



Chicago Public Library  
The National Center on Improving Literacy

# JUMP INTO READING

## FRAMEWORK:

**Best Practices, Materials and Resources  
to Support Emerging Readers  
at Public Libraries**

**JUNE 2026**



## About Chicago Public Library

Chicago Public Library provides free access to rich resources, engaging cultural and educational programs and technology for all Chicagoans through its 81 neighborhood locations. Throughout its 150-year history, CPL has made information and knowledge available to all Chicagoans, from young children to older adults—inspiring continuous learning, exploration and growth. Learn more at [chipublib.org](http://chipublib.org)

### Chicago Public Library Mission:

We welcome and support all people in their enjoyment of reading and pursuit of lifelong learning. Working together, we strive to provide equal access to information, ideas and knowledge through books, programs and other resources. We believe in the freedom to read, to learn, to discover.

## About the National Center on Improving Literacy

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL) is a partnership among reading researchers, literacy experts and technical assistance providers led by Boston University's Wheelock College of Education and Human Development, along with Florida State University and RMC Research Corporation. NCIL supports families, educators, and education agencies by providing free, practical tools and professional learning grounded in the best available research. Using a multi-tiered approach, NCIL helps schools and communities screen, identify and effectively teach pre-K through grade 12 students with reading difficulties. Visit us at [improvingliteracy.org](http://improvingliteracy.org) or [contact us](#) for more information.

## Acknowledgments

Jump Into Reading was developed in partnership with many librarians, literacy experts and community leaders. We would like to acknowledge CPL's leadership team, the Department of Children's Services and Family Engagement, the Emerging Reader Cohort and the Collection Development Department for determining what is needed for Chicago's emerging readers. We would also like to thank our thought partners, who provided the expertise needed to develop this initiative: the National Center on Improving Literacy, Redwood Literacy, Laura Lay, Black Boy Literacy Campaign and Big City Readers. This project would not be possible without the Chicago Public Library Foundation, who provided vision, support and partnership to help bring this initiative to life.

# Table of Contents

- 04** Section 1: Introduction
- 09** Section 2: Our Process
- 15** Section 3: Building Staff Knowledge Through Training
- 18** Section 4: Collection Development
- 27** Section 5: Connecting Caregivers to Resources
- 31** Section 6: Programming
- 40** Section 7: Continuous Program Improvement
- 45** Section 8: Conclusion
- 47** References and Resources



# Section 1: Introduction

Every day in public libraries, parents and caregivers ask “My child is learning to read; can you help?” There are so many factors to consider when helping emerging readers! Public libraries have a long and rich history of supporting young children before they start learning to read with evidence-based programming like the American Library Association’s [Every Child Ready to Read® @ your library®](#) (ECRR), and then engaging school-aged children after they can read. But what about supporting children in between, as they are learning to read?

These are timely questions as educators, community leaders and parents are concerned about the state of literacy across the nation. According to data from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP), the literacy crisis in the United States affects all children, but has a disproportionate [impact](#) when analyzed in terms of race, socioeconomic status, multilingual learners and students with disabilities. Low literacy levels are a public health issue associated with anxiety, depression, unemployment, poverty, incarceration and adverse health outcomes (see [interactive literacy map](#)). But when children are given the tools they need to effectively learn to read, they are empowered to think critically and actively participate in their communities, supporting a more equitable society.

All children deserve the right to literacy, and we believe public libraries can help ensure access to high quality and appropriate literacy learning opportunities, resources and information. In 2021, Chicago Public Library began more deeply exploring the public library’s role in supporting children who are learning to read. We asked ourselves, “Even though librarians are not reading teachers, what can public libraries do to better serve emerging readers?”

There is no one-size-fits-all way for public libraries to support emerging readers, but there are many innovative, effective and fun ways libraries can directly improve literacy. By developing our collections, strengthening our resources and enhancing our evidence-based practices to align with the science of reading, we can help children, and the families who support them, find joy and success in learning to read.

# How Children Learn to Read

The body of research that seeks to understand how children learn to read is called the science of reading. While this collection of interdisciplinary research is constantly evolving, there are key ideas that describe how reading and writing develops, why some children struggle and how to provide effective instruction.

Learning to read is a complex process that does not happen naturally. The human brain is hard-wired for language, but not reading. Therefore, children need to be explicitly taught the many different skills needed to read well. While some pick them up quickly, many children need more time and practice—and that’s completely normal.

The process of learning to read comes down to two key interrelated skills, which were outlined by Gough and Tunmer (1986) in the Simple View of Reading:

**Word Recognition x Language Comprehension = Reading Comprehension**

Word recognition means being able to read words correctly and smoothly and language comprehension refers to knowing what those words mean. When both are strong, children have reading comprehension, which means they can understand what they read. If either one is weak, reading becomes difficult. If a child is having difficulty learning to read, it’s important to figure out early which skills are giving the child trouble and then target instruction to address them.

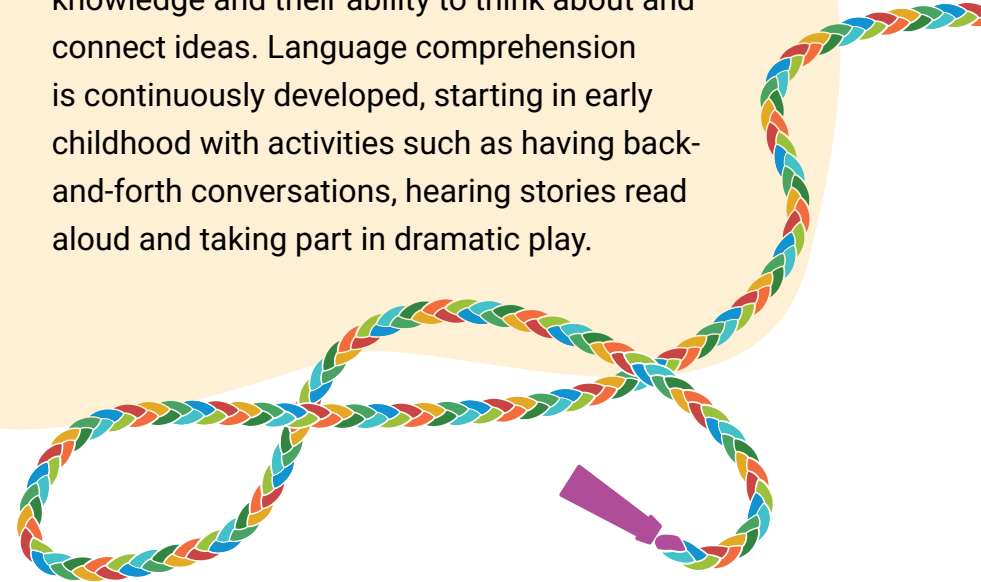
## Word Recognition

Successful word reading starts with a strong foundation in **phonological awareness** (the ability to recognize that spoken words are made up of individual sound parts) and phonemic awareness (the ability to hear, identify and manipulate those individual sounds in words). These skills are strong predictors of reading success.

When children begin to read words on a page, they use their knowledge of letter-sound relationships to decode the words. For example, the sounds “c-a-t” are blended together into the word “cat”. With practice, children develop fluency and can read words quickly and automatically.

## Language Comprehension

Children make meaning from what they read by using vocabulary skills, background knowledge and their ability to think about and connect ideas. Language comprehension is continuously developed, starting in early childhood with activities such as having back-and-forth conversations, hearing stories read aloud and taking part in dramatic play.



Both word recognition and language comprehension matter! If children have strong word recognition skills without comprehension, they likely can read aloud but not explain what they read. If children have strong comprehension but weak word recognition skills, they are likely to understand stories read aloud but struggle to read independently.

These skills can be supported in and out of school. As a trusted community literacy resource available to all, public libraries can apply aspects of the science of reading to collections, resources and programming to support children learning to read.



