



Curriculum Navigation Report

Reading Horizons Discovery[®] (RHD) Grades K-3



2025 Publication
Reviewed with Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines (2nd Edition, 2023)

Introduction

CURRICULUM EVALUATION GUIDELINES DESCRIPTION

“Decisions regarding curriculum, instructional approaches, programs, and resources are critical and must be informed by more than experience, observations, or even belief systems. If we are to succeed in implementing effective practices, then we will need to embrace learning as a part of our work as much as teaching itself.”

Hennessy, 2020, pg. 8.

Due to the popularity of the science of reading movement, the term “science of reading” has been used as a marketing tool, often promising a quick fix for decision makers seeking a program aligned with the scientific evidence base. However, as articulated in The Reading League’s [*Science of Reading: Defining Guide \(2022\)*](#),

The science of reading is a vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing. Over the last five decades, this research has provided a preponderance of evidence to inform how proficient reading and writing develop; why some students have difficulty; and how educators can most effectively assess and teach, and, therefore, improve student outcomes through the prevention of and intervention for reading difficulties. (p.6)

The Reading League’s [*Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines \(CEGs\)*](#) are a resource developed to assist consumers in making informed decisions when selecting curricula and instructional materials that best support evidence-aligned instruction grounded in the science of reading.

The CEGs are anchored by frameworks validated by the science of reading. Findings from the science of reading provide additional understandings that substantiate both aligned and non-aligned practices (AKA “red flags”) within the CEGs. These serve as a foundation for what to expect from published curricula that claim to be aligned with the scientific evidence of how students learn to read. The CEGs highlight best practices that align with the science of reading. Red flags specify any non-aligned practices in the following areas:



- Word Recognition
- Language Comprehension
- Reading Comprehension
- Writing
- Assessment



The CEGs have been used by educators, building and district leaders, local education agencies, and state education agencies as a primary tool to find evidence of red flags, or practices that may interfere with the development of skilled reading. This report was generated after a review of the curriculum using the March 2023 *Curriculum Evaluation Guidelines*, which have been refined based on feedback, a lengthy pilot review, and have undergone an inter-rater reliability study with positive results. While the CEGs have been useful for schools and districts for informing curricular and instructional decision-making, The Reading League recognized the challenge of school-based teams that might not have the capacity for an in-depth review process. In the spirit of its mission to advance the awareness, understanding, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction, expert review teams engaged in a large-scale review of the most widely-used curricula currently used in the United States in order to develop informative reports of each. As you read through the findings of this report, remember that red flags will be present for all curricula as there is no perfect curriculum. The intent of this report is not to provide a recommendation, but rather to provide information to local education agencies to support their journey of selecting, using, and refining instruction and instructional materials to ensure they align with the science of reading.

Disclaimer: The Reading League's curriculum review is deemed an informational educational resource and should not be construed as sales pitches or product promotion. The purpose of the review is to further our mission to advance the understanding, awareness, and use of evidence-aligned reading instruction.

Curriculum Description

The evaluation on the following pages features the review of Reading Horizons, a foundational skills curriculum designed for students in Grades K-3.

For this report, reviewers closely examined the Reading Horizons Discovery® (RHD) curriculum. It consists of three core components including the Live, World, and Companion elements. Live is an online platform for teacher planning; World is a student facing, online program that provides learners with practice and review after teacher-led lessons are complete; and Companion is a resource that offers teachers tools to reinforce classroom instruction, including phoneme cards, sound wall posters, student transfer books, and decodable books (Reading Horizons Discovery®, 2024).

Reviewers were selected based on their deep knowledge of the science of reading and knowledge of high-quality instructional materials. Once selected, they were assigned to teams of at least three reviewers. The team met regularly to establish reliability in their individual scores and report their findings. For their review, each group member used The Reading League’s Curriculum Reviewer Workbook to capture scores and evidence for their decisions. Individuals then looked for evidence of red flags within the curriculum materials, including scopes and sequences, modules/units, and lessons, as well as any ancillary Tier 1 curriculum materials (e.g., assessment documents). As each component was reviewed, individual reviewers also noted the extent to which a red flag statement was “true” and selected the appropriate rating in the Reviewer Workbook as outlined below.

	1 Red Flag statement is False.		2 Red Flag statement is minimally True. Evidence is minimal or briefly mentioned.
	3 Red Flag statement is mostly True. If applicable, evidence is in multiple places throughout the curriculum.		4 Red Flag statement is always true, pervasive, and/or integral to the curriculum.
	A black box indicates that this component is not addressed in this curriculum and must be addressed with other materials.		

Reviewers used the notes section of each component to capture helpful evidence and notes, such as keywords that described a practice listed within the CEGs, specific examples, and precise locations of evidence, which are included in this narrative report.

