



Decodable Texts Research Brief
Moonlit Mountain Readers

Research Foundations of *Moonlit Mountain Readers* Decodables Series

The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* is a decodable text system designed to support beginning readers, from the earliest stages of decoding development to the advanced. The collection is built upon a systematic, cumulative phonics sequence that ensures children can successfully decode increasingly complex texts, all the while engaging with rich, highly comprehensible stories. The sequence provides built-in review opportunities, enabling readers to consolidate previously-taught phonics concepts, and the relatable cast of fantasy characters draws readers in and keeps them reading. After all, motivated, successful reading practice results in more motivated, successful reading. This brief outlines the research that underpins the series, emphasizing its alignment with best practices in reading instruction and phonics pedagogy.

The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* series offers young readers systematic practice with essential phonics concepts, following a carefully sequenced progression. Each book provides concentrated decoding practice with new phonics features, building skills step by step.

The series follows a structured phonics scope and sequence that aligns to most phonics programs and can be used to supplement a range of reading programs, with Set A introducing foundational skills and Set B expanding into advanced phonics and multisyllabic words. Each series also adds a new batch of high-frequency words for readers to practice. Cumulative review books within each series provide landing points to consolidate learning, reinforcing earlier concepts without adding new ones. This design supports a steady, staircase-like progression through phonics and decoding challenges.



Scope and Sequence for the *Moonlit Mountain Readers*

Overview

Learning to read is one of the most significant milestones in a child’s education, and decodable texts play a crucial role in this journey. These specially designed books align with sequenced phonics instruction, allowing children to apply what they’ve learned about letters and sounds to real words and stories. This connection builds confidence, fluency, and comprehension skills that form the foundation for literacy.

Decodable texts are supported by decades of research. Studies show that systematic, explicit phonics instruction—paired with practice in decodable texts—is the most effective way to teach early reading skills. By giving children texts that match their phonics knowledge, we set them up for success and prevent the frustration that can come from encountering words beyond their skill level.

We embrace this evidence-based approach. Our decodable books are thoughtfully designed to make learning to read both effective and delightful, ensuring that every child experiences the joy of turning letters into stories.

The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* follow a systematic research-based phonics progression. Each book provides concentrated decoding practice with new phonics features, building skills step by step. For instance, when introducing a digraph like “ch,” early texts focus on simple three-phoneme words such as *chop* and *much* before gradually incorporating more complex words like *chunk* or *stench*. This intentional approach ensures that readers gain confidence with new concepts while reinforcing previously learned skills.



The Importance of Systematic Phonics Instruction and the Development of Word Recognition

Decades of research, including findings from the National Reading Panel (2000) and subsequent studies, underscore the critical role of phonics in early reading instruction. The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* rest on several key principles from this vast body of research.

- **Application:** Phonics instruction “sticks” when it is applied (Blevins, 2020).
- **Sequence:** A phonics progression of increasing complexity, introduced incrementally, will build foundational decoding skills (Beck & Beck, 2013).
- **Repetition:** Repeated exposure to phonetically regular words aids word recognition and facilitates orthographic mapping, which bridges the transition from decoding to fluent reading (Gonzalez-Frey & Ehri, 2020).

Application and Sequence

Decodable texts allow readers the essential opportunity to apply the topics they are learning in phonics (Blevins, 2020). The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* follow a structured progression, beginning with simpler phonics concepts, like short vowels, and moving to more advanced topics like vowel teams, R-controlled vowels, and multisyllabic words. This is consistent with research by Beck and Beck (2013), which emphasizes the importance of introducing phonics patterns incrementally to build foundational decoding skills.





Repetition

Decodable texts feature a high proportion of phonetically regular words to support early decoding skills. Studies by Cheatham and Allor (2012) and Mesmer (2005) highlight how decodable texts improve early reading fluency and comprehension by offering repetitive practice with phonics rules. Further, Gonzalez-Frey and Ehri (2020) discuss how repeated exposure to phonetically regular words aids orthographic mapping, which in turn facilitates the transition from decoding to fluent reading. By design, the *Moonlit Mountain Readers* offer cumulative review with every book. When a new letter-sound correspondence is included in a text, it appears alongside previously-introduced concepts. Repeated exposure to words within and across books is essential for building sight vocabulary, as described by Ehri (2014) and Kilpatrick (2015). Orthographic mapping requires multiple encounters with words to reinforce memory and fluency.

