



## **Reading Kingdom Stage 2**

### **Overview**

**by**

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For information on where to obtain this program, please visit:

<http://www.ReadingKingdom.com/stage2/>

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## Introduction

Welcome to Reading Kingdom’s Stage 2—a program for teaching reading, writing and comprehension mastery. It contains three levels (equivalent to 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades), with each offering instruction in:

- **reading** via a format called Precision Reading
- **writing** via a format called Spell Right
- **comprehension** via a format called Mastering Meaning

### **The Stages of Reading**

Reading is talked about as if it’s a skill that moves in a steady line—from 1<sup>st</sup> grade to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and so on. However, it’s more useful to see it as a set of levels with big leaps in between.

**Level 1:** A student begins to see that the seemingly meaningless squiggles on a page are actual words. Often this is referred to as “cracking the code” and it roughly covers 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading. It is a phenomenal achievement, but the content is relatively simple in that the student are reading material that is far simpler than the language they use in speaking. In other words, speaking still far outpaces reading.

**Level 2:** At this level, every facet of the written language advances dramatically:

- words are longer, often composed of several syllables
- vocabulary is less familiar
- concepts are more abstract
- sentences are more complex

For example, a typical 4th grade book might contain sentences such as:

*George Washington ...scoffed at the idea of “sovereign states.” He knew that the states could not be truly independent for long and survive.*

Shh! We’re Writing the Constitution by Jean Fritz N.Y.  
Putnam 1987, p. 7.

People do not speak this way – but books do! And then the language of reading outpaces the language of speaking. A student’s ultimate success in school rests with how well this higher level is mastered.

Reading Kingdom Stage 2 helps students achieve the necessary mastery of this level of reading. It uses interesting, informative books dealing with science,

social studies and literature that directly impact the student's ability to handle the school curriculum. It focuses on three components:

- *Reading*: decoding, effortlessly and automatically, all words regardless of length and complexity
- *Writing*: accurately writing or spelling the words of higher level text
- *Comprehension*: providing succinct, well-organized summaries of the material that has been read

## **The Students Who Can Benefit**

The program is aimed primarily at students who are in grades 3 to 5 (roughly between 8 and 12 years of age) whether they have been progressing well in reading or not. Its broad applicability rests with its power to teach all essential components – including those often neglected in traditional instruction.

The program can also be used with

- younger children (e.g., 6-7 year olds) who have completed Reading Kingdom Stage 1 and are keen to move on to more advanced material
- older children who have had difficulties with English for a variety of reasons (e.g., it is a second language [ESL], they have learning disabilities, earlier instruction was inadequate, etc.)

For all students, before moving to Stage 2, Stage 1 skills should be mastered – either through Reading Kingdom's Stage 1 software program or some other instructional program.

Upon completion of Reading Kingdom Stage 2, a student will be able to independently read "chapter books" at a fifth grade level, accurately write complex sentences containing multi-syllable words and meaningfully discuss key ideas in the material being read. They will be prepared for all the literacy demands they encounter in school.

To get a sense of how the program operates, we'll discuss the three main components taught in every session: reading, writing and comprehension.

## **Teaching Reading: Precision Reading**

### **Automaticity and sustained reading**

If you're an effective reader, then figuring out the words on this page (AKA decoding) is a snap. You look at a word and automatically know what it is saying. But for someone who lacks this ability (including children who are said to be "at grade level"), the process can be incredibly difficult. Unable to instantly recognize the words in the way good readers can, they can cope only by resorting to a variety of ploys. Among these are:

- using context cues (such as pictures or the preceding words of the sentence), hoping to figure out what word might "fit" at that point
- looking at the first letter and then guessing as to what the words might be – the end result is a set of disconnected words that fail to yield any reasonable meaning
- trying to "sound out" but dropping the effort fairly quickly because it is both painful and ineffective. Fewer than 1 out of 5 English words can be readily sounded out, with most words showing enormous variability. Letters can have a range of sounds (e.g., the "c" in city, can, and chip) and they can also have no sound (e.g., the "c" in muscle). It may be interesting to linguists, but it is dismaying to children to deal with the fact that there are 1740 ways to spell the 40 key sound patterns [phonemes] of English words).

Regardless of the methods used, the outcome is frustration. Each new page of text is seen as an insurmountable challenge. Fortunately, the problems can be overcome once a student gains the skill of instant, automatic word recognition. That is what you are doing in reading this page and that is what the reading component of Reading Kingdom's Stage 2 achieves via the Precision Reading format.

### **Precision Reading: The Key to Accuracy and Fluency**

Precision reading relates to a method of reading instruction known under a variety of names (that include repeated reading, multiple readings, impress reading). Developed some decades back, it entails having a student read the same material repeatedly until all the words of the passage are decoded rapidly and accurately.

