



What is Raising Literacy?

Raising Literacy is a newsletter produced by the Florida Department of Education’s State Regional Literacy Directors (SRLDs). For the 2025-2026 school year, three issues will focus on reading foundations by referencing Lindsay Kemeny’s book *7 Mighty Moves: Research-Backed, Classroom-Tested Strategies to Ensure K-to-3 Reading Success*. Consult your district-adopted materials when planning instruction around these components of reading.

DEFINE DECODING

The B.E.S.T. English Language Arts (ELA) Standards Glossary defines **decoding** as the translation of a word from print to speech, usually by employing knowledge of letter-sound relationships; also the act of deciphering a new word by sounding it out (page 214). Decoding strategies are explicit methods readers use to translate written words into spoken language by applying knowledge of letter-sound relationships (phonics). These strategies help readers keep their eyes on the letters in unfamiliar words rather than guess based on context or pictures. In order for students to automatically recognize or read a word by sight, they “need to connect a word’s phonemes to its graphemes, and attach them to meaning” (Kemeny, page 70). Knowledge of phonics (ELA.F.1.3) and decoding strategies help students accurately read new words, develop automatic word recognition and prevent reliance on guessing.

APPLY DECODING

Effective decoding instruction explicitly teaches students to internalize reliable and transferable strategies that they can use to read (decode) and spell (encode) unfamiliar words. As Lindsay Kemeny emphasizes in Move 3 of *7 Mighty Moves*, explicit instruction in decoding emphasizes matching letters to sounds and blending the sounds represented by a word’s letters into a word. To help students attend to the internal units of a word, teachers must be equipped with a variety of prompts to return students’ attention to graphemes (letters) of the word they are decoding.

Error-Correction Procedure

When students incorrectly decode a part of a word, implement an error-correction procedure like the one below (adapted from Kemeny, page 72):

- **Pointing Prompt:** Point to the part of the word the student missed and allow time for the student to state the correct sound.
- **Verbal Prompt:** If the student cannot recall the sound, provide it.
- **Blending Prompt:** Encourage the student to blend the sounds. If the student is unable to blend the sounds independently, model how to do it.

Decodable Texts

Kemeny’s Move 4 describes another opportunity to practice decoding through the use of decodable texts. Decodable texts are written to match the phonics skills students are learning, giving them focused practice applying those skills while reading. These texts draw attention to letters and sounds, reinforcing phonics instruction. When the text aligns with a reader’s current phonics knowledge, it supports confidence, fluency and mastery of newly learned skills.

CONNECT & PRACTICE AT HOME

How Can Families Help at Home?

The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) has the Student Center Activities database, providing teachers a wide-array of student activities targeting different aspects of reading development. Each activity comes with directions and printable student resources. Below is one activity that supports decoding development:

- [Digraph Delight](#): This task provides students with frequent opportunities to practice decoding a variety of words.

DEFINE SIGHT WORDS

What are Sight Words?

The B.E.S.T. ELA Standards Glossary defines **sight word vocabulary** as words that can be recognized efficiently at a glance. It further notes that the goal is that all words eventually become sight words (page 218). In Move 5, Kemeny explains that sight words have been stored in long-term memory through **orthographic mapping**, the cognitive process of forming connections between the sounds of spoken words (phonology), their written spellings (orthography) and their meaning (semantics) (page 99). Kemeny also reminds educators that even irregular words (words that “contain sounds or spellings that are not consistent and reliable”) (page 99) can be decoded and learned through connecting sounds (phonemes) to letters (graphemes), explicit phonics instruction and repeated, meaningful practice.

Recognizing sight words quickly helps students read more smoothly and focus on comprehension of the text. When students cannot decode or recognize words efficiently, their cognitive processes are consumed with decoding words rather than making meaning from those words. Teaching sight words by connecting sounds to letters through repeated practice frees the mind to focus on comprehending what is being read.

APPLY SIGHT WORDS

Through the use of consistent phonics-based routines (F.1.3) during reading and writing, teachers may support sight word reading development by guiding students to map sounds to letters, especially in high frequency words (words that occur often in text) (Kemeny, page 97). Appendix E from the B.E.S.T. ELA Standards provides a list of high frequency words (F.1.4) that can be used for instruction (pages 207-208). Sight words are not learned simply by looking at words as whole units; instead, students need to be taught to investigate each word by analyzing the full word, noticing the connections between a word’s written letters, the possible pronunciations those letters represent and the meaning of the word in context. This deeper interaction helps students map the word to memory through orthographic mapping. Similarly, students should attend to the internal units of irregularly spelled words to orthographically map those words as well.

Teach Irregular Words Using an Explicit Routine

This routine for teaching irregular words is adapted from Kemeny, page 102:

1. Say the word and use it in a sentence.
2. Segment and count the sounds.
3. Map the phonemes (sounds) to the graphemes (letters).
4. Point out the irregular parts.
5. Cover the word and have students rewrite it from memory.
6. Uncover the word and check students’ spelling.
7. Have students generate sentences that contain the word.

Kemeny, L. (2023). *7 Mighty Moves: Research-Backed, Classroom-Tested Strategies to Ensure K–3 Readers Succeed*. Scholastic.

CONNECT & PRACTICE AT HOME

How Can Families Help at Home?

- Choose three to five high frequency words the child is learning (e.g., *said, have, come*).
- Say one word aloud and have the child repeat it.
- Tap the sounds he/she hears and match the sounds to the letters.
- Write the word together while saying each sound represented by the letter(s) out loud.
- Say the whole word again.
- Repeat the process with each word.

High frequency word practice helps the child connect sounds to letters in order to store the word in memory, supporting the process to orthographically map the word and make it a sight word that he/she can read automatically.