Comprehension & Vocabulary

Overview Guide

Waterford.org

Waterford Early Learning's
Six Instructional Strands for Literacy

- Phonological Awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Comprehension & Vocabulary
- Language Concepts
- Communication

Research-Based Principles

Reading comprehension, the ability to draw meaning from text, is the ultimate goal of reading instruction.

Vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge are closely linked and are key contributing factors for reading comprehension (Adams, 1990; Scarborough, 2001; Recht & Leslie, 1988). The issue of early oral language exposure is complex. Although some controversy surrounds studies on the issue, the "word gap" describes a disparity between exposure to oral language in the early years of life for children from language-rich environments as compared with some of their peers (Golinkoff et al., 2019; Sperry et al., 2019; Hart & Risley, 1995). This disparity creates both a vocabulary gap and a background knowledge gap (Snow, 2017). In addition, the quality of young children's language experience matters as much or more than the quantity (Snow, 2017; Seidenberg & MacDonald, 2018).
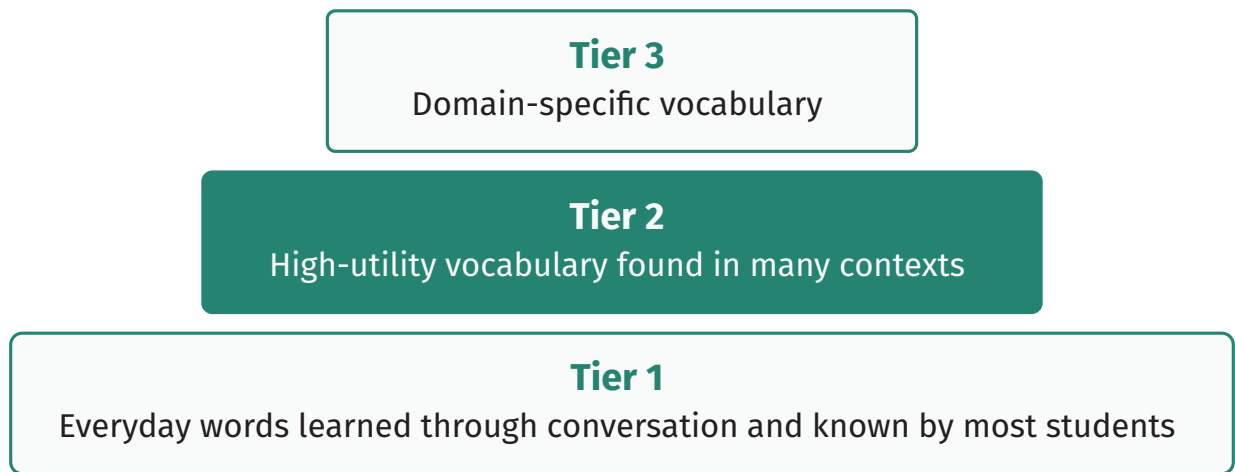
To build vocabulary and background knowledge in the classroom, experts recommend combining content instruction and reading instruction (Cabell & Hwang, 2020; Petscher et al., 2020). Content knowledge supports the ability to make inferences, a key component of reading comprehension (Cabell & Hwang, 2020).

Research shows that reading aloud coupled with teacher think-alouds enhances student comprehension by demonstrating how skilled readers actively construct meaning from text. Think-alouds model essential strategies like predicting upcoming events, clarifying confusing sections, and connecting the text to students' prior knowledge (Pearson & Duke, 2004; Pressley & Gaskins, 2008).

Vocabulary instruction should focus on academic vocabulary and "tier 2" words, those words that are commonly seen in narrative and informational texts but whose meanings may not be part of students' oral vocabularies (Beck et al., 2002). Words should be selected for instruction based on their frequency, utility, and instructional potential (Biemiller, 2010; Graves, 2006). Multiple-meaning words and those

that can be used across disciplines in varied contexts should be a high priority for explicit instruction (Beck et al., 2002). Words that are conceptually challenging or represent ideas critical to a student's grade level should also be targeted (Hiebert, 2019). Morphology instruction creates bridges between meaning and spelling (Castles et al., 2018) and supports reading comprehension (Kilpatrick, 2015; Kirby et al., 2012).