In Reading Kingdom Stage 2, this method is improved upon by incorporating an apprenticeship type system. Apprentices learn by modeling, that is, by observing others perform a behavior and then copying the performance. These are the procedures used here. First, the student, while looking at the text, hears the adult read a small segment. This provides the student with a clear correct model

of all the words thereby eliminating the laborious process of “sounding out” any unfamiliar words.

Next the student is asked to read aloud the same segment of text. If there are any errors, the adult immediately stops him or her and supplies the necessary correction. The immediate correction of the error allows the reading to proceed smoothly. This contrasts with methods where the reading essentially is halted while the student is asked to painstakingly “sound out” the word he or she has failed to decode.

Precision reading must be used with care. If the adult simply offers the word and allows the student to move on, it’s likely that he or she may not attend to the information that has been offered. Hence, the desired learning does not take place.

To ensure that this does not happen, the student is required to go back to the start of the segment and re-read the full segment. The full re-reading makes the student pay a non-stressful, but still meaningful price for error that makes it worthwhile to attend to the correction.

Precision reading contrasts sharply with the techniques commonly employed in teaching decoding that rely on worksheets with lists of words. The reading of isolated words does not lead to fluent decoding. **Effective decoding requires the ability to read long stretches of connected text smoothly and effortlessly.**

To facilitate the student’s mastery with long stretches of text, precision reading includes a component termed cumulative reading. Here, the student re-reads — in a continuous manner — several segments of text. In some sessions, three segments are re-read, in others, six segments, and in some others, nine segments.

The effectiveness of precision reading depends on many factors.

### **Critical Factor I: the level of the material.**

In order for the teaching to be effective, the reading material must be neither:

- too easy (i.e., without any teaching, the student can read it effortlessly). If a book is so easy that a student can decode it almost perfectly, then it cannot serve to advance his or her skill.
- or
- too difficult (i.e., the student, reading the material independently, displays an error rate higher than 15%). If a book is too hard, the reader will feel

overwhelmed by excessive demands and learning will be thwarted, rather than fostered.

By contrast, a small percentage of errors (10% or less) means that during the practice of sustained reading

- the overall experience is one of success
- the number of new patterns and new words is restricted to manageable proportions.

### **Critical Factor II: the content being presented.**

Many basal readers offer short, disconnected sentences. This does not lay the foundation for effective reading. Meaningful books involve long stretches of connected text written by a single author. As a result the topic is maintained in same style and a predictable domain of words appears. For example, a book on the sinking of the Titanic automatically raises a set of related ideas such as *danger, lifeboats, survivors, and rescue*. The end result is that the student can begin to sense where the text is heading thereby making reading far more manageable.

The use of complete books has additional advantages. The topics are interesting, thereby fostering motivation. Further since the same book is read over days or weeks, there is little need for the teaching to be designed to review previously learned material. The material itself has the review process built-in.

Based on the above considerations, Reading Kingdom's Stage 2 offers three levels of books with four books at each level.

## **Teaching Writing: Spell Right**

Writing, another key component of literacy, is a complex process that involves multiple skills with two central ones being

- spelling (producing readable words) and
- composition (putting ideas together to convey a message).

In this section, we'll consider the spelling aspect of writing. Then, in the next section on comprehension, we'll move on to the composition aspect of writing.

### **The Problem: The Cycle of Learning and Forgetting**

For many students, spelling poses even more problems than decoding. It's not unusual for parents to report:

*"My child really puts effort into his spelling. Every day, he works on his spelling list for the week and he really does a good job. He usually gets over 90% on every test. The only problem is that a couple of weeks later, he doesn't remember any of the words. And, what is even worse, when he has to write a composition, he makes mistakes on the same words that he KNEW a week or two back."*

The pattern is disturbing and not limited to spelling. Think of the times, before smartphones when people needed to look up a phone number in a directory. After finding the information, they repeated the number over and over till they successfully completed the call. Then, the number vanished from memory. The information was held for just as long as it was needed.

Spelling lists typically lead to just this form of forgetting. Students dutifully concentrate on remembering "the words for the week." Then, with the chore completed, they clear out their memory banks to learn the new list for the coming week.

### **The Solution: Spell Right**

The key to change rests with changing the nature of the memorization typically associated with spelling where spelling lists are the dominant mode of instruction. Typically, students get a set of new words each week which they are supposed to memorize. Their success is tested at the end of each week via a spelling test. However, this approach is frequently ineffective. It may work for short-term memory – leading to the good weekly test scores, but it does not work for long-term memory, and that is what is needed to use the words in actual writing.

For effective spelling to emerge, students must develop the ability to gain a clear picture of all the letters that go into shaping a word. This is what allows good spellers to look at misspelled words and instantly recognize that “something is not right” even before they can identify the specific letters that are awry. They have an intuitive sense of what the word should look like.

