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## Dear Teacher

How to teach a child to read has always been more than a professional curiosity for me; it is a personal one. I come from what I call a “legacy of illiteracy.” My grandparents on my father’s side never learned to read and write. My grandmother on my mother’s side only attended school until fifth grade because she didn’t think her clothes were fancy enough to go to town for middle and high school. So I grew up in a home without books and where the limitations of illiteracy hung over us like one of those thick, X-ray blankets they put on you at the dentist’s office. Suffocating.

For me, reading is one of the greatest gifts we can give a child. It is a gift that, once given, can never be taken away and will forever transform that child’s life. It literally opens the door of possibility. I’ve seen what can happen when that door is closed.

As teachers, you give children that gift every year, and I know what an enormous responsibility it is to do it right and to do it well. I thank every reader of this book who continues to strive to do it right and well. Your efforts matter.

Continue to make a difference,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wiley Blevins".

Wiley Blevins

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# Putting It in Perspective

I called this book *Meaningful Phonics and Word Study: Lesson Fix Ups for Impactful Teaching* because the field of literacy learning is at a fascinating juncture, where recent research confirms for us the ways in which the human brain transforms print and makes meaning, and yet the implications for instruction are not universally known by teachers. While everyone agrees that children need explicit and systematic phonics instruction, how that gets accomplished is hotly contested. Often the debate becomes set apart from the actual classroom resources and routines with which phonics is taught. So my goal for this book is to help teachers by addressing the instructional settings and phonics materials first and foremost. That way, teachers can learn the essentials of strong phonics instruction through the lens of their current literacy program and resources, whether they are teaching with a phonics supplemental program, using a basal reading program, or organizing within a Balanced Literacy and/or Workshop framework with leveled texts.

## Tailoring Materials and Routines

Using my decades of study of phonics and language acquisition, I share what tends to go right—and tends to go wrong—with each of these approaches. Beginning on page 30, in Chapter 2, I delve into how to adapt and augment common phonics programs and routines. In this way, teachers reading this book have what they need to succeed, no matter where they are and what materials they are using. Children in grades K, 1, 2, and beyond can learn to read using many different resources. So the big message I want to send is that when teachers operate with insight about the strengths and weaknesses of their materials, shoring up the weakness becomes easier.



Teacher expertise helps overcome the weaknesses in any phonics program.

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## Integrating Seven Foundations for Strong Phonics Instruction

Armed with these insights, teachers then review and deepen their understanding of the seven foundations of effective phonics instruction, beginning on page 67, Chapter 3. I purposefully placed these fundamental practices last, because I've found teachers can more easily integrate successful phonics routines when they have had my “guided tour” of common pitfalls and fix ups first.

Phonics instruction has always been about making meaning.

## Applying Learning to Reading and Writing

The spoiler alert for this last section of the book is this: success means embracing the belief that systematic, explicit phonics instruction is never divorced from children's purposeful reading and writing. It's actually in that purposeful reading and writing that the learning sticks. Phonics instruction is and has always been about making meaning. “Systematic” and “authentic” are not antonyms. We need phonics instruction that is impactful, effective, and efficient and resides in the context of a literacy block filled with rich and engaging texts. We need phonics learning to be fun for children, and connected to purposeful reading and writing experiences. Read-aloud by read-aloud, book by book, young children begin to build the deep core of knowledge, vocabulary, reading skills, and habits that set them up to persevere with complex texts later on in school.



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