For a more comprehensive description of the review process, visit [The Reading League Compass’s Curriculum Decision Makers page](#).

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING WORD RECOGNITION

1A: Word Recognition Non-Negotiables

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

WORD RECOGNITION NON-NEGOTIABLES	SCORE
1.1: Three cueing-systems are taught as strategies for decoding in early grades (i.e., directing students to use picture cues, context cues, or attend to the first letter of a word as a cue).	1
1.2: Guidance to memorize any whole words, including high frequency words, by sight without attending to the sound/symbol correspondences.	1
1.3: Supporting materials do not provide a systematic scope and sequence nor opportunities for practice and review of elements taught (e.g., phonics, decoding, encoding).	2

Reading Horizons’s **word recognition non-negotiables** are “**mostly met.**” Reviewers found no evidence of the three-cueing system, and the Building Words routine begins in Grade K, Lesson 55. Students build and read a word using the following sequence:

- Write a consonant and say the sound.
- Write a vowel and say the sound.
- Read the slide.
- Add a consonant and say the sound.
- Read the word by reading the slide then the final consonant.
- Read the word two more times.

Additionally, the team found no evidence of memorization of whole words. In Reading Horizons, high-frequency words are titled Most Common Words (MCWs). The teaching protocol for MCWs asks learners to say the word, segment its sounds, spell its sounds, including those that have not been taught, and then read and spell the word three times.

While the supporting materials did provide a scope and sequence of instruction, the team observed insufficient opportunities for independent practice at the word and connected-text levels. For example, in Grade K, Lesson 55, students participate in a Whole Class Transfer Cards (WCTCs) lesson. These lessons address students' "automaticity in the recognition of the spelling patterns of the English language and the sounds they represent" (Reading Horizons, 2024). This specific lesson features limited practice as it includes three CVC real words and one nonsense word, three high-frequency words, and one sentence. Additionally, there is no independent reading; the whole group chorally reads the passage, the teacher provides modeling, and then students take turns reading with a partner. Later, in Grade 1, Lesson 10, students repeat the target letter name and sound after the teacher three times but are never asked to recall it independently. There are additional practice opportunities in the Review and Transfer Day resources, and more practice opportunities can be found within supplementary toolkits and reteach lessons.

1B: Phonological and Phoneme Awareness

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR PHONOLOGICAL AND PHONEME AWARENESS	SCORE
1.7: Instruction only attends to larger units of phonological awareness (syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) without moving to the phoneme level (e.g., blends such as /t/ /r/ are kept intact rather than having students notice their individual sounds).	1
1.8: Instruction is focused on letters only without explicit instruction and practice with the phonemes that letters represent.	1
1.9: Phoneme awareness is not taught as a foundational reading skill.	1
1.10: Phonological and phoneme awareness is not assessed or monitored.	1

Reading Horizons’s **phonological and phonemic awareness** practices are “**mostly met.**” Reviewers observed that instruction progresses from the larger units of phonological awareness (syllables, rhyme, onset-rime) to the phoneme level in a swift manner. For example, in kindergarten, students begin to work with individual phonemes by Lesson 5. By Lesson 102, they are reading consonant blends like in the word snap (e.g., /s/ /n/ /ă/ /p/). The consonant blend in this instance is also presented as two separate phonemes.

Reviewers found that phoneme awareness is a foundational part of the Reading Horizons curriculum, and the phoneme awareness routine is included in all K–3 lessons. Letter sounds and articulatory gestures are taught alongside letter names starting in kindergarten. Learners participate in Reading Horizons Discovery® Sound City, a sound wall routine where attention is called to air flow and mouth placement, voiced vs. unvoiced sound, stop vs. continuous sounds, and so forth. Students use the Consonant Corner and Vowel Valley resources to solidify the connection between letters and the sounds those letters represent.

Finally, reviewers noted that there are phonological and phoneme awareness assessments included in the Phonemic Awareness Supplement; however, these materials are optional. Students also participate in multi-skill assessments which contain two parts: spelling and reading of a decodable passage. While these checks do not include a standalone PA assessment, they do include an encoding component which embeds phoneme awareness skills. Additionally, teachers are encouraged to monitor PA through observation, and additional phoneme awareness assessments are included in the student software, which is required for all students.