# Chicago Public Library's Jump Into Reading Initiative

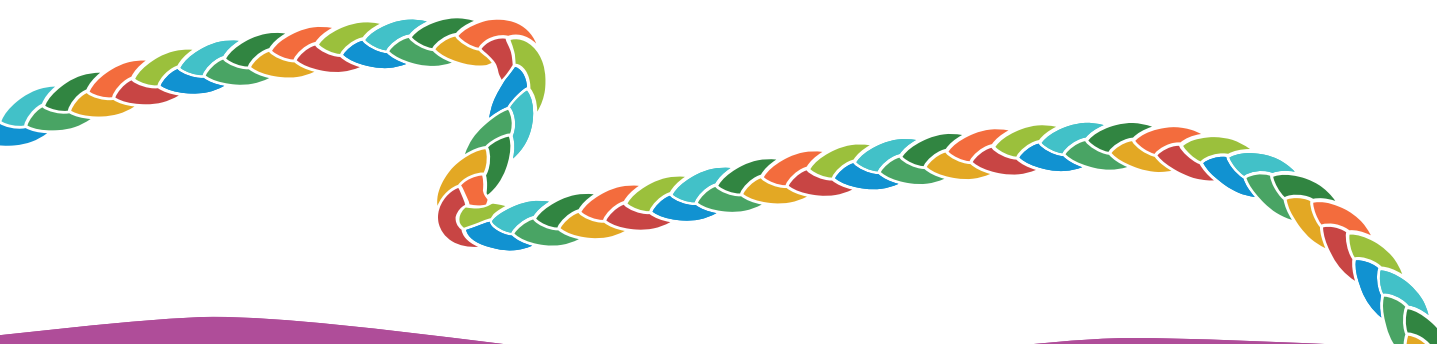
Jump Into Reading uses evidence-based practices to support emerging readers and their caregivers. Using a multi-tiered approach, the initiative strengthens libraries, supports families and helps children become confident readers. While targeted for ages 4 to 8, resources are available and useful to all who need them.

Jump Into Reading includes four main components:

- Staff Knowledge
- Collections
- Caregiver Education and Resources
- Programming

## How to Use This Framework

This framework outlines the evolution of the Jump Into Reading initiative and includes relevant tools and information. It is intended for other public libraries to use and/or adapt. CPL is a multi-branch system in a large city—your community, resources and goals may look very different. Ultimately, we hope that this framework helps you feel empowered and excited when a patron enters your library and says, “My child is learning to read; can you help?”



# CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY JUMP INTO READING

Strengthening Library Capacity. Empowering Caregivers. Advancing Literacy.



## WHAT JUMP INTO READING PROVIDES

A coordinated approach that strengthens libraries, supports families, and helps children become confident readers.



### STAFF KNOWLEDGE

**Builds confidence and strengthens practice.**

- How children learn to read
- How to support families
- How to use decodable books effectively



### PROGRAMMING

**Makes reading engaging and attainable.**

- Activity sheets and games
- Book clubs
- Literacy kits
- Family literacy programs



### BOOKS & COLLECTIONS

**Connects readers with the right books.**

- Decodable books
- Curated collections
- Reader's advisory



### PARENT EDUCATION & RESOURCES

**Empowers caregivers to support reading at home.**

- Website with tools and tips
- Pamphlets and guides
- Book selection tool

## WHAT CHANGES

Jump Into Reading creates lasting impact.



### LIBRARIES WILL:

- Strengthen staff capacity to support reading
- Offer engaging programs and trusted resources
- Build stronger partnerships in the community

Libraries become powerful hubs for family learning.



### FAMILIES WILL:

- Feel more confident supporting their child's reading
- Better understand how children learn to read
- Use library resources and read together more often

Caregivers become confident reading partners.



### CHILDREN WILL:

- Build strong foundational reading skills
- Transition from early reading to fluent reading
- Grow into confident, joyful readers

Children leap forward as readers.

## Overview of CPL's Jump Into Reading Initiative

## Section 2: Our Process

CPL has 81 branches across 77 neighborhoods. It is a large system with a lot of moving parts. When CPL began thinking about how to better support emerging readers, we took a scaffolded approach:

### **Phase 1: Background Knowledge and Initiative Development**

Steps in this phase:

- Explore other public library programming that supports emerging readers
- Train leadership in the science of reading
- Introduce all staff serving children to the science of reading
- Work with a combination of community experts and a cohort of interested children’s librarians to develop the initiative

When CPL started this work, public libraries did not have an established approach to supporting emerging readers. Unlike the ECRR initiative for pre-readers, there was not one unifying and accepted collection of evidence-based practices. Plus, as public librarians, we were not formally trained in how children learn to read.

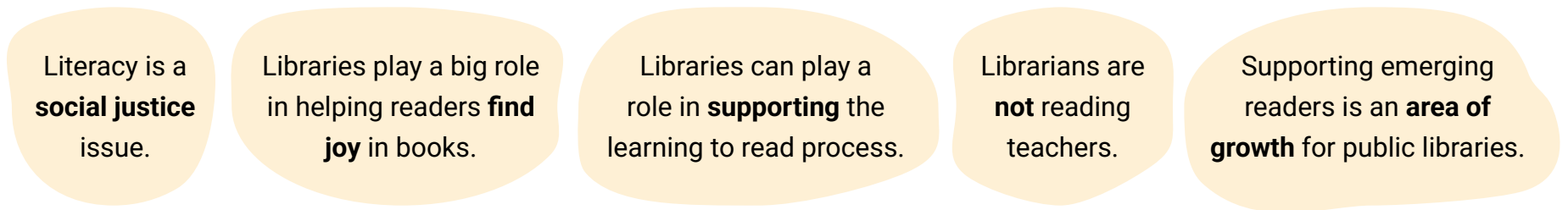
Our first step was to explore how other public library systems explicitly support emerging readers, especially in areas of programming, collections and resources for families. We learned that while many library systems shared our goals, there was no set of guiding principles. Our exploration also helped us determine that a model of direct literacy instruction (like tutoring) for children was not manageable or sustainable across multiple library branches in a large system. We realized we had to carefully consider what our patrons need, determine what was practical for us to support and develop a plan!

CPL administrative staff also participated in the Core Foundational Literacy Skills training led by the [Institute for Multisensory Education](#). This 40-hour training uses an Orton-Gillingham approach to literacy instruction, which provides explicit, direct, sequential and systematic techniques to teach reading. We learned alongside teachers who would be implementing this method

in their classroom. While this information helped us better understand the complexities of learning to read, it was more granular and specific than what we needed.

We next introduced all CPL children’s librarians to an overview of the science of reading led by a librarian and literacy expert. This introductory training covered the basics of learning to read and was an important first step because, for most of our staff, this was their first introduction to the science of reading.

Following that training, approximately 15 librarians were inspired to help shape the new initiative. They joined our administrative team to form a cohort with the goal of determining what role CPL should have in supporting children as they learn to read. The cohort discussed issues of equity and access, and explored the science of reading more deeply. The cohort determined the following axioms when considering the role of the public library in supporting emerging readers:



With these axioms in mind, we connected with [Redwood Literacy](#), a Chicago-based organization focused on helping children improve their literacy skills regardless of socio-economic background or learning differences. This partnership helped us work through the large body of research to determine what was relevant to libraries and how to translate those key ideas to a library space.

Working with Redwood Literacy, we learned more about [Scarborough’s Reading Rope](#), a visual way to identify the multiple components of language comprehension and word recognition necessary to become a skilled reader. The heuristic, made by Dr. Hollis Scarborough, shows how these two key skills are interconnected and interdependent. Over time and with practice, the two key skills (and their smaller components) are woven together to lead to skilled reading. CPL worked with Redwood Literacy to create a simplified and parent-friendly representation of the reading rope.

## SOUNDING OUT WORDS

**Phonological Awareness:** hearing individual sounds in a word. Practice this by clapping out the syllables in your name or saying the sounds that make up simple words (like /c/ /a/ /t/).

**Decoding:** sounding out words. Practice this by checking out a decodable book.

**Sight Recognition:** happens over time and with practice when your brain automatically recognizes words instead of having to sound them out every time you read them.

# JUMP INTO READING: The Reading Rope

## UNDERSTANDING WHAT WORDS MEAN

**Background Knowledge:** learning about the world helps you make sense of what you are reading. Practice this by finding books that are interesting to you and your child. Read them together and enjoy!

**Vocabulary:** knowing the meaning of words helps you understand what you are reading. Reading aloud to your child and listening to audio books are a great way to learn new words.

**Grammar:** knowing how sentences are structured helps you understand what you read.

**Verbal Reasoning:** being able to respond verbally to what you read. For example, can you follow instructions to find a solution?

**Literacy Knowledge:** understanding how books work. Practice this by pointing out the parts of books you read, like the table of contents or pictures.



Developed with Redwood Literacy, CPL's representation of the Reading Rope describes the process of learning to read for educators, librarians and caregivers.

Adapted from Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis) abilities: Evidence, theory and practice. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), Handbook for research in early literacy (pp. 97-110). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Scarborough's Reading Rope helped us break down the components of reading and allowed us to think through how we wanted to support the multiple strands of learning to read in the context of a public library.

We concluded that public libraries already excel at nurturing language comprehension. Libraries strive to offer high quality programming and books that build vocabulary, background knowledge and other important language comprehension skills. However, word recognition is an area of growth for public libraries. We determined that our initiative would combine our strength in supporting language comprehension with more targeted collections, parent education resources and programming around word recognition.