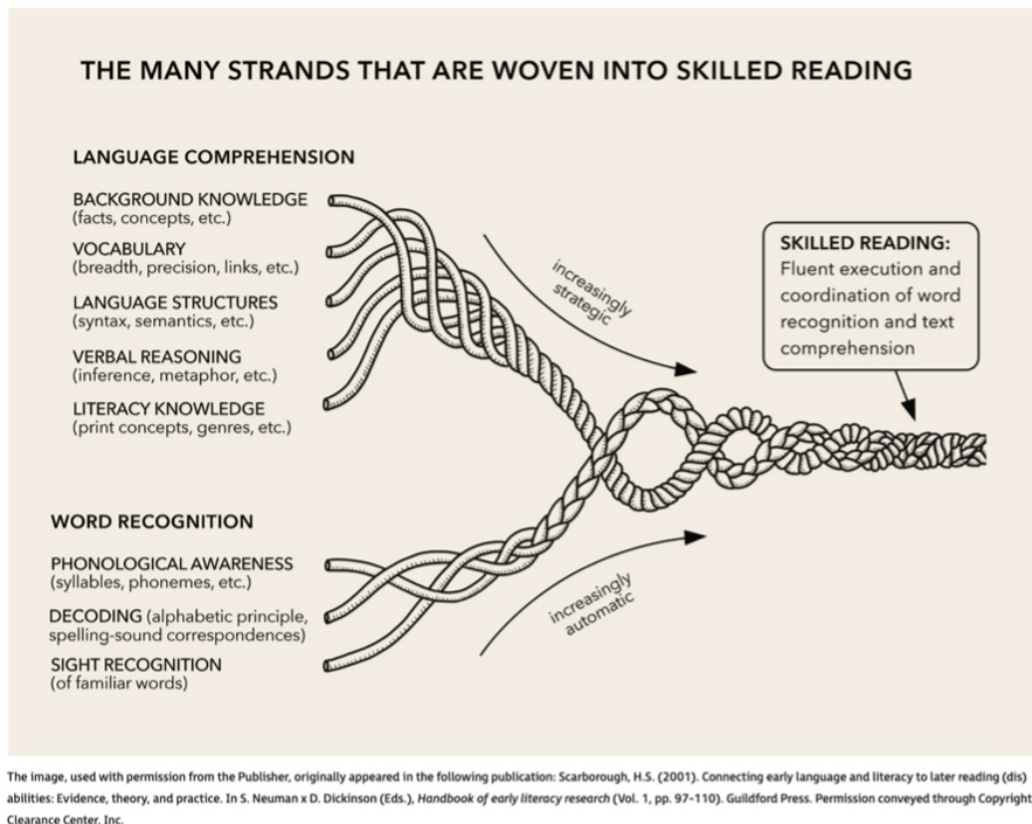
By design, the *Moonlit Mountain Readers* offer cumulative review with every book.

Additionally, *Moonlit Mountain Readers* offer a scope and sequence of high-frequency words. Duke and Mesmer (2016) suggest that teaching high-frequency words systematically, alongside decoding, accelerates early literacy development. The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* balance phonetically regular words with high-frequency irregular words (e.g., “said,” “the”) to better reflect natural language while introducing critical vocabulary.

The vibrant illustrations communicate big ideas, even when the words are limited, and move readers toward deep comprehension.

On average, the *Moonlit Mountain Readers* are more than 70% decodable and more than 90% “readable,” meaning the combination of decodable words plus high-frequency words that are part of the scope and sequence is above 90%. In addition to irregular or temporarily irregular high-frequency words, the

books also include a small percentage of non-decodable “story words” that allow them to convey richer content. The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* align with the findings of researchers Heidi Ann Mesmer (2012), Jim Cunningham, and Freddy Hiebert (1999), who argue that beginner books should strike a balance between phonetically regular words and irregular high-frequency words. As these researchers have suggested, a balance supports the acquisition of both decoding skill and sight vocabulary while better approximating the rhythms of natural language.



Hollis Scarborough’s Reading Rope (2001) illustrates the intertwined nature of word recognition and language comprehension in skilled reading. The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* are carefully controlled to promote successful decoding *and* they strive to sound natural and tell compelling stories that resonate with children. The vibrant illustrations communicate big ideas, even when the words are limited, and move readers toward deep comprehension. As the available words increase, the stories become longer and more complex with more sophisticated vocabulary and character arcs, so they grow right alongside readers.

Conclusion

The *Moonlit Mountain Readers* series is grounded in a robust body of literacy research. By adhering to evidence-based principles of phonics instruction, incorporating consistent cumulative review inside engaging and comprehensible stories, the series empowers new readers to develop essential reading skills. It serves as a valuable tool for educators committed to fostering early literacy and ensuring all students achieve reading success.

The Moonlit Mountain Readers series is grounded in a robust body of literacy research.

References

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