1C: Phonics and Phonic Decoding

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR PHONOLOGICAL AND PHONEME AWARENESS	SCORE	
1.15: Letter-sound correspondences are taught opportunistically or implicitly during text reading.	1	
1.16: Instruction is typically “one and done;” phonics skills are introduced but with very little or short-term review.	2	
1.17: Key words for letter/sound correspondences are not aligned with the pure phoneme being taught (e.g., earth for /ē/, ant for /ā/, orange for /ō/).	1	
1.18: Phonics instruction takes place in short (or optional) “mini-lessons” or “word work” sessions.	1	
1.19: The initial instructional sequence introduces many (or all) consonants before a vowel is introduced, short vowels are all taught in rapid succession and/or all sounds for one letter are taught all at once.	1	
1.20: Blending is not explicitly taught nor practiced.	1	
1.21: Instruction encourages students to memorize whole words, read using the first letter only as a clue, guess at words in context using a “what would make sense?” strategy, or use picture clues rather than phonic decoding.	1	
1.22: Words with known sound-symbol correspondences, including high frequency words, are taught as whole-word units, often as stand-alone “sight words” to be memorized.	1	
1.23: Few opportunities for word-level decoding practice are provided.	1	
1.24: Early texts are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts which include phonic elements that have not been taught; decodable texts are not used or emphasized.	1	
1.25: Advanced word study (Grades 2-5) Instruction in phonics ends once single syllable phonics patterns (e.g., CVC, CVCe) are taught.	1	
1.26: Advanced word study (Grades 2-5) No instruction in multisyllabic word decoding strategies and/or using morphology to support word recognition is evident.	2	

Reading Horizons's **phonics and phonic decoding** practices are “**mostly met.**” Reviewers observed a defined, systematic scope and sequence for teaching letter/sound correspondences. Sounds that are introduced in phonics are practiced in decoding, encoding, and within decodable text. Furthermore, taught sound-symbol correspondences appear in decodable stories within subsequent lesson plans. Reviewers noted a slight missed opportunity in the form of student practice. For example, students were offered some opportunities for interleaved practice within the Whole Class Transfer activities and student software activities, but during the lessons themselves, there was limited student practice. It is important to note that other practice opportunities are found in the toolkits, reteach lessons, and review and transfer days, which appear every 3-7 days however, these resources are supplemental.

Keywords for letter/sound correspondences are aligned to the pure phoneme taught. Examples include /ă/ = apple, /ĕ/ = edge, and /ĭ/ = itch. Explicit phonics instruction is provided daily, and all lessons feature the following sequence:

- Students review previously taught phoneme/grapheme relationships.
- Students learn new phoneme/grapheme relationships.
- Students read new phoneme/grapheme relationships within slide decks, mark up the slides, and finally, read a given word.

In both kindergarten and first grade, letter sounds are taught in carefully selected “letter groups” to facilitate word building (e.g., group 1 = a, m, s, t, p). Additionally, instruction of short vowel sounds precedes long vowel sounds and the instructional sequence is appropriately spaced across the kindergarten scope and sequence (e.g., /ă/ - Lesson 30, /ĭ/ - Lesson 37, /ŏ/ - Lesson 44, /ĕ/ - Lesson 50, and /ŭ/ - Lesson 56).

Teachers use the lesson slides to teach blending. Students are asked to successively blend individual sounds and then read the entire word. Reading Horizons emphasizes a speech-to-print approach which is reinforced through the use of the sound walls to highlight phoneme/grapheme relationships. As previously mentioned, Reading Horizons uses the Most Common Words (MCWs) protocol for high-frequency words. Memorization is not emphasized and the routine leverages known sound-symbol relationships for reading and spelling and irregular words. Lessons also include the use of decodable text, featuring previously taught phoneme-grapheme relationships, beginning in Lesson 37 of kindergarten.

Reviewers observed that the majority of word-level decoding opportunities take place within the Whole Class Transfer card activities from slides the teacher projects. There are also transfer pages where students practice decoding on their own. The amount of practice, however, is limited and partially completed by reading off of a screen. While practice and application are minimal in kindergarten, the team noted more sufficient opportunities in first grade. Consequently, the team concluded that incorporating more word-level practice for kindergarten would be beneficial. Furthermore, there was some confusion as to how word-level practice fits within the student transfer books, highlighting the need for more explicit guidance for educators.

Decoding strategies for multisyllabic words are taught; however, the teacher language lacks clarity. For instance, in Grades 2–3, Lesson 82, students are taught the “one must run” rule for decoding multisyllabic words. This rule states: “If there is just one consonant following the vowel in a multisyllabic word, the consonant will move on to be with the vowel in the next syllable” (Reading Horizons Discovery®, 2024). This lack of clear language may lead to student confusion and inconsistent application of multisyllabic decoding strategies.

The team was able to locate some examples of word study and morphology. Specific high-frequency suffixes (e.g., -ed, -ing, -er, -est) are explicitly taught; however, instruction in morphology is limited, and in some instances, lacks clarity. For example in Grades 2–3, Lesson 77, students are taught that adding the suffix -er means there is “more of something” (e.g., longer, sweeter). While this is one function of the suffix -er, it can also have other meanings, such as signaling a “person who performs an action” (e.g., painter, runner). By presenting a narrow definition, students may develop misconceptions, limiting their ability to understand a full range of words.

