learn the complete structure of the English language by progressing through Levels K, 1, and 2 over a period of three school years. The daily Foundations lesson provides multiple opportunities to read words, phrases, sentences, and stories containing the syllables that have been taught. A unique Foundations finger tapping procedure provides another multisensory way to blend the sounds heard into a word. Foundations spelling procedures are used to explicitly teach students how to spell words. Students learn to write words, phrases, and sentences correctly.

Irregular Word Instruction

Irregular words are words that are phonetically irregular. Foundations calls these “Trick Words.” The most common words used in reading and spelling were chosen from the American Heritage Dictionary. At the end of Level 1, students will have mastered 150 of the most common. Students learn these words by naming the letters while tracing on their desk or writing on each letter on their dry erase tablet. An example of a Foundations Trick Word is “people.”

Vocabulary

In Level K, students develop oral language and vocabulary from reading aloud and classroom discussions. In Levels 1 and 2, students study words in a more explicit, formal manner. A “Word of the Day” is chosen to align with the word structure that is being studied. Multiple meaning words are introduced. Students enter vocabulary words into a vocabulary dictionary in their Foundations student notebook. Students begin to learn dictionary skills.

Fluency

Students have several opportunities to develop fluent reading skills during the daily Foundations thirty minute lesson. This reading skill is necessary for comprehension. Students become automatic in recognizing words in isolation, but the skill of prosody, or phrasing, is also developed. Echo and choral reading develop fluency. The Foundations phrasing procedure supports students to learn to read with proper phrasing and expression.

Comprehension

Kindergarten students develop listening comprehension skills through the oral stories acted out by the echo and Baby Echo puppets. Students are asked to retell the stories in their own words. In Level 1, first grade students are introduced to the difference between narrative and expository text. The Foundations comprehension activities set the stage for more formalized comprehension strategies introduced in formal literature instruction.

Written Composition

Difficulties with handwriting and spelling in intermediate grades and beyond affect the quality and quantity of written compositions. Students learn to segment and spell words rather than memorize word lists. Students learn the proper use of punctuation, capitalization and proofreading skills. Spelling and punctuation skills are explicitly taught. Students gradually transfer from “invented” spelling (*kat*) to “standard” spelling (*cat*) as they progress through the three levels of the program.

HOW FOUNDATIONS IS TAUGHT

The following principles of instruction are key to students learning how to read and spell efficiently and effectively.

Explicit Instruction

The Foundations program does not use phonics worksheets like conventional core programs. Students do not work independently on worksheets. Instead, all Foundations instruction is interactive between the teacher and students. The teacher teaches the skills through modeling and the students are actively engaged during the lesson. This approach uses all the modalities of seeing, hearing, saying, and doing.

Systematic Instruction

All skills are presented in a careful, sequential, and cumulative manner. Each Foundations level requires one year of instruction and the skills in each level build upon the other. As students proceed through the instruction, all previous skills are reviewed and this allows students to apply the skills as they learn new concepts.

Motor-Memory Learning

Students are actively reinforcing new skills and concepts through motor-memory methods. Skywriting, tracing, and kinesthetic activity through tapping and finger-blending solidify learning within the brain.

Repetition

Unlike traditional reading approaches that introduce skills, but do not afford the opportunity to review and repeat the learning, the Foundations lesson provides many ways to review through the different modalities and parts of the daily lesson.

Feedback

Foundations teachers provide automatic feedback and positive feedback as well as correcting students’ errors. Teachers analyze student errors and misunderstandings and teach diagnostically so that students feel safe to learn from their mistakes.

*This summary is adapted from the Wilson Foundations Teacher’s Guide.