

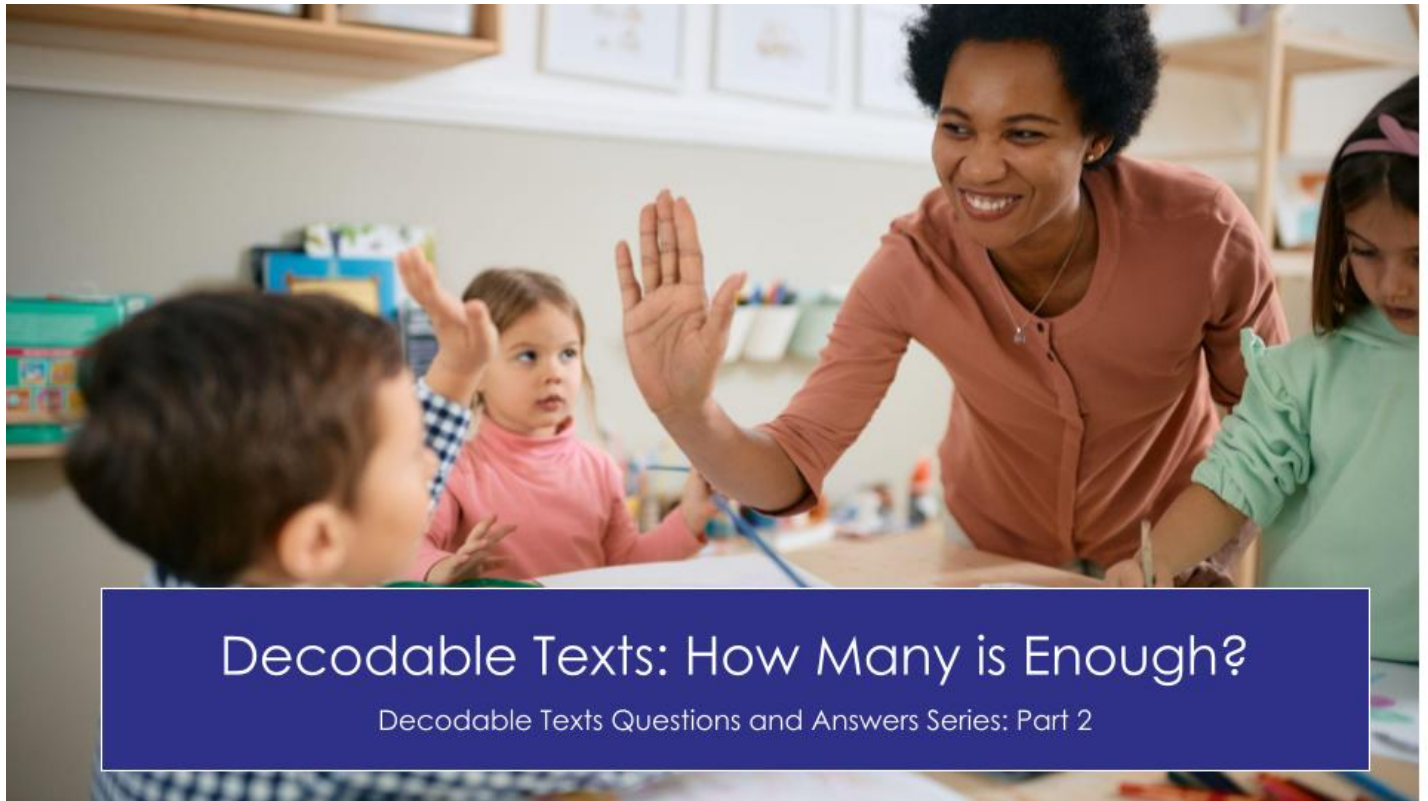
The Six Shifts

Where Science Meets Balance

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Decodable Texts Q&A (Part 2): How many?

By Jan and Kari



Last week we launched a series focused on questions and answers about the very hot topic of decodable texts. We explored what decodable texts are, why they are important, and who really needs them. You can revisit that post [here](#).

This week we are thinking about your collection of decodable texts. If you, like so many of the teachers we hear from, are working to build a collection of decodable text, you may be wondering, “Just how many decodable texts is enough?”

Well, we’re glad you asked.

So, how many decodable texts do I need, anyway?

Your “shopping list” or need for decodable texts will be driven by a combination of what you’re teaching in the phonics classroom—the scope and sequence that drives your

instruction—and individual student progress.

Ongoing formative assessment of the phonics skills you are teaching is a critical part of the puzzle because of how it will help you keep tabs on which students need more support—including more instruction *and* more access to decodable texts—with which skills.

Previously, we wrote [a post about using simple word or sentence dictation as a formative assessment of phonics skills](#) that you might find helpful as you think about tracking progress.

So, if, for example, you're a first-grade teacher and your phonics scope and sequence guides you to start the year with a review of short vowel sounds, including blends and digraphs, before moving on to VCe (final e) long vowel patterns, an assessment will likely show that you have students at various points along this progression.

For instance, some children might need more instruction and practice with:

- A single, specific short vowel sound in simple VC and CVC words,
- A mix of CVC words containing all five short vowels to build automaticity,
- Closed syllable words with basic consonant digraphs (sh, th, ch) and/or blends, or
- VCe long vowel practice, combined with more review of CVC words.

So, as much as possible, you will want to align students' reading practice in decodable texts to their specific needs. And while you may be wondering exactly how many decodable texts you really need to support each skill, students are learning . . .drum roll . . .there's really no precise number.

You'll certainly want access to some decodable texts for each skill along the progression of your scope and sequence. But of course, some skills are easier to master than others. And some children can master a skill after a handful of exposures, while others require dozens or even hundreds to reach mastery. But, chances are you already know which skills your students typically need the most practice. And a general rule of thumb would be that the trickier the skill, the more opportunities you will want to provide for practice in context, so the more decodable texts focused on that skill you'll want to gather.

Yet, although the goal is to build a robust collection of decodable texts supporting a range of skills, you don't need a full collection to get started exploring the benefits of decodable

texts. And they don't all need to be full-color, professionally published books (more on that in another post).

What you need to get started is just to grab that phonics scope and sequence and ask yourself, "Which new skills are coming up? Which past skills do some children still need more practice with? And which skills are predictably more difficult?"

Once you've answered those three questions, you essentially have your "wishlist" for decodable texts. So, you dig in and make that list.

We'll meet you back here for the next post in this series, which is all about considerations for choosing high-quality decodable texts to support confidence and competence with beginning decoding skills.

And if you want to dig even deeper into the why and how of decodable texts, that's the focus of Shift 6 in *Shifting the Balance: The Online Class*. You can join us for an even deeper exploration of this and other topics as we unpack misunderstandings and share high-leverage routines for early literacy instruction in six critical areas; language comprehension, phonemic awareness, phonics, sight word instruction, and prompting/feedback during reading.

Binge our entire 6-part blog series about decodable texts!

[Decodable Texts Q&A \(Part 1\): What? Why? Who?](#)

[Decodable Texts Q&A \(Part 2\): How Many is Enough?](#)

[Decodable Texts Q&A \(Part 3\): What to Look For? The WORDS.](#)

[Decodable Texts Q&A \(Part 4\): What Else to Look For – The MEANING.](#)

[Decodable Texts Q&A \(Part 5\): What About FREE Decodables?](#)

[Decodable Texts Q&A \(Part 6\): More Ideas for Getting Started!](#)