Tier 3 Domain-specific vocabulary	
Tier 2 High-utility vocabulary found in many contexts	
Tier 1 Everyday words learned through conversation and known by most students	

Tier 2 Focus for Vocabulary Instruction (Based on Beck et al., 2002)

New words should be introduced with student-friendly definitions, experienced in multiple contexts, and learned through repeated exposures (Beck et al., 2002). Isabelle Beck emphasizes the importance of directly teaching word meanings and providing multiple exposures to new words through context-rich explanations, engaging questions, examples and nonexamples, and opportunities for students to use the words in their own speech and writing (Beck et al., 2002). Using clear and consistent routines for explicit instruction of words that are critical for comprehension and knowledge building has been shown through empirical studies to improve comprehension.

Comprehension strategies, particularly summarizing, questioning, and monitoring, are helpful tools when used in the context of a primary
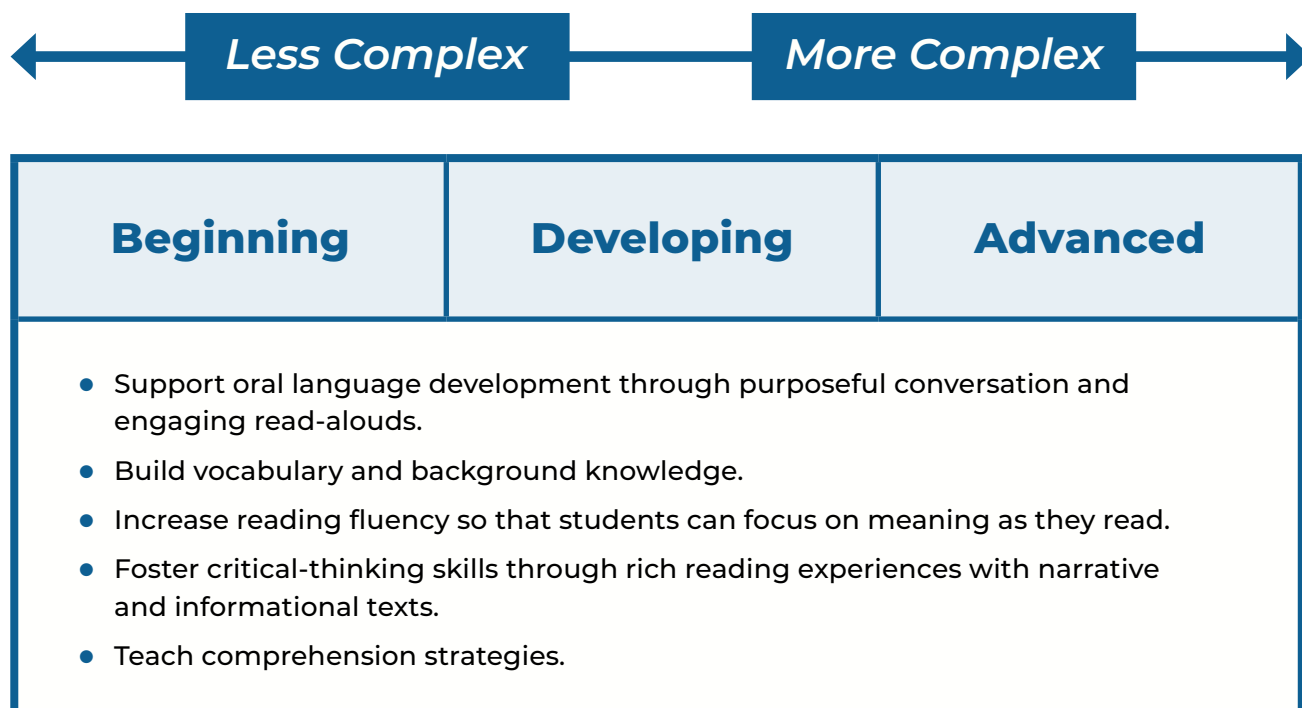
focus on content. Comprehension strategies instruction should be brief, targeted, and applied to a variety of texts (National Reading Panel, 2000: Shanahan, et. al.; McKeown, et. al., 2009).

Importantly, all instruction related to comprehension should happen in the context of purposeful reading of high-quality, authentic texts.

Building comprehension in any language builds those skills across languages. Comprehension skills are transferable from one language to another. Making connections between vocabulary words, meaning, and content knowledge across languages builds students' skills and understanding in both languages.

