



Frequently Asked Questions

How does Letterland work? What makes it so engaging to young students?

When teachers first see Letterland, they immediately notice that it is fun and engaging for children. Letterland uses simple stories to help students remember different phonics concepts. The program integrates developmentally appropriate, child-friendly language with multi-sensory activities related to meaningful characters that students grow to love as they learn foundational reading skills. The program uses a structured literacy approach that is aligned with the science of reading.

The Letterlanders

Young children build phonemic awareness and phonics skills with the help of friendly Letterland characters who transform plain black letter shapes into child-friendly pictograms that live in an imaginary place called Letterland. Simple stories and pictograms about the Letterland characters explain sometimes “dry” phonics facts using child-friendly language. Letterland incorporates a number of clues that help students learn, including:

- Musical/Rhythmical Clues: Young children learn sound-symbol correspondences with the help of Letterland characters who have engaging stories and songs that are directly related to sounds that letters make. The first sound of the character’s name is a clue for the letter sound. Alliteration using the same sound is embedded in the story.
- Cognitive Clues: Each character’s story includes cognitive clues to help students remember the sounds related to single letters. For example, **Harry Hat Man** whispers his sound /h/ and **hates** noise because it gives him a **horrible headache**. He doesn’t wear shoes so he will not make noise. The characters never change, only their sound changes when they meet other characters in digraphs, double vowels, vowel-r, or other more advanced phonic elements. Brief stories are used to help explain the new sounds that are made when two letters are next to each other. For example, when **Sammy Snake** comes up behind **Harry Hat Man** in the digraph **sh**, **Harry** turns around to **Sammy** and says /sh/.
- Letter Shape Clues and Songs: Children learn correct letter formation from songs related to handwriting strokes and the Letterland characters’ shapes.
- Visual Prompts: A pictogram is a visual image that is designed to carry information. Each Letterland character is matched and embedded in the shape of its letter. For example, **Bouncy Ben** (a bunny) has **big brown** ears that go straight up from his head, so his pictogram shows his round face in the bottom part of the letter **b** and his ears going up behind the tall line in the letter **b**.
- Kinesthetic, Dramatic Prompts: Each character has an “action trick” prompt that provides a kinesthetic memory clue for the letter shapes and sounds. For example, while saying **Bouncy Ben’s /b/** sound, shoot your arms up for ears and wiggle them. Or, while saying **Harry Hat Man’s /h/** sound, breathe into your hand in front of your mouth.
- Reading Direction: To reinforce that we read from left to right, Letterland provides orientation clues. For example, many of the characters face right as they move.

Multiple Options for Engaging Activities

Letterland incorporates numerous interactive teaching strategies designed to engage children’s attention. Some of these standard learning activities are repeated in every unit plan to provide a consistent learning structure. For example:

- Live Reading: Using picture/letter cards, students blend sounds together to read a word.

- Live Spelling: Using picture/letter cards, students segment sounds to spell a word.
- Quick Dash: Used to review letter sounds – show a picture code card, ask for character’s name. Then turn the card over and ask just for letter sound.
- Roller Coaster or Finger Tapping: Used to blend sounds together to form words.

In addition to the standard activities, teachers can choose additional activities and games to reinforce concepts or provide a “double dose” lesson for concepts that are not mastered. Children are not asked to do something until they have been taught directly how to do it!

Word Building Early On

Blending and segmenting sounds in words is introduced very early on in Letterland, beginning in kindergarten. Letterland incorporates numerous interactive teaching strategies designed to engage children’s attention. In kindergarten, once students have learned the basic sounds associated with the letters c, a, d, h, m, and t, they begin blending sounds related to simple, consonant-vowel-consonant words. They also complete onset and rime activities and learn word families with short vowels, and they start reading high-frequency sight words.

How does Letterland teach foundational reading skills in the Common Core literacy standards?

The majority of U.S. states have adopted the Common Core standards or similar state literacy standards. Letterland is tightly aligned with grades K-3 Foundational Skills standards (i.e., print concepts, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency), Language standards (i.e., conventions of standard English including printing letters, vocabulary acquisition and use), and Speaking and Listening standards (i.e., comprehension and collaboration, presentation of knowledge and ideas).