1D: Fluency

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR FLUENCY	SCORE	
1.40: Fluency instruction focuses primarily on student silent reading.	1	
1.41: Rate is emphasized over accuracy; priority is given to the student's ability to read words quickly.	1	
1.42: Word-level fluency practice to automaticity is not provided, or fluency is viewed only as text-reading fluency.	1	
1.43: Fluency is practiced only in narrative text or with repeated readings of patterned text.	2	
1.44: Fluency assessment allows acceptance of incorrectly decoded words if they are close in meaning to the target word (e.g., assessment based upon the cueing systems, M/S/V).	1	

Reading Horizons's **fluency** practices are **"mostly met."** Team members observed that fluency instruction primarily takes place during the connected-text reading activity in the Whole Class Transfer Card routine. This consists of the following:

- whole group choral read
- listen to a model (e.g., teacher) read and attend to prosody
- take turns reading with a partner

While student transfer books include decodable passages, and separate decodable books are provided, there is a lack of clarity on how these resources should be utilized effectively. These decodable texts are primarily narrative, with some informational texts included starting in kindergarten (e.g., Grade K, Lesson 9, "Question and Answer Words" and Grade K, Lesson 51, "Take a Hike!"). Reading accuracy, automaticity, and prosody are emphasized as the hallmarks of fluent reading. Teachers reinforce this concept by using student-friendly language like this:

- "We can read at the just-right speed, not too fast or too slow."
- "Listen to my voice to make the reading sound interesting."

Reviewers noted that, similar to phonic decoding, word-level fluency practice is limited. Again, word-level fluency is primarily practiced chorally in whole group settings through the Whole Class Transfer Card, with little clarity as to what small group instruction entails. Additionally, excessive teacher talk throughout the curriculum reduces opportunities for students to respond and practice word-level fluency. For example, in Grades 2-3, Lesson 40, the entire instructional sequence on the soft sound of g (i.e., g sometimes sounds like /j/ when followed by an e, i, or y), is delivered without providing opportunities for student response. This is problematic as it limits students' engagement and active participation in learning.

Finally, Reading Horizons's fluency assessments follow standard proctoring and data monitoring procedures. This includes calculating a Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) score, which is derived by subtracting the number of errors from the total words read in one minute. Fluency assessments also include the use of rubrics to assess prosody.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, AND WRITING

SECTIONS 2–4: Non-Negotiables for Language Comprehension, Reading Comprehension, and Writing

This section begins with a review of non-negotiable elements for language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing before moving on to the language comprehension strands highlighted in Scarborough’s reading rope. Therefore, identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION, READING COMPREHENSION, AND WRITING	SCORE	
2-4.1: (LC, RC, W) In early grades, the instructional framework is primarily a workshop approach, emphasizing student choice and implicit, incidental, or embedded learning.	n/a	
2-4.2: (LC, RC, W) Students are not exposed to rich vocabulary and complex syntax in reading and writing materials.	n/a	
2-4.3: (RC) Comprehension activities focus mainly on assessing whether students understand content (the product of comprehension) instead of supporting the process of comprehending texts.	n/a	
2-4.4: (RC, W) Writing is not taught or is taught separately from reading at all times.	n/a	
2-4.5: (LC, RC) Questioning during read-alouds focuses mainly on lower-level questioning skills.	n/a	

Reading Horizons’s non-negotiables for **language comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing** are **“not applicable.”** Reading Horizons Discovery® is a K–3 foundational literacy program that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. It is designed to be used as a supplement to a comprehensive ELA program. Consequently, adopters must be mindful of this when selecting this curriculum, as they will need to ensure that all aspects of literacy (e.g., background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge, writing, etc.) are adequately represented and addressed within their programming.

2B: Background Knowledge

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE	SCORE	
2.1: Read-aloud opportunities emphasize simple stories or narrative texts. Read-aloud text is not sufficiently complex and/or does not include knowledge-building expository texts (i.e., topics related to science, social studies, current events).	n/a	
2.2: Opportunities to bridge existing knowledge to new knowledge is not apparent in instruction.	n/a	
2.3: Advanced (Grades 2-5): For students who are automatic with the code, texts for reading are primarily leveled texts that do not feature a variety of diverse, complex, knowledge-building text sets to develop background knowledge in a variety of subject areas.	n/a	

Reading Horizons’s practices for **background knowledge** are “**not applicable.**” Reading Horizons Discovery® is a K-3 foundational literacy program that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. It is designed to be used as a supplement to a comprehensive ELA program. Consequently, adopters must be mindful of this when selecting this curriculum, as they will need to ensure that all aspects of literacy (e.g., background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge, writing, etc.) are adequately represented and addressed within their programming.