Comprehension & Vocabulary Skills Development

Less Complex	More Complex

Beginning	Developing	Advanced
• Support oral language development through purposeful conversation and engaging read-alouds. • Build vocabulary and background knowledge. • Increase reading fluency so that students can focus on meaning as they read. • Foster critical-thinking skills through rich reading experiences with narrative and informational texts. • Teach comprehension strategies.		

Waterford Early Learning Instruction

→ **Comprehension & Vocabulary Skills Taught and Scope & Sequence**

View example comprehension and vocabulary activities from Waterford Early Learning's adaptive learning path → here.

Students build understanding before, during, and after reading Waterford Early Learning books.

Experiences with Waterford Early Learning books foster the growth of background knowledge, vocabulary, and critical-thinking skills. Supports that help students read with purpose and understanding surround each book and are embedded within the texts.
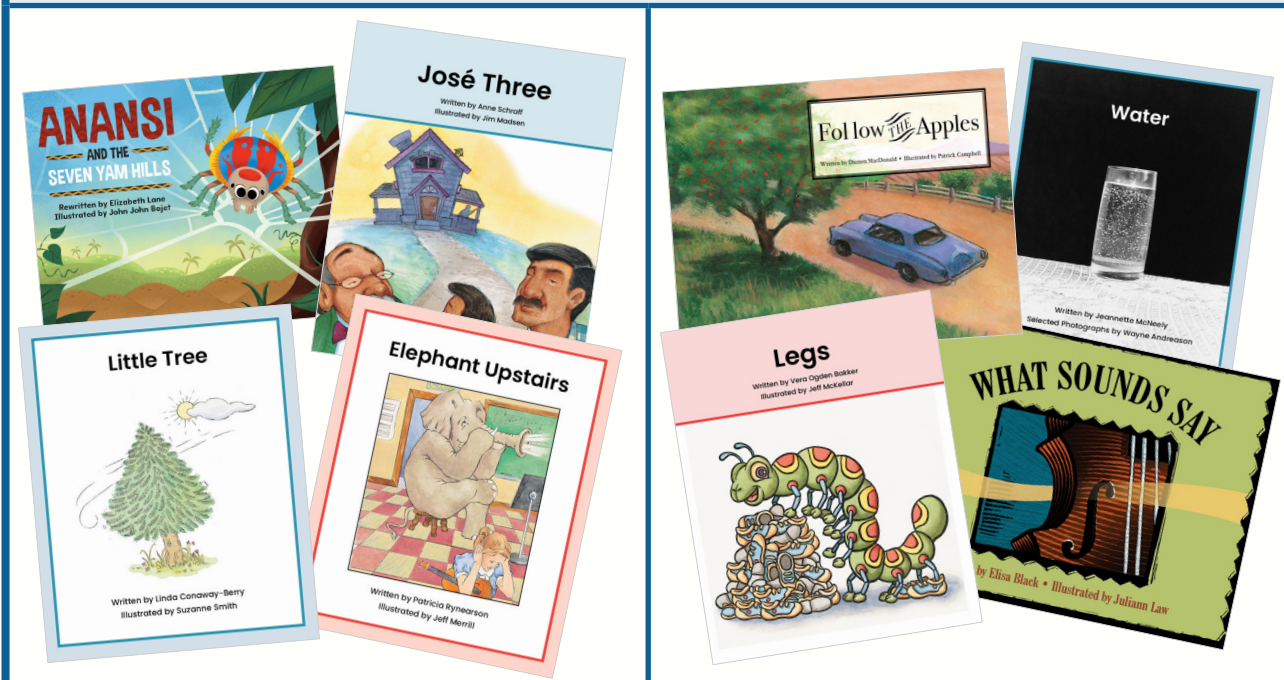
Narrative texts include the following Waterford Early Learning series: Sing a Rhyme, Read With Me, Traditional Tales, and Read-Along Books.