The reading rope made us think of a jump rope, which inspired the name of our entire initiative: Jump Into Reading!

## Phase 2: Pilot Period

Steps in this phase:

- Coordinate with and train staff at pilot branches
- Run pilot with check-in meetings
- Evaluate successes and what needs to be changed

We chose 9 library branches across the city with different demographics to pilot our new decodable collections and parent resources.



# Phase 3: Expansion

Steps in this phase:

- Determine the number of branches to expand targeted collections and resources
- Develop a plan for system-wide Jump Into Reading supports
- Continue regular staff training on science of reading and initiative components

After the pilot phase, we adjusted and expanded targeted collections and support to 18 more branches; approximately one third of all CPL locations. The Jump Into Reading initiative also developed a system-wide footprint, and we clearly defined what materials all CPL branches can access to support emerging readers versus what additional resources are available at designated Jump Into Reading branches.

## Jump Into Reading as a System-wide Initiative

### At all CPL Branches:

#### Decodable Books

- Some decodable books, shelved with beginning readers
- Opportunity to order additional decodable books if desired

#### Resources

- CPL Jump Into Reading website

#### Programming Opportunities

- Phonological awareness/phonics activity sheets, games and kits

### Additional Resources at Jump Into Reading Branches:

#### Decodable Collection

- Boutique collection of decodable books with spine labels
- Informational signage and reader’s advisory to support collection

#### Resources

- Jump Into Reading pamphlets and other print resources

#### Programming Opportunities

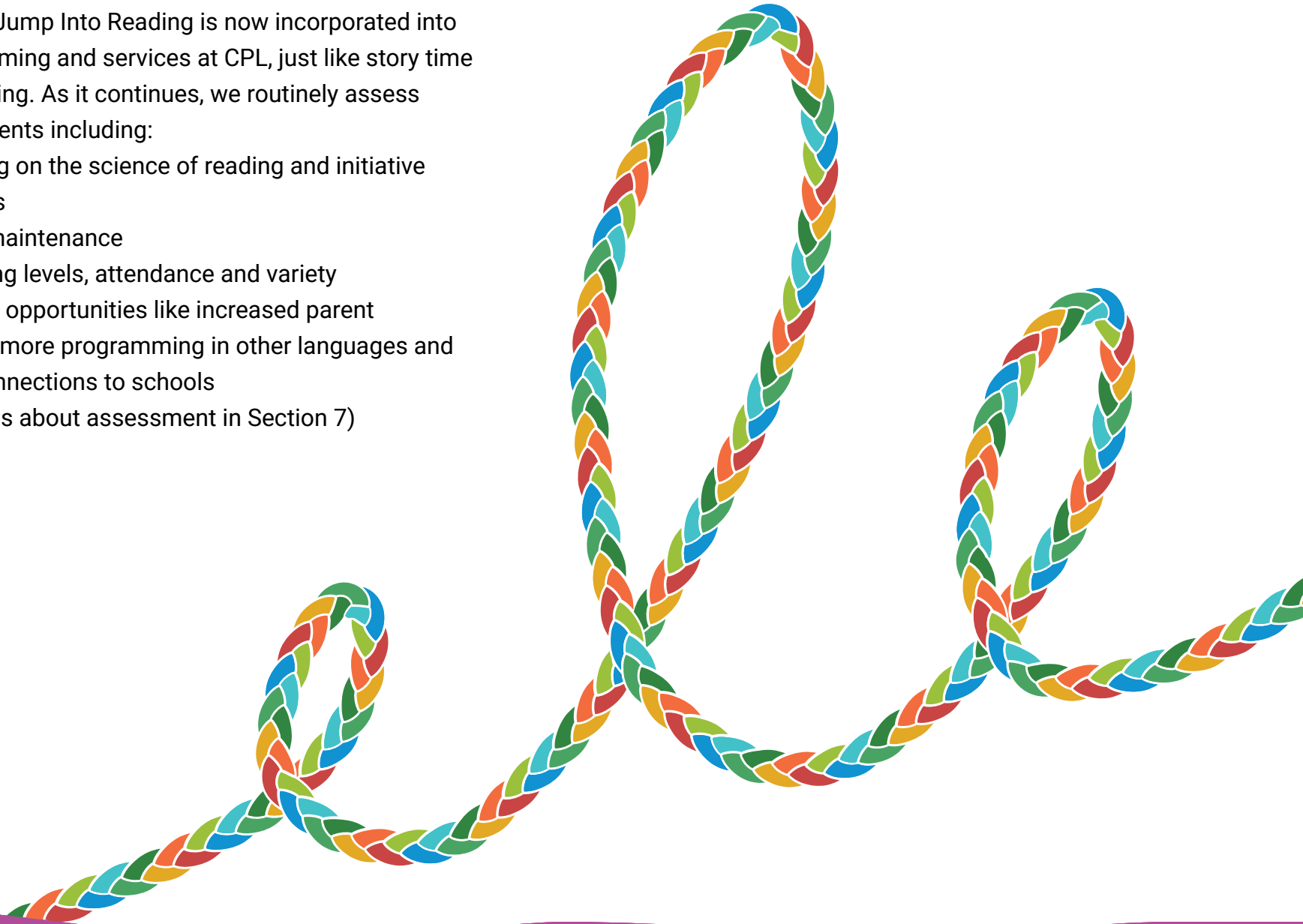
- Dedicated programming for emerging readers

## Phase 4: Sustainability

As an initiative, Jump Into Reading is now incorporated into regular programming and services at CPL, just like story time or summer reading. As it continues, we routinely assess various components including:

- Staff training on the science of reading and initiative components
- Collection maintenance
- Programming levels, attendance and variety
- New growth opportunities like increased parent workshops, more programming in other languages and stronger connections to schools

(See more details about assessment in Section 7)



## Section 3: Building Staff Knowledge Through Training

Whether training a small staff or large, there are many considerations when launching an initiative to support emerging readers. Since most public librarians are unfamiliar with the science of reading, multiple opportunities for professional development should be offered, so knowledge and understanding can deepen over time.

It is useful to train staff by leveraging many types of presenters, including literacy experts, community leaders and specialized educators. At CPL, we offered professional development that focused on the science of reading, led by local and national literacy experts. We brought in community leaders to provide training on community engagement and equity. We also partnered with local educators to offer training on programming strategies.

Additionally, professional development can take many forms, including webinars, podcasts, articles, conferences and peer-to-peer learning. We encouraged staff to listen to Emily Hanford's [Sold a Story](#) podcast, attend relevant sessions at conferences and share new ideas with peers.

### Suggested Topics for Training:

- Understanding how children learn to read and the science of reading
- Using decodable texts appropriately
- Conducting reference for emerging readers
- Offering programming for children and caregivers
- Aligning or collaborating with the local school system



## Resources for Professional Development:

- [Cox Campus](#): Developed by the Rollins Center, this adult learning platform provides equity-based resources on language and literacy.
- [Florida Center for Reading Research](#): FCRR offers background information and educator resources from an interdisciplinary research center at Florida State University.
- [National Center on Improving Literacy](#): NCIL is a national resource center that provides professional learning and support for families, educators and educational agencies.
- [The Reading League](#): This national organization with state chapters focuses on professional development opportunities and resources, including an annual conference.
- [Reading Rockets](#): This comprehensive site offers articles, videos and instructional strategies for teachers, parents, administrators, librarians and childcare providers.
- [Reading Universe](#): Featuring videos, interviews with experts, courses and articles, this resource provides a range of strategies to support reading and writing instruction.
- [University of Florida Literacy Institute](#): Featuring the Foundations Toolkit, UFLI offers a comprehensive reading curriculum, resources, and professional learning.

## Lessons Learned:

- Train early, train often and train in multiple ways! This is a complex topic, and we found that multiple training sessions helped our staff more confidently understand it.
- While the science of reading is likely a new area of staff training, many of the practical applications are familiar and complimentary to current practices in children’s librarianship.
- Local literacy organizations are a great resource—they can serve as a thought partner, train staff or collaborate on programs and resources.
- It’s ok to not be an expert.



## Reflecting on Staff Knowledge:

- How familiar are your librarians with how children learn to read? Are there specific areas you would like to focus on?
- In what ways can you build staff knowledge for the science of reading? What current training methods can be leveraged to advance staff knowledge? What new methods might you consider?
- Who can help you train staff? Is there a community partner you can work with? Do you have funding to bring an expert?
- How does your staff handle change and new ideas? Have you launched new initiatives or had large-scale changes in programming or services? What can you do to make this new information feel accessible and staff feel supported?