2C: Vocabulary

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VOCABULARY	SCORE	
2.7: Vocabulary worksheets and activities are used with little opportunity for deep understanding of vocabulary words.	n/a	
2.8: Instruction includes memorization of isolated words and definitions out of context.	n/a	
2.9: Tier 2 words are not taught explicitly and practiced; students are not given opportunities to use them in their speech, see them in print, and use them in writing.	n/a	
2.10: Students are not exposed to and taught Tier 3 words.	n/a	
2.11: Explicit instruction in morphology is not present and/or not taught according to a scope and sequence (i.e., simple to complex) consistently throughout K-5 instruction.	n/a	

Reading Horizons’s practices for **vocabulary** are “**somewhat met.**” Reading Horizons Discovery® is a K-3 foundational literacy program that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. It is designed to be used as a supplement to a comprehensive ELA program. Consequently, adopters must look to other instructional materials to ensure that all aspects of literacy (e.g., background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge, writing, etc.) are adequately represented and addressed within their programming.

2D: Language Structures

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LANGUAGE STRUCTURES	SCORE
2.18: Conventions of print, grammar, and syntax are taught implicitly or opportunistically with no evidence of consistent, explicit, simple to complex instruction across all grade levels.	n/a
2.19: Instruction does not include teacher modeling nor sufficient opportunities for discussion.	n/a
2.20: Students are asked to memorize parts of speech as a list without learning in context and through application.	n/a

Reading Horizons’s practices for **language structures** are “**not applicable.**” The program does feature language lessons which cover a range of topics (i.e., adjectives, adverbs, alphabetic order, antonyms & synonyms, capitalization, commas). These lessons are part of the curriculum’s supplemental resources, and were not included in the program’s overview. Reviewers noted that it wasn’t clear if or when the resources should be used, and teachers would benefit from additional clarity on the delivery of these lessons. The team also observed that the language lessons provide limited explanation and teacher modeling as seen in Mini-Lesson 1, “Commas Between the Day and the Year.” In this instance, the teacher is instructed to provide a quick definition of a comma as a punctuation mark “used to separate ideas or elements in a sentence,” followed by a brief demonstration of its use in dates (e.g., May 31, 2004). After offering two isolated examples, students quickly transition to guided practice where they read the dates and add missing commas. Thus, instruction and application of targeted concepts are not provided in the context of authentic reading and writing opportunities.

2E: Verbal Reasoning

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR VERBAL REASONING	SCORE
2.26: Inferencing strategies are not taught explicitly and may be based only on picture clues and not text (i.e., picture walking).	n/a
2.27: Students do not practice inference as a discrete skill.	n/a

Reading Horizons’s practices for **verbal** reasoning are “**not applicable.**” Reading Horizons Discovery® is a K-3 foundational literacy program that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. It is designed to be used as a supplement to a comprehensive ELA program. Consequently, adopters must be mindful of this when selecting this curriculum as they will need to ensure that all aspects of literacy (e.g., background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge, writing, etc.) are adequately represented and addressed within their programming.

2F: Literacy Knowledge

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR LITERACY KNOWLEDGE	SCORE
2.33: Genre types and features are not explicitly taught.	n/a
2.34: Genre-specific text structures and corresponding signal words are not explicitly taught and practiced.	n/a

Reading Horizons’s practices for **literacy knowledge** are “**not applicable.**” Reading Horizons Discovery is a K-3 foundational literacy program that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. It is designed to be used as a supplement to a comprehensive ELA program. Consequently, adopters must be mindful of this when selecting this curriculum, as they will need to ensure that all aspects of literacy (e.g., background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge, writing, etc.) are adequately represented and addressed within their programming.

SECTION 3: Reading Comprehension

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR READING COMPREHENSION	SCORE	
3.1: Students are asked to independently read texts they are unable to decode with accuracy in order to practice reading comprehension strategies (e.g., making inferences, predicting, summarizing, visualizing).	n/a	
3.2: Students are asked to independently apply reading comprehension strategies primarily in short, disconnected readings at the expense of engaging in knowledge-building text sets.	n/a	
3.3: Emphasis on independent reading and book choice without engaging with complex texts.	n/a	
3.4: Materials for comprehension instruction are predominantly predictable and/or leveled texts.	n/a	
3.5: Students are not taught methods to monitor their comprehension while reading.	n/a	

Reading Horizons’ practices for **reading comprehension** are **“not applicable.”** Reading Horizons Discovery® is a K-3 foundational literacy program that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. Instruction is primarily teacher directed and students do not engage in independent reading. Students are tasked to read decodable texts that align with phonics skills targeted. The review team did note that comprehension questions are provided at the end of decodable stories, and Reading Horizons features comprehension extension activities embedded within its transfer routines. However, work with comprehension strategies is limited and student self-monitoring methods were not observed. Consequently, adopters would need to ensure these practices are adequately represented and addressed within their programming.

