

**Pioneer Valley Books has a strong commitment to provide research-based literacy solutions to our school partners. Our products combine the science of literacy with the latest research on the principles of learning and how that translates into effective literacy resources that ensure students' success.**

For more than 25 years, Pioneer Valley Books has partnered with educators, conducted research, collected data, and built literacy programs and tools that support students' literacy growth and teachers' professional learning. Each new product or program is driven by educational leaders and literacy experts to ensure the development of evidence-based learning solutions. We strive to deliver better literacy results and better reading experiences in the classroom.



The Pioneer Valley Books Product Research and Development Cycle:

### ***Stage 1: Needs Assessment and Background Research***

With the help of educators and literacy leaders, we identify challenges. After conducting background research, we then propose a resource or curriculum to address the needs of teachers and learners.

### ***Stage 2: Development and Design***

As we develop the solution, we conduct trials and testing with students and teachers in classrooms and schools. We use that data and feedback to guide improvements throughout the production process.

### ***Stage 3: Impact***

We partner with researchers and educators to measure the effectiveness of our programs in classrooms across different settings with diverse student populations.

Stepping Together has been developed to meet the most current research on literacy acquisition. Stepping Together meets ESSA Tier 4 standards. This program is built around a well-defined logic model, is informed by research, and is currently under evaluation.



## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Stepping Together is a research-based interactive shared reading program that provides a classroom community with a daily opportunity to read increasingly more challenging text with the support of a teacher. The goal of each lesson is to build students' literacy skills including phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, reading fluency, and writing, while also fostering a love of reading and a deeper understanding of the text.

Stepping Together lessons feature:

- Interactive reading experiences
- Powerful demonstration and gradual release of skills
- Robust comprehension instruction aligned with standards
- Systematic, explicit phonemic awareness and phonics instruction
- Writing practice aligned with phonics focus
- Phonics skills applied to authentic reading and writing
- Emphasis on building writing proficiency in response to reading
- Opportunities to develop vocabulary and fluency

See Appendix A for a sample of the scope and sequence for each kit.

## Stepping Together Lesson Plan Frameworks

### Kindergarten

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Rhyme, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Rhyme, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Rhyme, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Rhyme, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Rhyme, Song, Poem, or Chant
<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Shared Reading</b> Introduce the New Book Read the Book Discuss and Teach	<b>Interactive Writing and Cut-Up Sentence</b> Teach the New Sight Word (What's Missing?, Mix and Fix) Dictated Sentence(s) Letter Formation Cut-Up Sentence	<b>Shared Reading</b> Reread the Book Discuss and Teach	<b>Interactive Writing and Cut-Up Sentence</b> Reteach the New Sight Word (Rug Writing, Write and Retrieve) Dictated Sentence(s) Letter Formation Cut-Up Sentence	<b>Reread Shared Reading Books</b> Reread one or two shared reading books from previous lessons
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Listen Up Rhyming Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Listen Up Rhyming Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Listen Up Rhyming Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Listen Up Rhyming Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting	<b>Letter Formation/ Sight Word Review/ Phonics Assessment</b> One of the Following: Letter Formation Assessment Assessment: Sight Word Review Assess Phonics Focus
<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Name Game Picture Sorting Letter Detective Making Words Sound Boxes Breaking Words	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Name Game Picture Sorting Letter Detective Making Words Sound Boxes Breaking Words	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Name Game Picture Sorting Letter Detective Making Words Sound Boxes Breaking Words	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Name Game Letter Detective Decoding Words in Controlled Text	

### First Grade

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Rhyme, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Rhyme, Song, Poem, or Chant			
<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Shared Reading</b> Introduce the New Book Read the Book Discuss and Teach	<b>Interactive Writing and Cut-Up Sentence</b> Teach the New Sight Word (What's Missing?, Mix and Fix) Dictated Sentence(s) Letter Formation Cut-Up Sentence	<b>Shared Reading</b> Reread the Book Discuss and Teach	<b>Interactive Writing and Cut-Up Sentence</b> Reteach the New Sight Word (Rug Writing, Write and Retrieve) Dictated Sentence(s) Letter Formation Cut-Up Sentence	<b>Reread Books</b> Reread one or two shared reading books from previous lessons
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Rhyming Blending Segmenting Substituting	<b>Assessments</b> Assessment: Sight Word Review Assess Phonics Focus			
<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Picture Sorting Making Words Sound Boxes Breaking Words Breaking Big Words Analogy Charts	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Picture Sorting Making Words Sound Boxes Breaking Words Breaking Big Words Analogy Charts	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Picture Sorting Making Words Sound Boxes Breaking Words Breaking Big Words Analogy Charts	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Picture Sorting Making Words Sound Boxes Breaking Words Breaking Big Words Analogy Charts	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> Decoding Words in Controlled Text