Students build content knowledge through the reading of informational texts that cover a wide variety of topics.
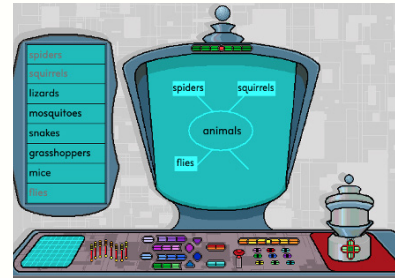
Before Reading

| Activate Background Knowledge	Build Background Knowledge	Make Connections
Before reading *The Little Monkey*, students sort statements that describe a monkey, an elephant, or both.	Before reading *The Little Red Hen*, students learn about how bread is made.	Before reading *The Talking Lizard,* students think about animals that are seen in their own surroundings.

During Reading
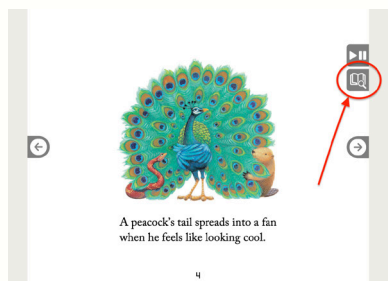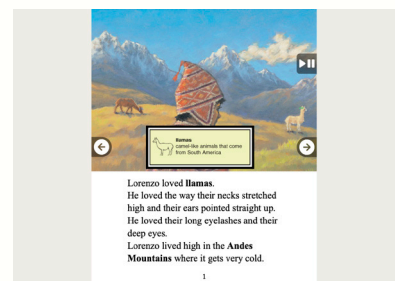
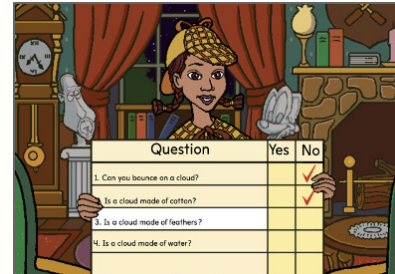| Inspector Detector		Embedded Vocabulary Support
In many Waterford Early Learning books, Inspector Detector provides a think-aloud model, guiding students to pause and think during reading. Prompts are centered on making predictions, considering the author's choice of language, thinking about the characters, and more. These experiences help students monitor their comprehension and make any necessary repairs to their understanding.		Students can select bolded words to see and hear the word's pronunciation and definition.

After Reading

Describe Characters	Compare Texts	Extend Understanding
After reading *Anansi and the Seven Yam Hills*, students describe the characters.	After reading *The Ugly Duckling*, students compare the text to other stories.	After reading *What is a Cloud?*, students answer questions about the topic.

Comprehension strategies are introduced and applied to increasingly complex texts through a variety of digital activities including the following:

- Peek at the Story
- Make Connections
- Step into the Story
- Check My Prediction
- Ask a Question
- Find an Answer
- Sum-Up, Remember Order
- Sum-Up—Five Ws

To see examples of these activities, search for the activity title in
→ **Resources & Activities**.

As students work through Waterford Early Learning's adaptive learning path, they acquire new vocabulary through explicit instruction and wide reading of narrative and informational texts. When students learn the meanings of new words, they also learn about the larger ideas and concepts connected to those words. A broad vocabulary bank fosters a broad knowledge bank, both of which support strong reading comprehension.

Students receive **explicit vocabulary instruction** for words drawn from Waterford Early Learning's authentic, high-quality texts. Instruction is focused on high-utility "tier 2" and academic vocabulary.

| Prior to reading the text, word meanings are introduced with student-friendly definitions. | Understanding of word meanings is reinforced through practice activities with scaffolded feedback. | After encountering the words in connected text, students check their understanding. |

Additional vocabulary instruction focuses on synonyms, affixes, word categories, and more.

Resources

Resources to support comprehension and vocabulary skills development in the classroom and at home include the following:

A Waterford account is required to access program hyperlinks (displayed in orange). If you do not have an account, you can request a demo account here.

Comprehension

→ In **Resources & Activities**,

  - FILTER for **Resource Type>WEL Activity** and **Subject & Strand>Literacy>Comprehension & Vocabulary**.

→ In **Resources & Activities**,

  - Go to **Collections>Graphic Organizers**.

→ **My Comprehension Checklist**

→ **Reading With Understanding**

→ **Group Reading Activities**

→ **Stories and Poetry**

→ **Compare and Contrast**

→ **Find the Similarity Between Two Texts**

→ Graphic Organizers

  → **Story Map**

  → **Five Finger Retell**

  → **Story Board 1**

  → **Story Board 2**

  → **Sequence Ladder**

  → **Sequence Organizer**

  → **Summarize a Story**

Vocabulary/Background Knowledge

→ In Resources & Activities,

- FILTER for **Resource Type>WEL Activity** and **Subject & Strand>Literacy>Comprehension & Vocabulary**.