By fully developing phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, letter formation, word structure and recognition, passage reading, and accurate spelling, Letterland helps children become automatic at letter naming, letter-sound correspondences, reading, and writing words. Reading and spelling are taught together with an emphasis on using phonemic awareness to support early spelling, and later knowledge of advanced phonics to support more complex spelling. Long and short vowel sounds are different characters and are introduced at the same time. The characters’ stories are related to help students make the connection between the long and short sounds. For example, Mr. **A**, the Apron Man (long vowel) belongs to Annie Apple (short vowel) and works in her orchard.

In Grades 2 and 3, students focus on word structure for multi-syllable words, including learning the basic syllable types. Grades 2 and 3 also addresses morphology by teaching students how combining basic prefixes, suffixes and roots creates words and changes the meaning of words. Grade 3 addresses schwa in unaccented syllables.

What is the Letterland phonics scope and sequence?

The scope and sequence for presenting letter sounds and phonics patterns is similar to most other systematic, structured literacy phonics programs. Here is a brief summary of what is covered at each grade level:

- Pre-K: Explore phonemic awareness; expand vocabulary; introduce the characters a through z; letter sounds and shapes; capital shapes; long and short vowels.
- Kindergarten: Full alphabet immersion with speed and fluency. Start to blend, segment, and learn first digraphs. Introduce high-frequency words and check progress with integrated assessments. Phonemic awareness; onset and rimes; word families with short vowels; word building; consonant blends; long vowels; silent-e; double vowels; r-controlled vowels.
- Grade 1: Focused on word families, digraphs and trigraphs, prefixes, suffixes, and fluency with integrated assessments. Word families; consonant blends; silent-e; soft c and g; long vowel teams; r-controlled vowels; diphthongs and oo, ou, ow, oi,oy; contractions and apostrophes
- Grade 2: Focused on more advanced spelling patterns, syllabication, and word structure with integrated assessments. Review of all grade 1 concepts in more challenging words; consonant doubling in multi-syllable words; six syllable types and syllable division; variant plurals plus silent letters; advanced double vowels and r-controlled vowels.
- Grade 3: Focused on advanced phonics concepts, spelling rules and generalizations, advanced words study including reading multi-syllable words and prefixes, suffixes, roots.

Does Letterland have a continuous, “spiraling” curriculum?

Letterland has a spiraling curriculum that helps build solid literacy skills as concepts are taught, practiced, reviewed, and applied. Each Letterland lesson introduces one or two phonics elements that are taught and practiced for reading and spelling. However, previously learned elements are also addressed at the start of a new lesson during the “review” activities. This ensures that teachers “spiral back” to provide ongoing practice with previously learned elements. In this way, the phonics elements build on each other.

Gradual Release of Letterland Characters: The Pre-K and kindergarten levels place significant emphasis on the use of the Letterland characters to learn letters and the sounds they make. As students move through grade K and 1 and into grade 2, and their sound/letter associations become more automatic, the focus on the characters is gradually released. But students know that when they see letters in text, the Letterlanders are there “hiding” behind their plain letters even though they can’t see them. If students are not sure about a particular letter, especially students who struggle, they can just look at the letter shape and imagine the character in their mind. To get the sound, they just have to start to say the character’s name and they will have the sound.

How can Letterland be used in a tiered model of literacy instruction (i.e., RtI or MTSS) for students who struggle and need intervention?

While Letterland is a Tier I, core program for teaching phonemic awareness and phonics to all students as part of a primary grades curriculum, it is designed to be compatible with an RtI (Response to Intervention) or MTSS (multi-tiered system of supports) model. Letterland also includes two options for accessing specific lessons to be used with students who struggle, including students who are identified as eligible for special education services, students with English as a second language, or any student who is struggling to learn to read:

- The Kindergarten through Grade 2 Teacher Guides include a section with special intervention lessons for Tier II or III instruction. The Letterland assessments are used for instructional decision making to determine which students might benefit from the supplemental lessons. Intervention lessons focusing on previously taught phonics elements can be selected for use based on individual student needs. These students continue to participate in the whole-class, Tier I instruction with their peers, as well as their intervention lessons.
- In 2019, Letterland launched an Intervention Teacher Guide focused specifically on intervention lessons. Intervention teachers can choose from 3 tracks of lessons depending on how far behind students are. The Guide and additional intervention materials can be purchased separately, or as part of an intervention pack.