## Section 4: Collection Development

### **What are Decodable Books?**

Like most public libraries, CPL's children's collection contains many books that support language comprehension, but until recently, didn't offer books specifically designed to help with word recognition.

Decodable books encourage children to use their knowledge of letters and their corresponding sounds to read words. They help readers apply the phonics skills they have learned, rather than using pictures or context clues to read unknown words. This is important since children's knowledge of letter-sound relationships to sound out words is a key predictor of future reading success.

In decodable books, children encounter many words based on a common letter-sound pattern. Each decodable book features a specific pattern. These patterns build from simple to more complex, so decodable books differ in their phonetic focus and level of difficulty. Because the purpose of decodable books is to practice learned phonics skills, it is important that the phonics skill in the selected decodable book is matched to the skills the child has learned.

While decodable books are a great tool to practice reading skills, improve fluency and build confidence, emerging readers should also be exposed to many books that help develop their understanding of language. At CPL, we recommend pairing decodables with books that help build vocabulary, background knowledge and other elements of language comprehension.

# Decodable Books

Decodable books are a great tool to practice reading skills and build confidence. They help new readers sound out and decode words.



Informational sign placed near boutique collections of decodable books.

# Developing a Decodable Book Collection

Currently, all CPL branches have decodable books, but the collections do not look the same at every location. Some branches have a small boutique collection of decodable books which are shelved in a special section, with signage and related Jump Into Reading materials. Branches that do not have this boutique collection have some decodable books as part of the Beginning Readers collection.

Series in our boutique decodable book collection include:

- [Little Blossom Stories](#), [In Bloom](#), [Code Breakers](#) (Cherry Lake)
- [My Decodable Readers](#) (Crabtree, Little Honey)
- [The Decodables](#) (Norwood House)
- [Dandelion Readers](#) (Phonic Books)
- [Meg and Greg Books](#) (Orca Books)
- [Bob Books](#) (Scholastic)



# DECODABLE

## Classification Label Guidance



Decodable books are for beginning readers, but not all beginning readers are decodable.

### LOOK FOR THE LABEL!



**DECODABLE**  
Supports early readers building phonics and decoding skills.



Decodable beginning readers have text that focuses on the **phonetic code** and includes words that follow specific patterns.



Decodable beginning readers support new or struggling readers and encourage use of **phonics knowledge** and **decoding skills**.



Decodable readers methodically develop reading skills by teaching letter patterns in a **specific order**.



Instruction builds from **simple** skills/syllables to **complex/multisyllabic blends**.

### A SYSTEMATIC PATH TO READING SUCCESS



**Simple Skills**  
CVC words,  
short vowels



**Early Patterns**  
blends, digraphs,  
long vowels



**More Complex**  
vowel teams,  
r-controlled,  
diphthongs



**Multisyllabic and Advanced**  
multisyllabic words,  
complex blends



**STRONGER READERS, STRONGER FUTURES**

CPL's decodable book classification guidance.

# Considerations When Selecting Decodable Books:

## 1. Decodability

- Are the majority of the words in the book decodable? (Should be at least 64%)
- Is there a clear target letter-sound pattern that is repeated throughout the book?
- Does the text encourage decoding skills as opposed to the use of repeated sentence patterns, context clues or pictures to figure out unknown words?

## 2. Readability

- Does the book make sense to a young reader? Is it engaging?
- Does word choice and language structure allow for understanding?

## 3. Diversity

- Is the book inclusive of a diverse range of characters (in terms of race, gender, ability, etc.)?
- Does the book appropriately represent a range of characters and perspectives?

## 4. Layout and Illustrations

- Are the text size, font and placement of words appropriate for emerging readers?
- Are the illustrations high-quality and interesting?

## 5. Durability

- Is the book flimsy?
- Will it hold up over time?

# Organizing and Shelving the Collection

CPL's boutique collection of decodable books is organized into 5 main categories, starting from simple to more complex letter-sound patterns. In partnership with experts at Redwood Literacy, we intentionally developed these 5 categories for a library environment. While not as granular as a phonics sequence used in a more formal instructional setting, the 5 categories allow us to quickly help patrons find an appropriate decodable book.



## CPL's Decodable Book Categories

Category	Description	Examples
<b>Consonant-Vowel-Consonant (CVC)</b>	Words that have one short vowel sandwiched between two consonants.	cat, pig, mop
<b>Blends and Digraphs</b>	<p>Blends have two (or three) consonants that you blend together into one sound.</p> <p>Digraphs are two consonants that together represent one new sound, like sh, th and ch.</p>	<p>skip (/sk/ is the blend), fast (/st/ is the blend)</p> <p>ship, chat, bath</p>
<b>Vowel-E</b>	Words with the pattern vowel + consonant + e. Words with this pattern usually have the vowel make its long sound and the e is silent.	bike, lake, slime, hope
<b>R-Controlled Vowels and Vowel Teams</b>	<p>Words with a vowel + r. Sometimes this is called “bossy r” because the “r” takes over and makes the vowel make a new sound.</p> <p>Vowel teams are two or more vowels together that make a sound. There are many teams with different rules. Sometimes vowel teams also contain consonants to create a vowel sound like /ow/ in throw.</p>	<p>car, dirt, turn, storm</p> <p>seed, pain, say, boot</p>
<b>Multisyllabic Words</b>	Words with more than one syllable that can be read in chunks.	muffin, swimmer, eating



Decodable book shelving at CPL's Logan Square Branch.

We select titles to support each of our 5 main skill categories. This process varies for different decodable series, since there is no standard scope and sequence that publishers use. We use the available publisher information and also read through the books to determine the appropriate skill category for each one. We keep track of all decodable series, titles and corresponding skills on a spreadsheet that is regularly updated and accessible to all staff.

When shelving the boutique decodable collection, most branches use color-coded bins to organize the titles into the 5 skill categories. Correlating colored stickers are placed on the books, along with a [decodable spine label](#). These labels help patrons browse the books to find appropriate titles as well as help staff easily reshelve.

We also have Jump Into Reading signs and Decodable Book signs and a display of print materials.



# Providing Reference Support

In addition to signage, we provide other support to guide patrons in finding, selecting and using decodable books. We developed the following tools:

- [Book Selection Tool](#)

This double-sided 8.5" x 11" resource helps patrons understand decodable books and choose appropriate titles. One side gives information on how to use a decodable book and provides an introduction to the progression of skills. The other side has an optional simple activity that guides caregivers in determining which skill category would be a good starting point for their child.

- [Jump Into Reading Pamphlet](#)

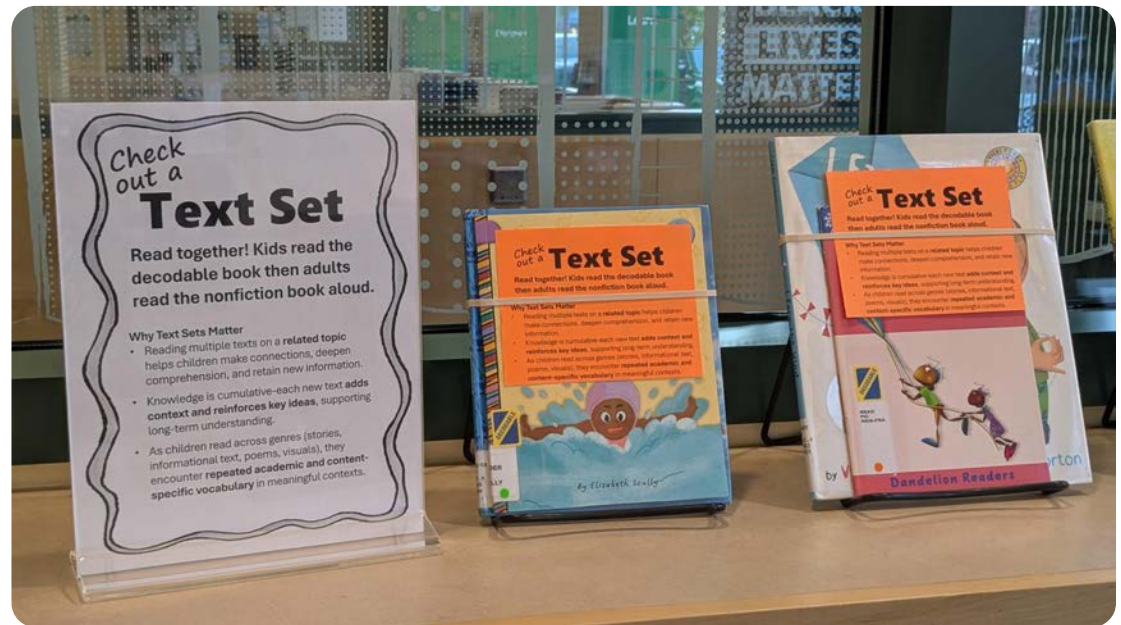
Based on Scarborough's Reading Rope, this brochure provides background information on how children learn to read.