4A: Writing – Handwriting

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAGS PRACTICES FOR HANDWRITING	SCORE
4.1: No direct instruction in handwriting.	1
4.2: Handwriting instruction predominantly features unlined paper or picture paper.	2
4.3: Handwriting instruction is an isolated add-on.	1

Reading Horizons’s practices for **handwriting** are “**mostly met.**” Beginning in kindergarten, students are explicitly taught handwriting concepts and associated language (e.g., strokes, line, slants, curves). This terminology is used in subsequent lessons to teach printing for each letter as it is taught. For instance, in Grade K, Lesson 4, teachers are instructed to use the following scripting when introducing an uppercase A: “Tall Slant Down. Tall Slant Down. Across.” While the team observed that students are offered lined paper within the student transfer books, whole group instruction uses white boards and dry erase markers. The team pointed out that the white boards lack lines, failing to reinforce proper spacing, letter sizing, directionality, and alignment.

Finally, all kindergarten “letter lessons” include explicit instruction in handwriting and letter formation, reinforcing concepts taught during the phonics block. For instance, in Grade K, Lesson 30, students are prompted to say the letter name and its corresponding sound (e.g., uppercase A, /ă/). However, as previously noted, the scope and sequence of letter name and letter writing instruction follows an A-to-Z progression, rather than prioritizing the most frequently occurring letters first.

4B: Writing – Spelling

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR SPELLING	SCORE
4.7: No evidence of explicit spelling instruction; no spelling scope and sequence for spelling, or the spelling scope and sequence is not aligned with the phonics / decoding scope and sequence.	1
4.8: No evidence of phoneme segmentation and/or phoneme-grapheme mapping to support spelling instruction.	2
4.9: Patterns in decoding are not featured in encoding/spelling; spelling lists are based on content or frequency of word use and not connected to decoding/phonics lessons.	1
4.10: Students practice spelling by memorization only (e.g., rainbow writing, repeated writing, pyramid writing).	1
4.11: Spelling patterns for each phoneme are taught all at once (e.g., all spellings of long /ā/) instead of a systematic progression to develop automaticity with individual grapheme/phonemes.	2

Reading Horizons’s practices for **spelling** are “**mostly met.**” The curriculum features a speech-to-print approach and encoding is included in every lesson. This instructional sequence includes the following:

- **Dictation for decoding:** The teacher spells a word aloud and students spell the given word orally. Students then write and mark the word on their whiteboards. The teacher checks their work for accuracy and students read the word twice.
- **Dictation for encoding:** The teacher says a word, then students repeat, spell, mark, and read the word.
- **Word building:** Students engage in word chaining activities.

Reviewers did note that in the Dictation for Encoding portion of the lesson, students say the word and spell the word, but are not prompted to first sound out the word. This is shown in the following example from Grade 1, Lesson 6:

The word is *he*, *he*.

Give it back to me. (*he*, *he*)

Spell and prove *he*.

The team felt this was a missed opportunity to use phoneme segmentation to support spelling instruction.

Reviewers also observed that the spelling scope and sequence appears to mirror the phonics scope and sequence, and in Grades 2-3, students begin to read and spell multisyllabic words. However, the team could not locate explicit strategies for spelling multisyllabic words, and spelling at this level followed a generic script as illustrated in Grades 2-3, Lesson 82:

The word is *detail*, *detail*.

Give it back to me. (*detail*, *detail*)

Spell and prove *detail*.

There was no evidence that students practiced spelling through memorization. Each Reading Horizons Discovery® lesson includes the Guided Dictation routine which follows these steps:

Dictation for Decoding:

1. Teacher spells a word two times.
2. Students spell the word back orally.
3. Students spell the word on their whiteboards and mark up the word based on its targeted concepts as the teacher circulates and supports as needed.
4. Students read the word twice.

Dictation for Encoding:

1. Teacher says a word twice instead of spelling it.
2. Students repeat the word two times and then spell and mark the word on their whiteboards as the teacher circulates and supports as needed.
3. The teacher checks their work, students point to the word, and read it back twice.

Nonsense words are also included within the guided dictation lessons.

Finally, spelling patterns are introduced systematically over time as shown in the Grade 1 lesson sequence below:

“a” spelling for /ā/ taught in Lesson 58

“ai” spelling for /ā/ taught in Lesson 70

“ay” spelling for /ā/ taught in Lesson 71

4C: Writing – Composition

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR COMPOSITION	SCORE
4.17: Writing prompts are provided with little time for modeling, planning, and brainstorming ideas.	n/a
4.18: Writing is primarily unstructured with few models or graphic organizers.	n/a
4.19: Conventions, grammar, and sentence structure is not explicitly taught and practiced systematically (i.e., from simple to complex) with opportunities for practice to automaticity, instead it is taught implicitly or opportunistically.	n/a
4.20: Writing instruction is primarily narrative or unstructured choice.	n/a
4.21: Students are not taught the writing process (i.e., planning, revising, editing).	n/a
4.22: Writing is taught as a standalone and is not used to further reading comprehension.	n/a

Reading Horizons’s practices for **composition** are **“not applicable.”** Reading Horizons Discovery® is a K–3 foundational literacy program that addresses phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. Instruction is primarily teacher directed and students do not engage in writing beyond the word and sentence level during dictation exercises. As such, adopters of the curriculum must incorporate composition instruction in addition to the programming provided. This ensures that students learn about the writing process and engage in opportunities that connect what they are reading about to written expression.