In addition to the intervention lessons, each standard Tier I lesson includes suggestions and activities for additional, small group work that provides more practice and reinforcement of the lesson’s phonics element. The Tier I lessons are rigorous, especially the Phonemic Awareness Fast Track unit at the start of kindergarten, but the program is designed with a lot of flexibility and differentiation in mind so that students at all levels of the learning curve can receive the amount of practice and review to meet their specific learning needs. In classrooms where the majority of students are having difficulty mastering a phonics element during the typical two-day (kindergarten) and five-day (grades 1 and 2) schedule, additional practice activities are available so that the teacher can “double-dose” and add additional daily lessons related to the same phonics element.

Letterland was originally developed to help struggling readers. Because Letterland uses an explicit, multi-sensory, and systematic approach to teaching, it is an excellent choice for use as a Tier II or III phonics program by a special education department.

In what grades should our school start using Letterland?

You do not have to begin using Letterland in Pre-K! Letterland instruction can begin in Kindergarten which is the ideal grade to introduce students to the characters in the program. However, Letterland can also be started in grade 1, which includes an introductory unit that is designed for children who are new to Letterland. It can be introduced in Grade 2 to students who have not used it in prior grades, but teachers will need to differentiate their instruction to help students make a connection between the Letterland character cues and the letter-sound correspondence cues

that students might be familiar with from the phonics approach used before starting Letterland. Grade 3 Letterland can be used with students who have never used Letterland because the emphasis at this grade level is on advanced decoding and multi-syllable word structure.

How long is a typical daily Letterland lesson?

Each Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 daily, whole-group lesson takes approximately 30 minutes. Supplemental, small-group intervention lessons are in addition to the core lesson. Intervention lessons typically take a minimum of 20 minutes. Lesson length is flexible at the Pre-K level.

How is handwriting taught?

Learning to write letters is built into the Pre-K and K lessons. As children learn the sound of a letter, they also learn how to write the letter. Handwriting songs are used to teach and reinforce the specific handwriting strokes to produce each letter, including starting points and directionality. In Pre-K and K, students finger-trace letters on cards or posters, and air-trace with arms held straight out (involving large muscles creating a link between the motion and letter). In Grade 1, students write the letters on paper. The instructional software also models how letters are formed. Teachers should consider having specially lined paper available for additional letter writing practice.

What assessments are included in the program and how are they used?

Letterland includes assessment materials and student record sheets to support three purposes: (1) for placement, diagnosis, and evaluation; (2) for weekly progress monitoring and pacing decision; (3) tri-weekly to check retention of learning. Assessments for grades 1 and 2 include reading words, spelling tests and dictation, and fluency checks. All reproducible forms for assessments are included in the Teachers' Guide and CD.

There is flexibility around the assessments used. If a school is already using an assessment (e.g., DIBELS or aimsweb) that measures the same skill, these assessments can be used in place of the LL assessments.

What materials are needed to teach Letterland, and what is the cost?

Letterland is a complete program that includes all of the materials that teachers will need to deliver lessons. There is a Teachers' Guide with detailed, step-by-step directions for every lesson, including a list of materials, procedures for instructional activities, and colorful graphics. However, Letterland is not "scripted" and teachers have flexibility in how they deliver the lessons. The grade-level packs come with everything teachers need to deliver the lessons, including classroom posters. The Teachers' Guide electronic files include any reproducibles that will be needed, including assessments and decodable text.