- **Reader's Advisory and Reference Support Script**

This [reference resource](#) for library staff helps answer common questions, such as "Can you help me find level D books?" and "How can I help my child learn to read?"

- **Text Sets**

Based on research that reading multiple titles on the same topic improves reading comprehension, we offer "[text sets](#)." These are thematic book bundles that combine decodable books with picture books, informational texts and other books that can be read with a caregiver.



A text set display at the CPL's West Town Branch.

## **Remember: Reading Comprehension = Word Recognition x Language Comprehension**

Decodable books are useful for a short period of time, when children are building their word recognition skills. Because they serve such a specific purpose, decodable books may lack dynamic vocabulary, syntax, characters and narrative. It is crucial to also support language comprehension by sharing books with rich vocabulary, complex narrative and interesting language structures. We always encourage caregivers to read engaging and interest-driven books aloud with their child. We also highlight our growing collection of Wonderbooks, VOX Books and audiobooks as another way for children to access rich stories.

## **Lessons Learned**

- Decodable books that focus on CVC words are the most checked out category at CPL, likely because caregivers are looking to support their children as they begin the process of learning to read.
- There are constantly new series to assess, without any standard criteria for what can be marketed as decodable or supporting emerging readers.
- You don't need a ton of decodable books—they serve a specific purpose for a short time in the learning to read process.
- Decodable books are often flimsy and not durable. Shelving them in bins helps keep them organized, but they may need to be replaced more regularly than other books.

## **Reflecting on Collection Development:**

- What might librarians need to know about the purpose of a decodable book collection and how to communicate about it with patrons?
- How might you go about organizing and shelving a decodable book collection? If you have multiple branches, do the decodable collections all look the same?
- What types of reference support might patrons need to effectively engage with the decodable book collection?
- Who is responsible for maintaining the collection? How can you keep up with new series?

## Section 5: Connecting Caregivers to Resources



A parent and child using Jump Into Reading resources at CPL's Back of the Yards Branch.

In addition to library collections and programming, finding and connecting families to a variety of resources to support learning to read is important. CPL shares information and resources for parents and caregivers on [CPL's Jump Into Reading website](#) and with printed informational handouts in branches (see Section 4 for more tips on providing reference).

### Considerations:

When evaluating whether or not a resource is appropriate to share with families, consider:

1. **Cost:** We promote free or low-cost options to ensure resources are accessible to all patrons.
2. **Quality:** We review potential resources to ensure that they are high-quality and from trustworthy sources.
3. **Accessibility:** We think about our patrons' language needs, abilities and other special needs when sharing resources.

## Resources Shared on the CPL Website

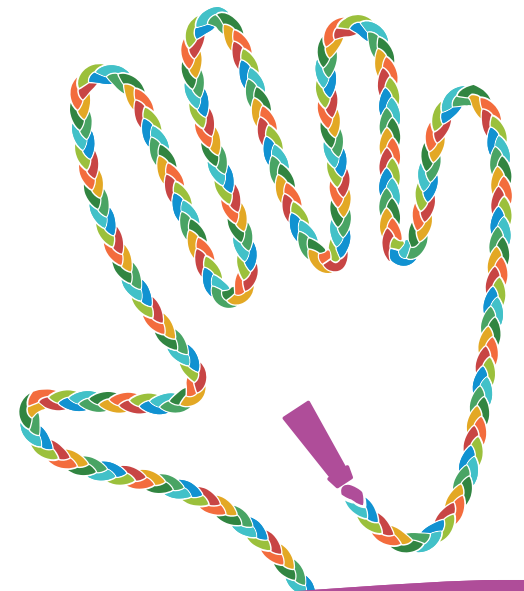
As part of the Jump Into Reading website, patrons can access information about resources that are available at the library, online and in Chicago neighborhoods. The [Resources to Support Learning to Read](#) page features 4 main sections:

- **Resources available at CPL**  
Includes decodable book lists, books with audio features (WonderBooks and Vox Books), audiobooks, tips for shared reading and links to programs for emerging readers.
- **Family Resources to Support Learning to Read**  
Features online resources families can use together, such as [Reading Buddies](#) and [Teach My Kid to Read Beginning Reading Instruction](#).
- **Tutoring Resources**  
Links to local opportunities for direct support.
- **Resources for Children Who Need Extra Support**  
Offers resources to help caregivers navigate when their child needs special services or supports, including information from Chicago Public Schools, [Family Resource Center on Disabilities](#) and [Bookshare](#).

## Handouts Shared in CPL Branches:

In collaboration with expert partners and based on patron need, CPL offers print handouts that are specifically designed for caregiver education. They include:

- [Jump Into Reading pamphlet](#)
- Parent handouts developed by the National Center on Improving Literacy:  
[Is Your Child Having Trouble Reading? Warning Signs and a Checklist](#)  
[Understanding Dyslexia: Myth vs. Facts](#)  
[Understanding Dyslexia: Signs to Watch for by Age](#)



## Assistive Technology

Assistive technology supports independence, accessibility and equitable access to information. Public libraries play an important role in ensuring that all patrons, including individuals with reading difficulties or disabilities, can fully access library resources, programs and services. Librarians should be familiar with common assistive technology tools such as audiobooks, screen readers, text-to-speech software, speech-to-text programs and closed captioning features. By doing so, they will be prepared to guide children and families toward available resources, explain basic functionality and create a welcoming environment where they feel comfortable asking for support.

### Assistive Technology Resources for Librarians and Patrons

- [Understood.org](#): Resources about learning differences, reading support tools and accommodations for children and adults
- [Bookshare](#): Accessible ebooks and reading materials for individuals with print disabilities, including dyslexia, visual impairments and physical disabilities
- [Learning Ally](#): Audiobook and literacy support services designed for struggling readers and students with learning disabilities
- [CAST](#): Guidance on creating accessible learning environments and supporting diverse learners
- [American Library Association Accessibility Resources](#): Accessibility guidance and best practices specifically for libraries
- [National Center on Accessible Educational Materials \(AEM Center\)](#): Information about accessible formats, assistive technology and inclusive educational materials
- [Microsoft Accessibility](#) and [Apple Accessibility](#): Overviews of built-in accessibility features commonly available on computers, tablets and phones that patrons may already use

## Lessons Learned:

- Recognize resources evolve and seek out new ones as they become available.
- Stay connected in the community to help identify new resources for families.
- While it can be difficult to find free local services that support children learning to read, we believe it is important to focus on accessible resources for families.
- Library staff do not need to be experts on every resource and tool, but they should know where to direct families for reliable information.

## Reflecting on Connecting Families to Resources:

- Who are the families you serve and what are their information needs related to how children learn to read? If you're unsure, how might you find out? Are the resources accessible to and reflective of all families you serve?
- What are the current ways you connect families with literacy resources? Are these ways reaching all families? If not, what are other tactics and channels you might consider?
- Do the resources include information on how children learn to read? How might they be enhanced to do so?



## Section 6: Programming

At CPL, library programs for emerging readers and their caregivers include evidence-based practices to support learning to read. We are careful not to promote this programming as teaching reading, but rather as helping children build the skills needed to become fluent readers. We focus on phonological awareness activities and phonics games to support word recognition, as well as activities that support language comprehension.

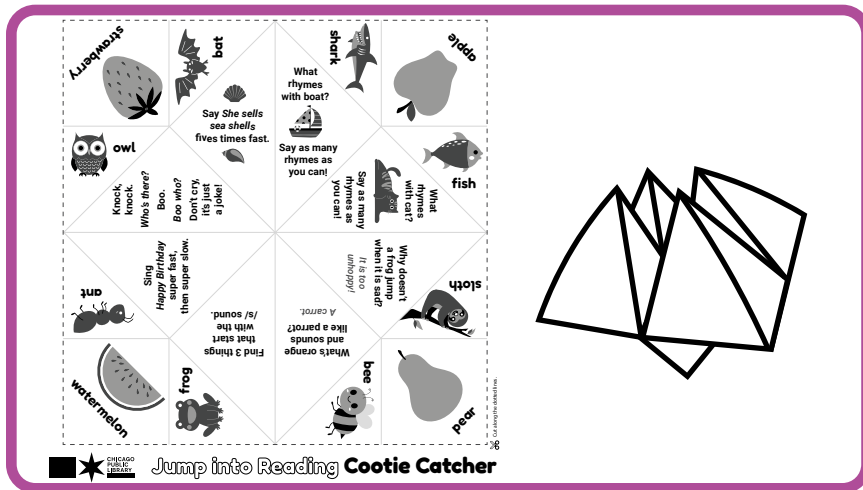
### A Note on Early Literacy Programming

Because CPL's story times incorporate ECRR, the building blocks of early literacy are already present in our programs for babies, toddlers and preschoolers. However, after learning more about the science of reading, we are more intentional in how we support phonological awareness, letter knowledge and language comprehension in early literacy programs. Two specific examples are:

- **Letter sound pronunciation:** When talking about letters in story time, we make sure to point out that printed letters are the visual links that we pair with speech sounds. It is important to model the correct pronunciation of letter sounds during story times. [Our favorite video](#) modeling each letter's most commonly taught sound, from the Rollins Center, does this very effectively, and also provides some additional tips.
- **Supporting understanding:** Knowing the importance of language comprehension, we are now more explicit in important skills such as exploring new vocabulary words and asking questions about different elements of the story. We share [useful tips](#) for how parents can read with their children at every age.