- FILTER for **Resource Type>WEL Activity** and **Subject & Strand>Literacy>Comprehension & Vocabulary**, and SEARCH for "**build knowledge**."

→ Context Clues (word meanings)

→ Defining Words

→ Identify New Meanings for Words

→ Graphic Organizers

   → K-W-L Chart

   → T-Chart

   → Venn Diagram (circles)

   → Venn Diagram (squares)

Narrative Books

→ In Resources & Activities, go to

- **Collections>Books: Read-Along.**

- **Collections>Books: Traditional Tales.**

- **Collections>Books: Chapter Books.**

Informational Books

→ In Resources & Activities, go to

- **Collections>Books: Biographies.**

- **Collections>Books: Informational Texts.**

Playlists

→ In Resources & Activities,

- FILTER for **View>All Playlists** and **Subject & Strand>Literacy>Comprehension & Vocabulary.**

Family Resources

→ Family Fact Sheet: Comprehension & Vocabulary
→ Hoja de datos familiars—Vocabulario y Comprensión

→ Family Video: Comprehension & Vocabulary
→ Video de elemento de instrucción de vocabulario y comprensión

→ Reading Together Bookmark
→ Marcador de leyendo juntos

→ Sum Up: Remember Order
→ Resumir: Recordar el orden

→ Sequence Game
→ Juegos de secuencia

→ In Resources & Activities,

- FILTER for **Resource Type>Books (PreK-2)** to find hundreds of Waterford Early Learning books in English and Spanish.

- go to **Collections>Reading Together Activities (Families)**.

Instructional Routines

The following instructional routines can serve as frameworks for whole-class, small-group, and individual instruction. These routines leverage the elements of effective instruction that are built into the adaptive learning path for Waterford Early Learning.

Read-Alouds

Use this instructional routine for small-group or whole-group dialogic read-aloud experiences.

Before Reading

1. Provide explicit instruction for vocabulary words that will support comprehension of the book, using the vocabulary instructional routine outlined below.

2. Build students' background knowledge as needed. A → K-W-L Chart can be used as a framework for understanding what students already know.

3. Make connections with students' prior knowledge and experiences. For example, ask, "Have you ever eaten porridge? Have you heard other stories about bears?"

4. Display the cover of the book. As you point to the relevant information, say, "The title of this book *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The author is Madge Tovey and the illustrator is Suzanne Smith."

5. Set a purpose for reading. For example, say, "Let's read this book to find out about what happens when Goldilocks visits the bears' house."
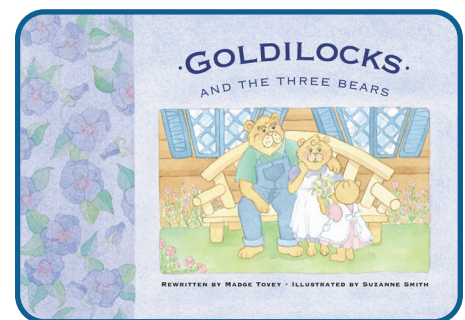
During Reading

1. Model fluent reading (i.e., reading at an appropriate rate with accuracy and expression). For example, change your voice for each character. Demonstrate how punctuation, such as exclamation points, give information about meaning and affect how you read the text.

2. Make the experience interactive by engaging students in active participation. For example, have students mimic the gestures and expressions of characters. A prompt could be: "Move your arms and change your face to look like Papa Bear."

3. Stop to make, check, and revise predictions. Here is an example:

   - What do you think Goldilocks will do with the porridge/chairs/beds?

   - What will the bears notice when they see the porridge/chairs/beds?

   - For each prediction, stop at the appropriate moments to confirm whether they were accurate or think about how you might revise your predictions as the story unfolds.

4. Point out vocabulary words as they are encountered in the text. Clarify word meanings through discussion as needed. Refer to images or concrete objects used in instruction. If a gesture was taught, ask students to act it out.

