

WONDER WORDS

Using Wonder Words in
a Homeschooling Environment



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Home education is a growing movement in Australia with increasing evidence to suggest the positive outcomes on academic performance and social, emotional and psychological development are greater than in the traditional school system (NHERI, 2022). Research also shows that there is no correlation between a home schooling parent needing a teaching qualification in order for their child to achieve highly (Conejeros-Solar & Smith, 2021). That is why Wonder Words has been designed from the ground up to support all Australian students and parents. It is simple to use and so effective that your child will be reading their first book by the end of the week!

Research was front of mind when building Wonder Words so not only is our program easy to follow but it is also curriculum aligned and based on proven scientific research that education departments, academics and educators all around the world agree, is best practice. Wonder Words is a unique reading program built on high frequency words and synthetic phonics. Synthetic phonics is a systematic approach to teaching the 44 sounds of spoken English, along with the letter combinations used to read and write them. Think about the letter a, what sound does it represent? /a/ like in apple? Well not always, it depends on the context of the word. How about angel, ball, swan, fast, zebra? The letter a is representing a different sound in each of these words. Synthetic phonics teaches students how to correctly map these sounds and letters together which replaces earlier theories that there are words that cannot be sounded out and have to be learnt by 'sight'. This approach forms the High Frequency Words component of Wonder Words. High frequency words is the term for the collection of words that appear frequently in texts. This list consists of words that are made up of common and less common sound-spelling correspondences such as went /w/ /e/ /n/ /t/ and said /s/ /e/ /d/. Traditionally the terms 'sight words' and 'high frequency words' have been used interchangeably; this is particularly true in early years and international education systems. However as synthetic phonics teaches how to sound out 'sight words' the terminology is slowly being updated to better reflect that students' do not have to rely on visual memorisation (sight) as the lone strategy to learn these words. During the Wonder Words Foundation program, your child will learn their first 100 high frequency words and the most common sound-spelling correspondences that



the letters of the alphabet make. The Year 1 and Year 2 programs continue this approach with an additional 100 words each as well as all 44 sounds of the English language and the increasingly complex sound-spelling correspondences that represent them.

Wonder Words is the only program of its kind to be based on the Science of Reading, which is a collective body of research conducted by developmental psychologists, educational professionals, and cognitive neuroscientists, that has broken down the mystery behind how children learn to read. The evidence that the 5 key concepts (of Phonological Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, Comprehension) produce capable readers is irrefutable (Snowling & Hulme, 2005). For this reason, Australian schools and Governments are slowly making it a compulsory aspect of the English curriculum.

This is why you may have noticed your child learning to read in a different way than you did at school. If so, it is likely that you learnt to read through the 'whole language' or 'balanced literacy' methods. These approaches have not inherently failed, after all, you are reading this right now. However, many studies in English speaking countries indicate poor literacy rates in a large number of adults. In particular, the OECD (2013) Found that 40-50% of adults in Australia have literacy levels below the international standard required for participation in work, education and society and this filters back down to the effectiveness of the methods used to first engage these adults in the reading process.

The 20+ years of research that has resulted in the Science of Reading, indicates that by changing the focus to explicit and systematic teaching of the indicated key concepts, we can produce more capable readers faster and easier than these older methods. Wonder Words is designed so that these concepts are integrated into a range of fun and engaging activities that your child can complete by themselves or with the whole family. You do not need to be an expert, we have done the research so you don't have to. Your child will be on the cutting edge of best practice reading instruction, while you get an easy to follow program to support their development. Simply follow along and take an interest in what your child is doing.

What really sets Wonder Words apart from other programs is its cohesive structure that implements synthetic phonics and high frequency words together in a complete package for school and home. Evidence shows that early reading progress is most likely to occur when the teaching of reading concepts is explicit and systematic, especially for childre



who are at risk of reading difficulties (Snow, 2016). Additional research has also shown that phonics instructional approaches improve students' high frequency word reading (Ehri, 2014; Noltemeyer, Joseph & Kunesh, 2019; Schmidgall & Joseph, 2007). Phonics instruction is also extremely relevant in high frequency word acquisition because students must know their letter-sound correspondences before they can begin to decode words. By combining the repetition of high frequency words and phonics understanding, your child is in the fast lane to gaining fluency in reading. This approach leads to a quicker ability to comprehend text which leads to an effective and efficient reader. The whole point of learning to read, after all, is to be able to understand the message conveyed in what we have read. Not only is Wonder Words light years ahead of the competition in regards to educational concepts and outcomes, but it is also highly engaging and accessible to all. As teachers and parents ourselves, we know that even the best intentioned programs fall flat unless they are interesting to children. That is why we placed equal importance on creating a program that is not only educational, but also stimulating in nature. You will see your child genuinely enjoy using Wonder Words.