Findings:

COMPONENTS SUPPORTING ASSESSMENT

SECTION 5: Assessment

Identification of the following red flag practices were prioritized in the review of this section.

NON-NEGOTIABLES FOR ASSESSMENT	SCORE
5.1: Assessments measure comprehension only without additional assessment measures to determine what is leading to comprehension weaknesses (e.g., phonics, phoneme awareness, nonsense word fluency, decoding, encoding, fluency, vocabulary, listening comprehension).	1
5.2: Assessments include miscue analysis in which misread words that have the same meaning are marked as correct.	1

RED FLAG PRACTICES FOR ASSESSMENT	SCORE
5.6: Assessments result in benchmarks according to a leveled text gradient.	1
5.7: Foundational skills assessments are primarily running records or similar assessments that are based on whole language or cueing strategies (e.g., read the word by looking at the first letter, use picture support for decoding).	1
5.8: Phonics skills are not assessed.	1
5.9: Phoneme awareness is not assessed.	1
5.10: Decoding skills are assessed using real words only.	2
5.11: Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) assessments are not used.	1
5.12: The suite of assessments does not address aspects of language comprehension (e.g., vocabulary, syntax, listening comprehension).	n/a
5.13: Multilingual Learners are not assessed in their home language.	4

Reading Horizons's non-negotiables and practices for **assessment** are “**mostly met.**” Assessment measures include phonemic awareness and phonics screeners as a part of the supplemental materials. Reviewers believe that these screeners were included as diagnostic tools, but could not locate clear teacher directions on how and when to use them. This was also true of miscue analysis procedures. While the team found no evidence that Reading Horizons accepts misread words of any kind as correct, the curriculum lacked educator guidance on scoring the fluency measures within multi-skill checks.

The multi-skill checks occur regularly through the curriculum and are aligned with the scope and sequence as well as to the phonics screener provided. These assessments are mastery based and do not correlate with a text leveling system. In kindergarten, the multi-skill checks include decoding, encoding, handwriting, letter identification, and high-frequency word reading. As learners progress through Grades 1–3, these measures shift to decoding, encoding, and fluency (i.e., rate accuracy, prosody) with a retell. The team did note that educators are encouraged to skip the decoding assessment if students in Grades K–3 show mastery on the encoding portion of the mini-skills check. While the multi-skill checks don't include an isolated phoneme awareness measure, each grade level has a phonemic awareness kit which includes multiple forms of a phonemic awareness assessment. For example, in kindergarten, students are asked to identify and produce rhymes, count words in a sentence, blend and segment compound words, and isolate initial phonemes.

Finally, educators would need to look to outside assessment measures to monitor language comprehension skills. Additionally, since Reading Horizons Discovery® focuses on developing word attack skills in English, students are not assessed in their home languages. Thus, educators would also need to look to outside assessment tools to ensure that multilingual learners are assessed in this manner. However, the team also noted that this would most likely be the case with most core curricula programs.

Final Report Summary

Overall, the reviewed components for Reading Horizons Discovery® curriculum were found to “**mostly meet**” most criteria for Grades K–3. This means there was minimal evidence of red flag practices. While an evidence-aligned core curriculum is a critical part of any literacy program, it is no substitute for building a solid foundation of educator and leader knowledge in the science of reading as well as a coaching system to support fidelity of implementation.

STRENGTHS

Reading Horizons Discovery® is a comprehensive foundational skills program that addresses the components of word recognition, including phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency.

Reading Horizons Discovery® features a speech-to-print approach and emphasizes teaching reading by connecting spoken language to written language. By focusing on speech first, Reading Horizons supports students in drawing upon their natural language abilities to understand how written language works.

Reading Horizons Discovery® includes a variety of teacher supports, including lesson embedded support videos which provide an overview of content for each lesson. This provides educators with additional guidance on key concepts and instructional strategies to support learners.

Reading Horizons Discovery® offers the Student Activity Hub, a game-based software where learners participate in activities and skills checks. This resource is student-friendly and engaging and serves as an excellent way to reinforce classroom lessons. Furthermore, while students reinforce instruction via the activity hub, the teacher can provide targeted instruction to small groups.

