

# Breaking the Code: Primary Grade Reading Skills

To read a book, your child needs to sound out words, recognize common words like *the*, understand what the text means, and read fast enough to make sense of the story. The National Research Council, the National Institute for Literacy, and the National Reading Panel, a group commissioned by Congress to determine important reading research, identified these key skills to learn how to read:

- **Phonics:** Knowing how the sounds of spoken language relate to the letters of written words is necessary for reading.

Phonics milestones:

- Understanding that the order of letters in a written word represents the order of sounds in a spoken word
  - Knowing the sounds letters make
  - Blending letter sounds together to make a word: /b/ /i/ /g/ makes *big*
  - Sounding out words he or she doesn't know, both real and nonsense: *sit* and *zot*
  - Developing an understanding of common word parts, such as *un-*, *-ing*, *-ed*, *-s*, and *-est*
- **Sight word recognition:** Many common words in English, such as *the* and *one*, don't fit the phonics rules, so your child needs to memorize them.

Sight word milestones:

- Automatically reading high-frequency irregular words such as *are*, *was*, *were*, *you*, and *said*
  - Instantly reading familiar words such as *cat*, *dog*, *mother*, and *daddy* without having to sound them out
- **Fluency:** To read fluently, your child must not only be able to recognize words instantly, but also be able to divide the text into meaningful chunks.

Fluency milestones:

- Reading aloud with expression
- Pausing at appropriate spots in the text

# Breaking the Code: Primary Grade Reading Skills (continued)



- **Spelling and writing:** Children increase their knowledge of how print works when they spell and write on their own. When a child makes each letter, he or she learns to associate a sound with it. At first the child may write *book* as *bk*—because he or she hears the /b/ and /k/ sounds. With instruction, the child learns correct spelling.

Spelling and writing milestones:

- Correctly spelling previously studied words
  - Spelling a word the way it sounds if the child doesn't know how to spell it
  - Knowing the mechanics of writing—sentences, capitalization, and punctuation
- **Comprehension:** To read, your child must understand the meaning of the text. Your child builds comprehension when discussing what he or she thinks a book will be about and summarizing what happened in a story. Understanding increases as the child's vocabulary expands.

Comprehension milestones:

- Predicting what might happen next in a story
- Noticing that a word the child just read doesn't make sense in a sentence
- Recalling facts and details from texts
- Developing questions, ideas, and opinions about texts