We recognise the unique needs of home schooling parents and are aware that many choose this method of education in order to provide a more holistic style of learning for their children. For this reason, whilst Wonder Words is a systematic package, it is also highly flexible, multi-modal, game-based and centred in child led learning opportunities. The Teacher Handbook contains a wide range of optional hands on activities to keep your child engaged and in line with your home school philosophy.

The Wonder Words program consists of a series of workbooks, online weekly content packs and access to the Wonder Words app. Parents are provided with a comprehensive Teacher Handbook that contains everything you need to implement the program. The step by step phonics script guides you and your child through the implementation of synthetic phonics in a clear, simple and effective way.

The daily phonics script is divided into 3 parts:

- Speaking and Listening: Rhythm and Movement
- Phonological Awareness
- Explicit Phonics Lesson

Each of these sections are taught through a variety of engaging oral language and optional hands on activities that will have your child actively participating. The phonics



script and has been designed so that your child can complete it independently. The application contains 30 minutes of content that revises the sound, letter and word focus for each week and your child can choose to do more or less if you like to limit the amount of screen time they receive.

Research shows that repetition and multiple exposures to new words (up to 15 times) are crucial to vocabulary development and all students, regardless of ability require opportunities to reinforce their skills in different contexts (Allen, 1999; Ehri & Saltmarsh, 1995; Golick, 1973; Marzano, 2005; Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). That is why the repetitive and predictable nature of the Wonder Words activities fosters the routine that children need and removes the frustration that is so common in learning to read. In the same way, gifted and talented students are also catered for with the opportunity for choice of activity, differentiated readers and the opportunity to progress through the program at their own pace. As a result, Wonder Words builds confidence and success right from the start. Children are proud of their achievements straight away and all children achieve using this program.

The intuitive nature of the Wonder Words print and digital content comes from designing each component around the Universal Design for Learning Guidelines. The UDL is a framework to improve and optimise teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn (CAST, 2018). As a result, the design of the Wonder Words activities is progressive, while still retaining a level of familiarity that allows all students to be self-directed and confident learners.

Game based learning has been considered with hands on activities in the scripts, workbooks and also through the redesigned digital application which compliments the weekly focus. The positive effects of game-based learning are well documented, Kang and Tan (2014) found educational games in the classroom are intrinsically motivating for students, and that the motivation extended or transferred to the subject matter itself. These results echoed an earlier study by Casser and Jang (2010) that found struggling readers in particular, benefit from games-based instruction because they are exposed to a considerably more interactive social learning environment, in which to develop their word recognition and spelling skills. The Wonder Words app has been designed to provide learners with a choice of activity to also increase their enjoyment and motivation, especially for gifted and talented learners (Ryan &



Deci, 2002; Turkay, Hoffman, Kinzer, Chantes & Vicari, 2014). Furthermore, Allery (2014) notes that using games in learning ensures all participants are winners because they have the opportunity for involvement and engagement in a fun learning experience. When students enjoy participating in the activities taking place, it allows for positive growth in both their academic results and attitude towards learning.

In summary, the Wonder Words program is scaffolded to provide your child with everything they need to pursue their reading adventure at home. The Foundation program provides a solid framework, giving students the tools they need to develop a love of reading, with the Year 1 and Year 2 programs continuing to enhance their skills through more complex reading conventions. Featuring tailored workbooks and a digital app, along with a range of supporting materials and a huge collection of readers, Wonder Words is a fully self-contained program that has everything you need to set your child up for early reading success. This unique approach to reading allows for a highly flexible program that caters to the needs of all students and parents. From struggling readers, to high achievers and everyone in between, the Wonder Words program allows everyone to experience success in reading.



Appendix

Phoneme	A single speech sound. /a/ in ant.
Grapheme	A letter or group of letters that represent a sound. ant, ship, right
Graph	One letter making one sound ant
Digraph	Two letters making one sound. /sh/ in ship.
Trigraph	Three letters making one sound. /igh/ in right.
Diphone	One letter making two sounds. /o/ in one.
Phonological Awareness	The ability to recognise and manipulate chunks of sounds in spoken words and identify patterns such as rhyme and alliteration.
Phonics	The relationship between mapping phonemes to graphemes.
Fluency	Being able to read with accuracy, speed and expression.
Vocabulary	Building a bank of familiar words to use in reading, writing, speaking and listening.
Comprehension	Being able to understand what you have read in a text.
Etymology	Being aware of the origins of words to understand their definitions and spelling patterns.

Glossary of concepts covered in the Wonder Words program.



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