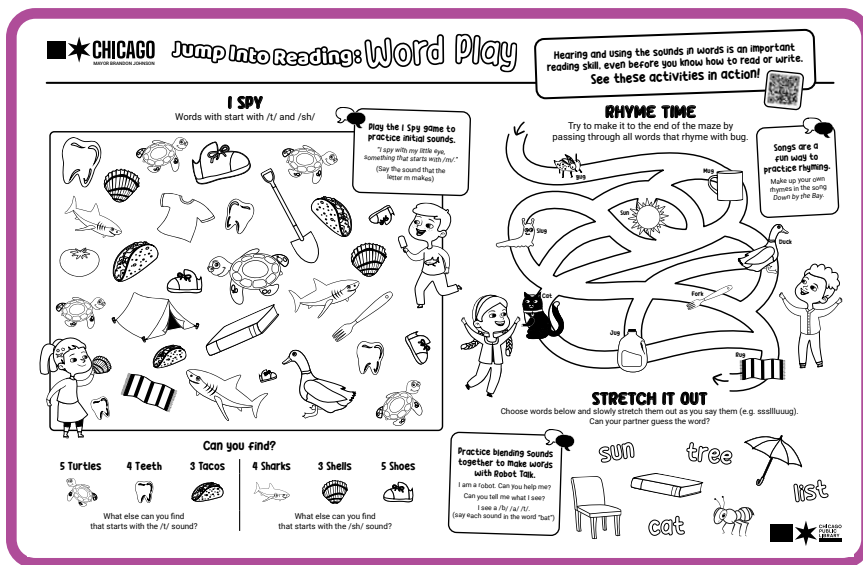
### Activities for Emerging Readers

CPL developed a variety of new ways to engage with children learning to read (and their families). We created two printed activities children can use in the branch or take home to reinforce phonological awareness and phonics skills.



CPL's *Jump Into Reading Cootie Catcher* activity encourages children to explore rhymes, syllables and sounds.

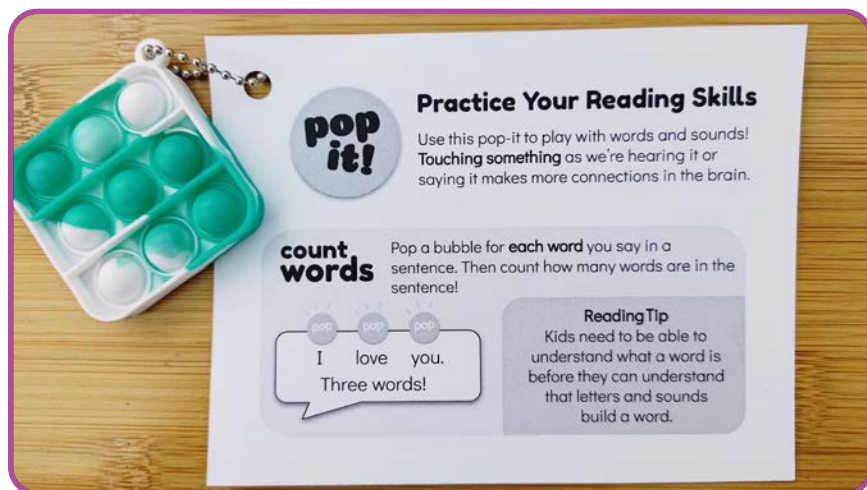
The [\*Jump Into Reading Cootie Catcher\*](#) is similar to the classic paper-folding game, but with a phonological twist. First, children move the cootie catcher based on the number of syllables in a word. Then, they move it based on the number of the sounds in a word. The activities on the inside all focus on playing with sounds and rhymes. We also print a version in Spanish called [\*Juego de palabras: Comecocos\*](#).



Front page of CPL's *Word Play* activity sheet.

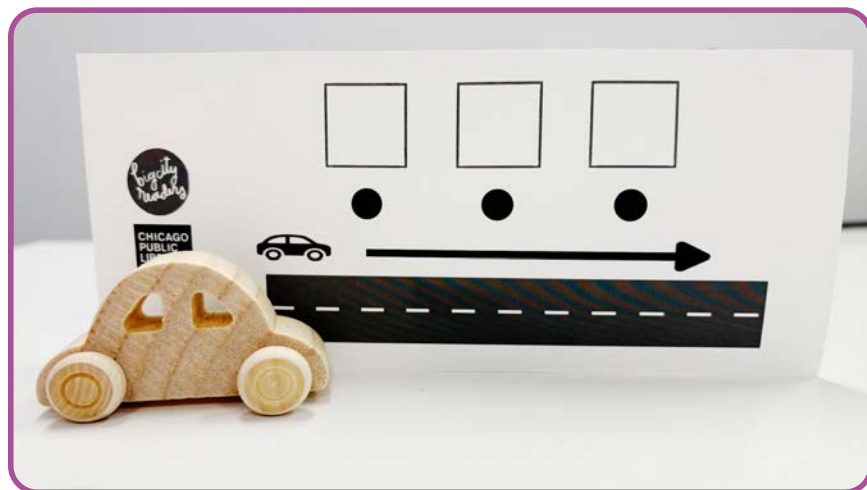
[\*Word Play activity sheets\*](#) are 11" x 17" pages that offer ways for families to engage with phonological awareness and phonics activities together. The sheets explore rhymes, syllables, phonemes and blending. They also connect families to other *Jump Into Reading* resources.

CPL also developed **take-home kits** with materials to support playing with phonological awareness and phonics skills at home. We worked with a local literacy organization [Big City Readers](#) to develop simple activities using household items.



*Pop-it! kits are a fun way to practice reading words.*

Our Pop-it! kit is the most popular and works well for a wide range of ages. Children practice different phonological awareness skills by popping a bubble for each word they hear in a sentence or each syllable or sound they hear in a word. We attach a card to each pop-it with simple instructions for both activities and a link to more resources online. This kit is also translated into Spanish.



*CPL's Word Race kit is an interactive way to practice blending sounds into words.*

The [Word Race](#) kit supports blending sounds into words using a toy car and a road themed [blending strip](#). Focusing on CVC words, this is a great activity for very new readers.

## Programs for Emerging Readers

CPL has also found success hosting a variety of intentional programming for emerging readers and their caregivers. We love when parents join in—it is a great way to model activities that can be done at home.

Our [Story Time for Big Kids](#) programs are a perfect example of this. As children begin learning to read, they still enjoy (and benefit from) hearing stories read aloud. By making some slight adaptations to a traditional story time, we offer engaging programs that support phonological awareness and phonics. Typically, these programs only feature one longer book read aloud, plus a variety of group songs and activities. They end with open play activities that also support phonological awareness and phonics.

### Tips for Story Time for Big Kids:

- Use a welcome/name song as a phonological awareness activity.
- While reading the story, support language comprehension by asking questions about the story and exploring new vocabulary words.
- There are lots of resources for finding group games and activities that support phonological awareness. CPL created our own set of [quick-reference cards](#) with a variety of games. Many of those games were inspired by [Reading Rockets](#) and the [Florida Center for Reading Research](#).



## Other Emerging Reader Programs:

- **Book Buddies Programs:** A fluent reader (such as an older child, teenager or parent) is paired with an emerging reader to practice reading skills.
- **Milk and Cookies Book Club:** In this early reader book club, students in grades K to 3 read a book together, talk about the big ideas and do a group activity related to the book.
- **Beginning Reader Play Programs:** Library staff lead group games and offer open play with materials that support emerging reading skills.



Emerging reader program at CPL's Thomas Hughes Children's Library.