Supplemental "Phonics Online": This is an additional, interactive resource to help teachers and students learn Letterland phonics. It is an Internet based platform that can be accessed on any device – laptops, desktops, tablets using an Internet connection. Phonics Online lets students explore 370 animation related to the Letterlanders, including stories, songs, and chants. There are interactive phonics readers (decodable text). Students can go on a learning journey with multiple levels of phonics games. There is also a Teacher Toolkit with downloadable resources, unit activities, and classroom demo videos. Phonics Online is available as a reasonably priced annual subscription with options for individual teacher plans, or classroom plans that include students.

While all Letterland products can be purchased separately, grade-level packs are available that combine all of the basic materials needed to teach Letterland. Each pack includes a grade-specific Teachers' Guide, phonics and handwriting songs on CD's, Letterland character story books, phonics and word display cards, and classroom posters. The Teachers' Guide electronic files include over 300 printable pages of decodable text, word lists, and other lesson materials. No student consumables need to be purchased. The classroom cost for grade-level packs is very reasonable in comparison to other foundational reading programs.

Extra materials: Letterland publishes numerous supplemental materials designed to extend and enhance Letterland instruction by teachers and parents. View the Letterland product catalogue to view extra products such as Big Books, phonics games, handwriting practice, phonics story books and readers, and parent guides.

What training and professional development is needed?

The Letterland program includes a full set of instructional materials and procedures that progress from grade to grade. Effective teaching of phonemic awareness and phonics requires a great deal of knowledge and skill on the part of a teacher. In order to support successful implementation of Letterland, schools should provide the opportunity for teachers to participate in live initial training and follow up professional development. Keys to Literacy provides the following Letterland services:

- Basic, Initial Training: One-day initial training for use of the Letterland program – one day of training for each grade level. Classroom teachers and any support staff that work in the classroom should attend.
- Implementation Coaching Days: Trainers can deliver onsite coaching support that includes implementation meetings with small groups of teachers, classroom observation and debriefs, side-by-side support to teachers for lesson planning, pacing, and lesson modeling. Available by the day, as needed.
- Letterland Intervention Training: A one-day training is available for intervention educators who will be using the supplemental intervention lessons that are embedded in the grade-specific Teacher Guides or in the Intervention Teacher’s Guide. These educators should attend a basic, grade level initial training first.

In addition to on-site Letterland training, Keys to Literacy also runs “public” training sessions that are open to the public. Contact Keys to Literacy to develop a professional development plan based on the needs of your school or district.

Self-Guided Training: There are several free, online videos available at the Letterland U.S. website, one for each grade level plus an introductory “Lift-Off” video that provides support for teaching Letterland. These introductory videos are approximately 35 minutes in length, and are a great way to get started with teaching Letterland. In addition, there are 23 short videos that demonstrate various instructional activities used in Letterland lessons.

How can Letterland be integrated with other literacy instructional materials and programs currently used in our school?

There are numerous core and supplemental literacy products used in schools across the country, and it is not unusual for schools to revisit and update their beginning reading curriculum every five years or so. Letterland is designed to be a complete, stand-alone phonemic awareness and phonics program across Pre-K through Grade 3. It can also be used along with other literacy instruction products, or just as an intervention program for struggling readers. Here are some suggestions for integrating Letterland with what you are already using:

- Core Reading Programs: If you have a core reading program that addresses all five components of reading, consider replacing the phonemic awareness and phonics lessons for the primary grades with Letterland. Compared to most core reading programs, it provides much more in-depth, explicit, and multi-sensory instruction that follows a developmentally appropriate phonics scope and sequence. Continue to use the core program for vocabulary and comprehension skills.
- Guided Reading Model: If your school relies on guided reading lessons that use leveled readers as the primary way to teach reading, you may find that the emphasis on comprehension and vocabulary skills coupled with an implicit approach to teaching phonics that is typical of guided reading is not working for some of your students. Consider using Letterland for your 30 minutes of instruction for phonemic awareness and phonics, and continue using guided reading lessons for the rest of your reading instruction block to focus on comprehension.
- Other Phonics Instructional Materials: Your school may be using some supplemental phonemic awareness materials or programs for Pre-K and K that do a good job of teaching these skills, but that are not aligned

with the materials you use to teach phonics in grades 1 through 3. Consider adopting Letterland as a solution to explicit phonemic awareness for your youngest students that provides consistency as these students move into subsequent grades. Or, your school may already be using a complete phonics program that spans Pre-K through Grade 3, but is not as engaging as you would like it to be. Consider piloting Letterland to see the difference in how students respond to phonics lessons. You may decide to move to school-wide adoption of Letterland!