### **Spell Right: Writing via Short Term Memory**

Spell Right is a technique that fosters those skills. It entails selecting a few sentences from the segments the student read in the Precision Reading component of the session. The student then has to copy these sentences working under conditions that lead him or her to grasp all the letters and the sequence in which they appear. That means “no direct copying” (i.e., copying-while-viewing) since direct copying encourages students simply to copy one letter at a time. As a result, they ignore the sequence and organization of the letters within the words.

Instead, the student, while viewing the sentences, reads the first set of words (e.g., the adult points to the first set of two to four words and says, “*tell me what these words are*”). (It is critical that the student, and not the adult, say the words since this enhances attention.) The student is then told that the words will be covered and s/he will have to write them. A set of words can be viewed for up to 10 seconds, if the student wishes. Then, the words are covered and the writing proceeds. **The student is responsible not only for the spelling, but for correctly copying all punctuation and capitalization.** For many students, this aspect of writing often represents a significant area of weakness.

If the words and accompanying punctuation and capitalization have been reproduced correctly, the copying continues until the sentences are completed. If an error occurs at any point, the student is immediately told to stop and the line s/he has been writing on is deleted (if using a computer) or covered (if using paper and pencil). Then, starting on the next line, the student begins the task anew beginning with the first word of the sentence. (The response to error here is, as you can see, similar to that in the repeated readings component in that error leads to starting the task anew.)

### **Spell Right and Long Term Memory**

Even when students have become adept at effective writing under conditions demanding immediate memory, many still fail to put the words into long term storage. You can see the problems by asking them to write a phrase or sentence they wrote the previous day. Words that were correct one day can be lost the next. That's how the word **night** can be transformed one time to **nite**, another time to **niet**, and still another time to **knite**.

Occasional errors are not a problem. What does matter is a steady disregard of accuracy. For a host of reasons (including being able to appreciate differences in word meaning that are conveyed by differences in spelling such as *made* and *maid*; *there* and *their*) it's vital for students to gain a solid visual grasp of words they will be writing. To enable this development to take place, the writing task is organized in the following manner.

To develop long term accurate retention, the student is told that s/he will have to rewrite, after an interval of 30 minutes (or longer) one of the sentences completed in the session. The student is not told which sentence will be rewritten, nor is s/he permitted to select the sentence. Further, the rewriting takes place via dictation without any model being offered. If the rewriting yields one or no errors, the activity ends for the day. By contrast, if the rewriting yields two errors, the dictation stops at that point. Then, the full (short term) writing component (from the original session) is repeated.

The longer-term memory task is not needed with all students. If a student shows high levels of accuracy in retaining the work that has been carried out (i.e., regularly writing with 90% or better accuracy), the short term memory task is sufficient.

For those students who do require the longer term memory task, you will generally find that within a period of six to eight weeks, accuracy improves dramatically. The tight, yet manageable, demands lead them to relatively rapidly develop strategies for attaining visual accuracy. Further, once the student shows marked improvement (e.g., no more than one error a session over three or four sessions), the activity can be reduced. This can be done by praising the student for his or her improvement and saying the activity will be reduced to once a week. If the high level of performance is then maintained (e.g., for a period of a month), the activity can be stopped altogether.

**Note:** This discussion on accurate writing does not include self-generated writing. If students choose to write, then extreme demands for accuracy can lead them to feel constrained and thereby inhibit a meaningful activity. Our concern for complete accuracy involves only the tightly controlled material that has been selected for the teaching. As long as the error rate in self-generated writing stays at 10% or lower, there is generally little reason for concern. If it is regularly higher than that, then depending on the student's age, a number of paths might be followed:

- For children 8 years or younger, you might have them initially dictate their ideas to you and then have them copy the material you have written from their dictation (the separation of the creative aspect of the writing from

- the accuracy part of the writing eases the task until the child can handle both components simultaneously).
- For children over 9 years, it can be helpful to have them become adept at using spell checkers. This not only helps them create accurate spelling, but it facilitates the editing of their writing – a process that becomes increasingly important as they advance through school.

## Teaching Comprehension: Mastering Meaning

Decoding and spelling are basic skills in reading, but the purpose of literacy is comprehension; that is, in understanding the message that the text contains. In the early stages of reading, comprehension often does not seem to be an issue. The texts are simple and most students can generally answer the questions related to the material they've read, or which was read to them. Often parents will receive a report from school which states, "Your child has a good understanding of the material and participates well in our discussions. Comprehension poses no problems at all."

### **Understanding the main idea**

Reports about comprehension being adequate are usually valid – as long as one is considering only details in the material. Often the students can easily answer questions involving the *Who*, *What*, and *Where* of the story.