## Phonological Awareness/Phonics Games and Toys

We have purchased a variety of educational games and toys to support open play in emerging reader programming. These include:

- Magnetic letter sets with small dry erase boards for individual play (we like the JoyCat brand)
- Splat! Word Games from the Teacher Created Resources brand
- Rhyming flash card sets and rhyming games like bingo or memory
- Phonics games from Learning Resources like the Pop for Blends popcorn game and Snap It Up Phonics.



Some of our favorite toys and games include Learning Resources Pop It games series, JoyCat's magnetic letter kit and the Splat word games.

## Programs with Community Partners

Parents, educators and community leaders are strongly invested in supporting literacy initiatives, and many communities have exciting opportunities for program partnerships. We found that we could reach even more families by looking for ways to partner with organizations outside the library.

We found a great partner who shares our goals in the [Black Boy Literacy Campaign](#), a church-based literacy organization that helps boys on the south side of Chicago grow their literacy skills. CPL provides special programming and materials to support their work, resulting in a deeper connection between the participants and their neighborhood libraries. This partnership also includes the Chicago Chapter of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, who collaborate on special booklists, events and resources to serve the families. This partnership allows CPL to respond to specific community needs, serve families outside of the branch and welcome new patrons into the library.



Black Boy Literacy Campaign display at CPL's Walker branch.



A girl reads one of CPL's decodable books to a trained reading assistance dog at CPL's South Shore branch.

For programming in our branches, we partner with [SitStayRead](#), a non-profit organization that brings trained Certified Reading Assistance Dogs to libraries. During the programs, children engage in literacy activities and read one-on-one to a dog. By practicing reading in a relaxed and supportive environment, children build confidence in their reading abilities.



Book buddies at Chicago Public Library's Thomas Hughes Children's Library.

## Programming for Parents

When caregivers attend emerging reader programs with their child, they often have follow-up questions. CPL has hosted caregiver workshops that offer information and suggestions for how to support a child's growing literacy skills.

Our first set of these workshops for caregivers were adults-only and led by community literacy experts. These programs experienced low attendance because parents often have their children with them when they're at the library, so we adapted them into informative programs for parents with literacy activities for children happening in the room, too. These programs have the benefit of modeling strategies for parents to use with their children at home. This blended model is the most practical model for patrons, but it requires careful planning and promotion. We are excited to be able to enhance these programs soon with presentation materials developed by NCIL ([slide deck](#) and [facilitator guide](#)).



## Lessons Learned

- As with all aspects of this initiative, you don't need to feel like an expert to be more explicit in how you support programming for emerging readers. We found that offering professional development that included opportunities to practice these activities helps build confidence.
- Because children learn to read at different ages, don't be too specific in specifying audience age for these programs. Younger children who are learning to read, or older children who want to join in, should feel welcome.
- CPL struggles when building an audience for adults-only programs for parents and caregivers. Our best success when offering informative programs for caregivers has come when children are also welcome.
- These programs are fun!

## Reflecting on Programming:

- Do you currently have programming for emerging readers aligned to the science of reading? If so, who does it serve? If not, what might be considered?
- What literacy activities currently exist for emerging readers at the library? Do they appropriately align to the science of reading? Do they need to be made more intentional or explicit? What new activities might you consider?
- Who do you or might you partner with to offer literacy activities or programming for emerging readers and their families?
- How can you build confidence in library staff to deliver these programs?



## Section 7: Continuous Program Assessment


As with any library service, program or collection, it is important to continuously assess and make necessary improvements. At CPL, we are often rethinking different elements of Jump Into Reading, to make sure they are effective and impactful. We use a variety of strategies and tools to support continuous program assessment.

### Theory of Action and Logic Model

A theory of action helps describe how specific actions will lead to a target outcome. It is typically displayed in a series of if/then statements. Our Jump Into Reading Theory of Action is:

*IF* Chicago Public Library staff: understand evidence-based literacy practices to support children, including those with reading difficulties and disabilities; *THEN* they can:

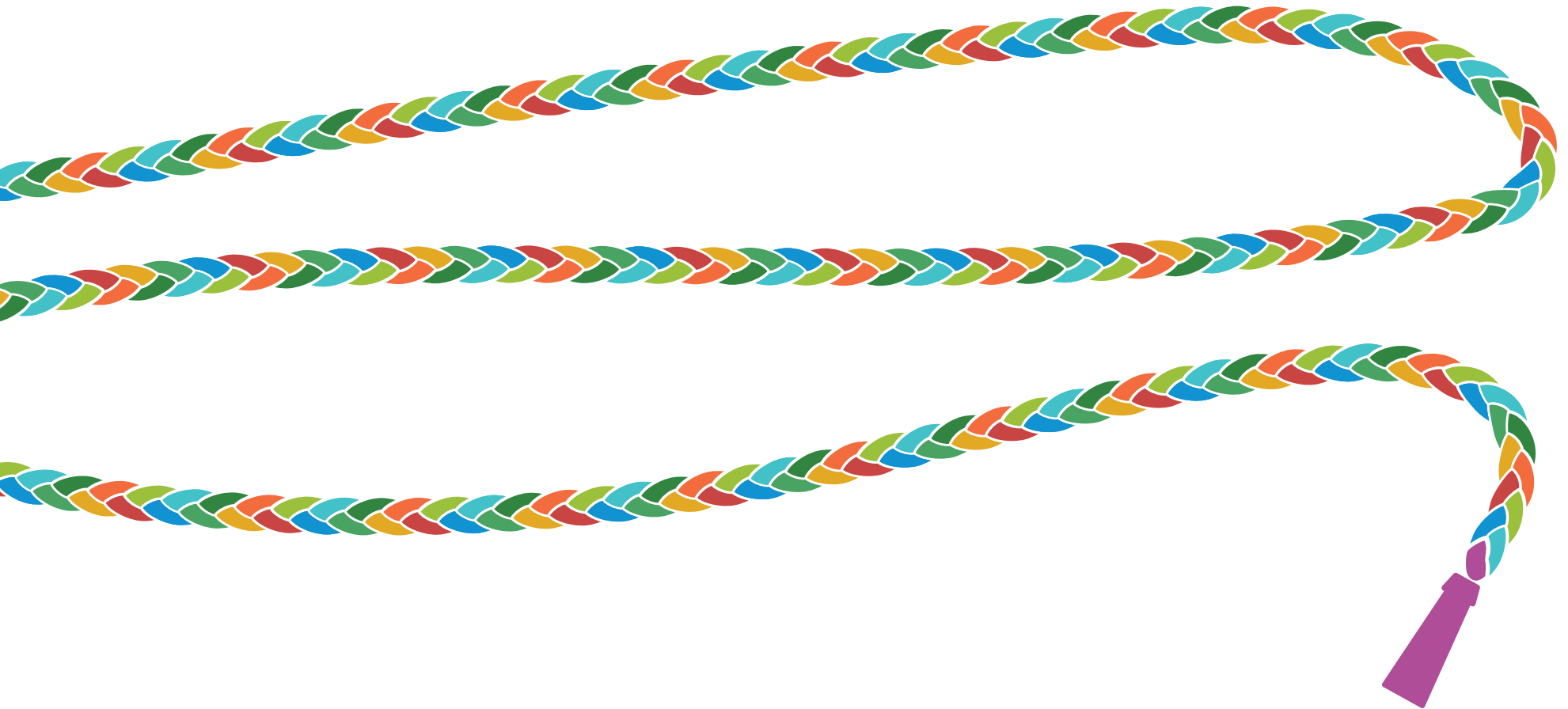
1. effectively communicate with caregivers about:
  - a. the parts of literacy,
  - b. how children learn to read, and
  - c. why children might struggle;
2. successfully assist caregivers in:
  - a. supporting their child's literacy learning at home,
  - b. asking schools questions about their child's literacy learning, and
  - c. connecting literacy assets, information and resources among home, school and the community; and
3. successfully connect caregivers with:
  - a. assistive technology to help their child access literacy experiences;
  - b. literacy activities that expand their child's learning opportunities;
  - c. various types of books, including decodables, matched to their child's literacy development; and
  - d. library, school and community resources to support their child's literacy development.



*IF* caregivers: access appropriate resources to support their child’s literacy development in and out of school; *THEN* they can:

1. Effectively support their child’s transition from an emerging to a fluent reader.

The theory of action leads to the development of a logic model that shows the relationships among resources, activities and outcomes. Logic models are an incredibly useful tool to help develop program goals, determine the resources and activities needed to reach desired outcomes and guide the evaluation of an initiative. The Jump Into Reading [logic model](#) is used internally to guide project improvement and data collection, and shared externally with stakeholders, partners and funders.



# CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY JUMP INTO READING

Strengthening Library Capacity. Empowering Caregivers. Advancing Literacy.

## LOGIC MODEL

### THE INITIATIVE

Jump Into Reading supports emerging readers and their caregivers as they build foundational skills and grow into confident, fluent readers.

### JUMP INTO READING SUPPORTS FAMILIES THROUGH:



#### Staff Knowledge

How children learn to read and how to use decodable with families.



#### Programming

Activity sheets & games, book clubs, kits, and family literacy programs.



#### Books & Collections

Decodable books and curated collections, plus reader's advisory.



#### Caregiver Education & Resources

Website, pamphlets, and a book selection tool.

### NEED

**Strong readers start with informed caregivers and capable libraries.**

Libraries need the capacity, resources, and support to deliver high-quality literacy programming grounded in the Science of Reading.

Caregivers need guidance to understand how children learn to read and why some struggle, so they can support their child's growth.



### INPUTS

City of Chicago Funds

Chicago Public Library Foundation

Chicago Public Schools and Pre-K Settings

National Center on Improving Literacy (NCIL)

Redwood Literacy

Literacy Programming Expertise and Research

### ACTIVITIES

#### VET, PURCHASE & CIRCULATE DECODABLE BOOKS

- Carefully select high-quality decodable books.
- Circle books and encourage shared reading with children and caregivers.

#### CREATE THE JUMP INTO READING WEBSITE & MATERIALS

- Develop an engaging website with tools and resources.
- Expand caregivers' knowledge and access to support reading at home.

#### DELIVER INTENTIONAL LITERACY PROGRAMMING

- Provide programming for children and caregivers aligned to the Science of Reading.

### OUTCOMES

#### SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

Increased staff knowledge of effective tools, resources, and ways to communicate about reading.

Improved staff ability to support caregivers and communicate how children learn to read.

Increased caregiver understanding of reading development, common reading difficulties, and available resources.

#### LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

Stronger caregiver engagement in literacy learning and use of library resources.

Increased use of decodable books and participation in Science of Reading's aligned programming.

Improved caregiver ability to support their child's literacy learning at home, ask questions, and use local resources.

### IMPACT

Caregivers effectively support emerging readers.

Children successfully transition to fluent reading.

Public libraries expand awareness and replicate successful literacy practices in their communities.



Jump Into Reading Logic Model

# Evaluation Measures

CPL gathers a variety of data to measure project outcomes, including:

- Circulation data for decodable books
- Program attendance
- Quantity of print material distributed
- Caregiver surveys
- Staff surveys
- Staff training attendance and feedback

Evaluation domains for the Jump Into Reading Initiative:

- Increased knowledge of children’s literacy development and evidence-based literacy practices
- Increased awareness of and access to resources for families or to support families
- Increased confidence in communicating about and supporting children’s literacy development or helping families to do so

The following questions serve as the basis for evaluating CPL’s Jump Into Reading initiative and guide the development of survey questions:

- To what extent have staff increased their understanding of evidence-based literacy practices to screen and instructionally support students?
- To what extent have staff increased their ability to effectively communicate with caregivers about the parts of literacy, how children learn to read and why children might struggle?
- To what extent have staff increased their ability to successfully assist caregivers in supporting their child’s literacy learning at home, asking schools questions about their child’s literacy learning and connecting literacy assets, information and resources among home, school and the community?
- To what extent have staff increased their ability to successfully connect caregivers with assistive technology to help their child access literacy experiences; literacy activities that expand their child’s learning opportunities; various types of books,

including decodables, matched to their child's literacy development; and library, school and community resources to support their child's literacy development?

- To what extent have caregivers increased their ability to access appropriate resources from CPL to support their child's literacy development in and out of school?
- To what extent have caregivers increased their ability to effectively support their child's transition from an emerging to a fluent reader as a result of accessing these resources?

Sample caregiver survey items:

- I can find resources from Chicago Public Library to help me support my child's literacy development.
- I use resources from Chicago Public Library to help me support my child's literacy development.
- I better understand how children learn to read and common reading difficulties because of Chicago Public Library resources or programming.
- I feel more confident in my ability to support my child's literacy development in and out of school because of Chicago Public Library resources.

Sample staff survey items:

- I am more knowledgeable about tools and resources available to me to more effectively communicate with families about how children learn to read.
- I know where to find tools and resources available to me to more effectively communicate with families about how children learn to read.
- I feel more confident in my ability to effectively communicate with families about how children learn to read and common reading difficulties because of these tools and resources.

## Section 8: Conclusion

Jump Into Reading has been an incredibly meaningful and successful initiative at CPL, both for staff and patrons. Evidence-based practices for supporting emerging readers have been a game changer and a much needed complement to our early literacy and school-aged services. We have been able to deepen, enhance and expand the work we were already doing. And there are ripple effects beyond what we anticipated! We have exciting plans for increased multi-generational family literacy programming, resources for children learning to read in Spanish ([Lánzate hacia la lectura](#)) and more accessible resources for patrons of all ages and abilities.

One of the biggest surprises has been how rewarding and enjoyable this work is. Understanding the science of reading and exploring the role it plays in children's librarianship resonates with staff. Programming with emerging readers is so special—you can see light bulbs go on as children strengthen their reading skills, from identifying phonemes to blending sounds together to reading written words. Plus, parents are so appreciative when they learn about resources available for their children.





## Jump Into Reading in Action

Ami, an aunt of a 5-year-old boy that lives on Chicago's West Side, reached out to a children's librarian. She shared that the boy's mother has dyslexia and he struggles with some learning difficulties. Ami wanted to help get him a strong start on his journey of learning to read and asked:

*"Do you have any materials that can help my nephew learn to read?"*

Five years ago, this would have been difficult to answer, but now it is one of our favorite questions! CPL has staff that are trained in the science of reading and can share resources to help caregivers like Ami understand the learning to read process and what to do when extra support is needed. Branches have books that will support developing word recognition and language comprehension skills. CPL offers a variety of programs specifically designed for emerging readers and their caregivers. Now, library staff can confidently respond to questions like Ami's:

*"Yes, we can help! The library has lots of books, resources and programs to support your emerging reader. Let's get started!"*

Public libraries can support learning to read in an equitable, meaningful and joyful way. We hope the Jump Into Reading framework and the resources throughout this guide are useful as you develop your own initiative. Different strategies work for different systems, so feel free to use the components that help you! You can email [story@chipublic.org](mailto:story@chipublic.org) with any questions or comments.

# References and Resources

*About reading.* Reading Rockets. (n.d.). <https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/about-reading>

Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. (n.d.). *The Research Building Blocks for teaching children to read Third edition.* Put Reading First. <https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/PRFbooklet.pdf>

Cheatham, J. P., & Allor, J. H. (2012). The influence of decodability in early reading text on Reading achievement: A review of the evidence. *Reading and Writing*, 25(9), 2223–2246. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-011-9355-2>

George and Barbara Bush Foundation (2026). *Why literacy.* Accessed 5/1/26  
<https://www.barbarabush.org/why-literacy/>

Gough, P. and Tunmer, W. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education*, 7, 6–10

Hanford, E. (Host). (2022–present). *Sold a story: How teaching kids to read went so wrong* [Audio podcast]. APM Reports.  
<https://features.apmreports.org/sold-a-story/>

Lupo, S. M., Berry, A., Thacker, E., Sawyer, A., & Merritt, J. (2020). Rethinking text sets to support knowledge building and interdisciplinary learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 73(4), 513–524.

National Center on Improving Literacy (n.d.). Retrieved from [improvingliteracy.org](https://improvingliteracy.org)

National Panel Reading Report. (2000) *Teaching children to read.* Washington, D.C. National Institute of Child Health and Development.

Neuman, S. B., Moland, N., & Celano, D. (2017). *Bringing literacy home: An evaluation of the every child ready to read program*. Every Child Ready to Read.

<https://everychildreadytoread.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017-ECRR-Report-Final.pdf>

The Reading League. (2022). *Science of reading: Defining guide* (2nd ed.). The Reading League.

Scarborough, H. S. (2001). *Connecting early language and literacy to later reading (dis) abilities: Evidence, theory and practice*. In S. Neuman & D. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook for research in early literacy* (pp. 97-110). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

University of Florida. (n.d.). *UFLI Foundations Toolbox*. UF Literacy Institute.

<https://ufli.education.ufl.edu/foundations/toolbox/>

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1992–2024 Reading Assessments.

The World Literacy Foundation (2018). *The Economic and social cost of illiteracy*, accessed 5/1/25

<https://educationoutloud.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/TheEconomicSocialCostofIlliteracy-2-3a9.pdf>