- Decodable Text: Your school may have invested in other sources of decodable text for students to build fluency reading passages and stories that integrate increasingly more complex phonics patterns. Letterland provides free decodable word lists and text that is built into the lessons, but additional decodable text is a great way to provide more practice. If you use decodable text from the popular “Reading A-Z” website, Letterland has developed a correlation guide that cross-walks Letterland lessons with this site’s reading passages. If you use decodable books and stories from publishers such as “Flyleaf Books”, the Letterland phonics patterns are easily aligned with the progression of phonics readers.

What is the history of Letterland? How and when was it developed?

Letterland was created by Lyn Wendon in England in the late 1960’s as a way to help students who struggled with learning to read. Lyn worked with special education students who had difficulty retaining letter-sound correspondences. She found that her students responded well to an Orton-Gillingham approach to teaching phonics that incorporated creative visual cues and simple stories that were easy to remember. Lyn eventually created a land where letters lived filled with engaging characters.

In 1980, Lyn started producing and selling Letterland materials in her own home. By 1985, as it became apparent that her materials suited not only children with learning difficulties, but could also be used as a mainstream model for all students and for teaching English as an additional language, she and her husband John, broadened the scope of Letterland resources, including the addition of PreKindergarten materials. Letterland continues as a Wendon family business, now headed by Lyn’s son Mark. Letterland is used in 111 countries where reading English is taught including the U.K., Canada, South Africa, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India, Jordan, Lebanon and China.

Letterland in the United States: The U.S. product version of Letterland was launched in 2008. Since 2008, Letterland has been adopted as a core phonics program in multiple states. Currently, Letterland is working with over 80% of all districts in NC, where the program was introduced in 2008. Letterland adoption across the country grows each year as teachers, administrators, and parents spread the news that Letterland works!

What is the research supporting Letterland and the instructional methods used in the program?

Letterland aligns closely with the findings of decades of research about the need to explicitly teach phonemic awareness and phonics, and the best instructional practices to do so.

The National Reading Panel (2000) not only identified the same instructional practices used in Letterland as the most effective ways to teach phonemic awareness and phonics, it actually cited the Letterland program. Here are some excerpts from the National Reading Panel report:

“In a study by Ehri, Deffner and Wilce (1984), children were shown letters drawn to assume the shape of familiar objects, for example, s drawn as a snake, h drawn as a house (with a chimney) ...Memory for the letter-sound relations was mediated by the name of the object. Children were taught to look at the letter, be reminded of the object, say its name, and isolate the first sound of the name to identify the sound...With practice they were able to look at the letters and promptly say the sounds. Children who were taught letters in this way learned them better than:

- Children who were taught letters by rehearsing the relations with pictures unrelated to the letter shapes...
- Children who simply rehearsed the associations without any pictures.”

The NRP reported, “application of this principle can be found in Letterland (Wendon, 1992), a program that teaches kindergartners letter-sound associations”. Not only did the NRP cite Letterland as a program where the use of mnemonics is prominent, but they also said:

- “The motivational value of associating letters with interesting characters or hand motions and incorporating this into activities and games that are fun is important for promoting young children’s learning...”

- *Techniques to speed up the learning process are valuable in helping kindergarteners prepare for formal reading instruction.”*

See the additional document “Letterland Results, Research for more specific details of research students.

How can I order Letterland program materials and professional development?

Letterland materials can be ordered directly from the Letterland website. In addition, as the new England provider of professional development for Letterland, Keys to Literacy can help your school or district determine what to purchase to get started with the program. We can also develop a PD plan and contract to provide training for your teachers. Contact us to learn about your options for using Letterland, see a demonstration, develop a PD plan, or order materials.

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