However, there is frequently a dramatic and unfortunate change once a student moves from recapitulating details and is asked to explain what is commonly referred to as "the main idea." This aspect of comprehension often leaves many students confused, and they're unable to come up with formulations that summarize the material they've read.

When confronted with demands to discuss the main idea, they often will respond by making some association to the material (e.g., when asked, "*Why did Washington choose to retreat,*" they may offer comments such as "*He became president*" or "*He had wooden teeth.*").

It's not difficult to figure out why comprehension – or understanding the main idea – is so challenging for many students. It requires some of the most complex thinking skills that we have – including classifying, deducing, inferring, hypothesizing, and monitoring.

For example, let's consider one of the books in Reading Kingdom's Stage 2 program. It is *Dinosaur Hunters* (by K. McCullen) which is about a subject that has great appeal to many students.

One of the chapters, called *The Giant Tooth Mystery*, explains the difficulties scientists faced in reconstructing the appearance and behavior of extinct species. It starts with a key idea – namely, that cultures over centuries have been puzzled by the strange fossils they were finding. The actual content is:

*People have been finding dinosaur fossils for thousands of years.  
They have found them in cliffs and along riverbanks. They have*

*found them while digging for gold and silver. The name fossil comes from Latin. It means "to dig." And that is usually how people found them!*

*Until about two hundred years ago people did not know what these big bones were. That's because they did not know dinosaurs had ever existed. They thought the bones must have come from hippos or elephants or other large creatures. They never suspected that creatures — very different creatures from the animals they know — had once lived on earth.*

*But some of the bones people found were huge. They were too big to have come from an elephant or a hippo. These huge bones made some people believe that giants and ogres really did exist. Native Americans thought that the bones were skeletons of giant serpents. In China the big bones were said to be dragon bones. They were ground into powders. People mixed the bone powder into a potion and drank it. They believed the dragon bones would make them powerful.*

As in any good text, there is a lot of information, including many details that support the main idea, but which are not critical to that idea. Typical of these supporting details are words in the first paragraph such as *cliff*, *riverbank*, *gold*, and *silver*. In other words, many of the details in the text often have only tenuous links to the main idea.

At the same time, the main idea itself cannot be found in any single phrase or sentence. For meaningful comprehension to take place, the reader must take all the information that has been presented and independently formulate the unstated message that unites the varied ideas of the text.

Many students understandably have difficulty with this very demanding task. And repeated requests to "find the main idea" do little to help. The requests provide no direction for guiding their search. Often all they serve to achieve are additional encounters with failure.

To help a student achieve this vital skill, the technique of mastering meaning is employed. Relying again on an apprenticeship model, it has the following steps:

1. The adult has a complete, well organized three sentence summary already prepared.

For this material, it is:

People found dinosaur fossils for  
thousands of years. But they did not know

the fossils were from dinosaurs. They thought they came from other animals.

2. The adult reads the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence of the summary, but omits the final word (e.g.,

People found dinosaur fossils for thousands of \_\_\_\_\_.

The student is shown a set of key words that end each sentence in the summary (i.e.,

**animals                  years                  dinosaurs**

3. after selecting the appropriate word, the student is then asked to repeat the whole sentence. This repetition of the sentence gives the student practice in expressing a complete, well organized idea – often using formulations that the student would never spontaneously offer. This can be invaluable in expanding the student’s language abilities
4. the process is repeated with each of the next two sentences
5. when all the sentences have been completed, the student is asked to combine the three sets of ideas to present a full summary of the material covered that day. Sustained, connected sentence production is vital to effective writing. However, it is easier for the student to offer that sort of language orally, before having to do so via writing. So the spoken production of a complete summary serves as an excellent precursor to the development of effective writing.

### **The Effects on Writing**

As the student becomes more proficient in paraphrase, typically the effects transfer to the writing process. The type of summaries that the students are learning have characteristics that are essential to effective writing. These include: thinking in full sentences (as opposed to words and phrases), connecting sentences so as to form a coherent message, and continuing the development of an idea over several sessions.

## **The Books in Reading Kingdom's Stage 2**

The books of the program are from Random House's Step into Reading Series-Levels 3, 4 and 5. They are as follows:

Step into Reading: Level 3

**Wild, Wild Wolves**  
**Dinosaur Days**  
**Bravest Dog Ever: The Story of Balto**  
**Christopher Columbus**

Step into Reading: Level 4

**Titanic: Lost and Found**  
**Helen Keller: Courage in the Dark**  
**Tut's Mummy: Lost and Found**  
**Volcanoes: Mountains of Fire**

Step into Reading: Level 5

**To the Top: Climbing the World's Highest Mountain**  
**Moonwalk: The First Trip to the Moon**  
**The Trojan Horse: How the Greeks Won the War**  
**Dinosaur Hunters**