5. Model comprehension monitoring through a think-aloud approach. For example, model how to think about word meanings to support understanding. Say, "What words does the author use to describe how the bears talk? Papa Bear *growled*. I know that a *growl* is a sound that dogs make when they are mad or angry. I think that means that Papa Bear is mad."

After Reading

1. Guide students to complete the → K-W-L Chart to indicate what they learned.

2. Reinforce understanding by engaging students in practice with a comprehension strategy. For example, use the → Summarize a Story resource to guide a group discussion.

3. Compare and contrast with other texts. For example, say, "The characters in *Goldilocks* and *The Three Little Pigs* both have a problem.

- How are the problems in the two stories similar? How are they different?

- How do the characters in each story solve their problems?

- What are some other similarities between the two stories?

- What are some other differences between the two stories?

- What other stories do you know that include similar problems?"

4. Build depth of understanding through → extension activities.

5. Share resources with families for reading time at home.

- **PDF book:** English / Spanish

- **Narrated book:** English / Spanish

- **Reading Together Activities:** English / Spanish

Vocabulary

Use this instructional routine to introduce new word meanings.

Carefully select words for instruction. Choose high-utility, tier 2, academic vocabulary words that are drawn from texts students will read and that connect to classroom learning goals and/or content area studies.

For example, if students are learning about the three states of matter, provide vocabulary instruction for the words *solid*, *liquid*, and *gas* before reading *Pancakes Matter*.
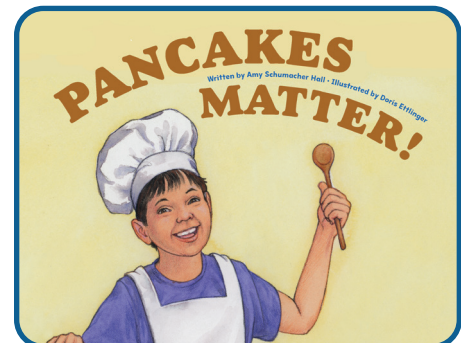
Before Reading

1. Set the purpose. For example, say, "Before we read *Pancakes Matter*, we will learn about some words you will see in the book. Understanding these words will help you understand the book."

2. Introduce the words with student-friendly definitions and explanations. For example, "A *solid*, like ice, is something that is hard and keeps the same shape no matter where you put it. When

it is warmer, ice turns to a liquid. A *liquid* is something that can be poured, and it takes the shape of the container you put it in. When water is a lot warmer, it turns to a gas. A *gas*, like the steam you see rising from a pot of boiling water, can move and change shape and is often hard to see."

3. Use visuals, gestures, and/or concrete objects to reinforce meaning. The images in **→ this resource** illustrate the words *solid*, *liquid*, and *gas*. Use the images to engage students in a discussion about examples and nonexamples. For example, show each image as you ask students, "Is this a solid?" Students respond *yes* or *no*. Ask students to brainstorm more examples and nonexamples.

4. Guide students to use the words in sentences.

During Reading

1. Point out the vocabulary words in context. Clarify word meanings through discussion as needed.

2. Refer to images or concrete objects used in instruction. If a gesture was taught, ask students to act it out.

After Reading

1. Provide multiple encounters with the words. For example, engage students with *Water*, where they will encounter the words *solid*, *liquid*, and *gas*.

2. Create structured opportunities for students to use the words in writing and conversation.

3. Build depth of understanding through **→ extension activities**.

4. Share the English or Spanish (*Los panqueques cuentan*, *Agua*) versions of the books with families for additional practice at home.

Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback has been shown to be a particularly powerful form of feedback (Hattie & Jaeger, 1998). It has a substantial effect size, meaning it can significantly improve learning outcomes. Within Waterford Early Learning's adaptive learning path, corrective feedback helps students build new understandings through productive struggle.

As you engage students in the instructional routines outlined above, provide corrective feedback that

- is immediate and timely;

- is targeted and specific;

- is asset-based and encouraging;

- provides additional information, as applicable (e.g., using a video to provide more background knowledge);

- approaches the task in a new way, as applicable (e.g., using a graphic organizer or role-playing the meanings of vocabulary words);

- is shared through multiple modalities (e.g., visual and auditory); and

- does not simply provide the correct answer, but instead guides students to confirm or self-correct their thinking to arrive at the correct answer.

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→ **A full list of references is included in the *Educator Overview Guide for Waterford Early Learning Reading Curriculum*.**