Reading Horizons Discovery® emphasizes the hallmarks of fluent reading including accuracy, automaticity, and prosody.

While Reading Horizons Discovery® does provide a program overview supplement, the review team struggled to locate this document. Thus, it was difficult to understand the structure of the program without this overarching guide to frame the delivery of instruction. The review team strongly recommends making the overview supplement something educators interact with immediately to ensure they have a clear understanding of the program's overarching structure before delivering instruction.

While Reading Horizons Discovery® provides options for differentiation via small groups and data collected in the online Message Center, whole group instruction is not differentiated and may not meet the needs of advanced learners in Grades 2-3, potentially leaving them unchallenged.

Reading Horizons Discovery® includes excessive use of teacher talk as the primary means of delivering instruction. This can negatively impact student engagement and limits their opportunities for active learning and practice.

Reading Horizons Discovery® provides 45 minutes of whole group instruction in addition to the small-group instruction where the bulk of student transfer and practice occurs. As a Tier I program, finding time to implement all components while still reserving time for language and knowledge-building ELA activities could be challenging.

Finally, although Reading Horizons Discovery® uses nonsense words for instruction, its multi-skill checks use real words only. Relying on nonsense words for instruction is problematic, as it fails to help students connect phonetic patterns with semantic understandings. Incorporating a variety of real words in instruction promotes the construction of the orthographic-phonologic-semantic network, which is essential for orthographic mapping and ultimately leads to automatic word reading. Thus, Reading Horizons Discovery® would benefit from the addition of nonsense words to their multi-skill checks while using them sparingly during instruction to address both decoding practice and meaningful word recognition.

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PUBLISHER'S RESPONSE



**Reading Horizons Discovery®
(RHD) Grades K-3**

Publisher Response to the Reading League Review

We are grateful to The Reading League for their in-depth evaluation of *Reading Horizons® Discovery* (RHD), which carefully examined the foundational literacy components designed to support students in Grades K-3. This review provides valuable insights into the program's strengths and areas for enhancement, further guiding us in our commitment to aligning with research-based literacy practices.

Comprehensive Literacy Support through Core Program Components

Reading Horizons Discovery is structured around three core components: Live, World, and Companion. These elements are designed to provide a holistic, flexible approach to literacy instruction that empowers teachers and supports student engagement.

- The Live platform serves as an online hub for educators, equipping them with tools and resources to plan for and deliver effective lessons.
- World, the student-facing online program, offers engaging practice and review activities to reinforce skills taught in teacher-led lessons.
- Finally, the Companion resources, which include phoneme cards, sound wall posters, student transfer books, and decodable books, give educators tangible tools to enrich classroom instruction and extend learning beyond the digital environment.

We are pleased that the review acknowledged the program's robust approach to essential literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding and encoding), and fluency. The review also highlighted the Student Activity Hub within the World component as a strength, providing students with a game-based, interactive experience while allowing teachers time for targeted small-group instruction. These acknowledgments affirm our dedication to providing research-aligned tools that support teachers in fostering foundational literacy skills.

Commitment to Research, Best Practice, and Continuous Improvement

Our mission is to ensure that *Reading Horizons Discovery* fully aligns with best practices in literacy instruction and remains grounded in the latest research. Feedback from The Reading League is a key source of guidance as we adjust to enhance the program's alignment with the needs of students and educators.

The reviewers noted areas for growth, including the importance of offering increased differentiation options in whole-group settings to better support advanced learners, particularly in Grades 2-3. Additionally, the feedback on balancing teacher-directed instruction with more active learning opportunities aligns with our goal of fostering a dynamic, student-centered learning experience. As we continue to refine Reading Horizons Discovery, the insights from this review align with our plans to enhance word-level practice, spelling, morphology, and including language options for assessments. These additions will improve the impact of this program.

Supporting Educators with Accessible Resources and Clear Guidance

We recognize that an evidence-aligned curriculum is only as effective as its implementation. The review underscores the importance of accessible resources, and we have already made adjustments to ensure that our Program Overview is immediately available to educators. This ease of access along with the detail within will help teachers quickly understand the program's structure and maximize its impact from the outset.

The Reading League's reviewers brought deep knowledge of the science of reading and high standards for instructional materials to this evaluation. Their rigorous assessment and thoughtful recommendations are welcome by Reading Horizons as they align with our ongoing mission to empower educators with the highest-quality literacy resources to make the greatest impact on student learning. This review, along with other key data, will serve as a guide as we continue our commitment to delivering an effective and comprehensive literacy program.

For more information about how *Reading Horizons® Discovery* can support literacy growth in your classroom, and to learn about the broader Reading Horizons impact, visit [readinghorizons.com/impact/](https://www.readinghorizons.com/impact/). Together, we are building a future where literacy is within reach for every learner.