### Second Grade

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Tongue Twister, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Tongue Twister, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Tongue Twister, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Tongue Twister, Song, Poem, or Chant	<b>Warm-Up</b> Read Tongue Twister, Song, Poem, or Chant
<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Shared Reading</b> Introduce the New Book Explain the Comprehension Focus Read the Book Discuss and Teach	<b>Shared Reading</b> Finish Reading the Book Discuss and Teach	<b>Prompt, Plan, and Write</b> Teach the New Sight Word (What's Missing?, Mix and Fix) Prompt Plan Dictated Sentence(s) Teach	<b>Prompt, Plan, and Write</b> Reteach the New Sight Word (Rug Writing, Write and Retrieve) Reread Prompt Review Plan Guided Writing Teach	<b>Reread Books</b> Select a section or chapter to reread together for deeper meaning
<b>Step 3</b>	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting Substituting	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting Substituting	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting Substituting	<b>Phonological Awareness Activity</b> One of the Following: Blending Segmenting Adding/Deleting Substituting	<b>Assessments</b> Assessment: Sight Word Review Assess Phonics Focus
<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Making Words Make a Big Word Breaking Big Words Advanced Breaking Big Words Analogy Charts	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Making Words Make a Big Word Breaking Big Words Advanced Breaking Big Words Analogy Charts	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> One of the Following: Making Words Make a Big Word Breaking Big Words Advanced Breaking Big Words Analogy Charts	<b>Word Study/ Phonics Activity</b> Decoding Words in Controlled Text	



## HOW STEPPING TOGETHER ALIGNS WITH CURRENT RESEARCH

The National Reading Panel published a report in 2000 that identified five key components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The report concluded that these components should be systematically taught and integrated into a comprehensive reading program. Stepping Together lessons provide instruction in each of these five essential components and offer daily opportunities for transferring learning to authentic reading and writing experiences.

The primary features of the Stepping Together System are explicit instruction in phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, reading, and writing. Each component is backed by scientific research that verifies its positive effects on student learning and reading proficiency.

*Phonological and Phonemic Awareness.* Students with strong phonemic awareness hear and manipulate sounds in words. The combination of letter work and phonemic awareness fosters sophisticated skills needed for decoding words, such as phoneme substitution, blending, segmenting, and deletion (Adams, 1990; Blevins, 2019). Stepping Together lessons include engaging activities that teach students to identify, blend, segment, and manipulate phonemes. The explicit instruction includes teacher explanation and modeling before students practice the procedures and draws on the reciprocal relationship between phonics and phonemic awareness.

*Phonics.* Systematic phonics instruction is a crucial aspect of early reading instruction, as it helps students develop foundational skills in decoding and word recognition (Rayner et al., 2001; National Reading Panel, 2000). Effective phonics instruction teaches students to associate sounds with corresponding letters and letter patterns so that they learn to be flexible word solvers as they encode (write) and decode (read) words (Ehri et al., 2001; Kaye, 2006; Richardson & Dufresne, 2019). An effective approach to teaching phonics involves engaging multiple senses—visual, auditory, and kinesthetic/tactile—to enhance learning and boost memory. Using multisensory tools helps engage children and hold their attention, which can increase their motivation to learn. Each Stepping Together Kit includes multisensory procedures and tools that teach individual phonemes and the skills of blending and segmenting. As the lessons progress, interactive group phonics

activities work to build student knowledge of high-utility rimes and common inflectional endings and affixes, all of which help readers find patterns in words to solve new words both when reading and in spelling.

*Fluency.* Fluency involves accuracy of word reading, automaticity of text reading, and reading in a phrased and expressive manner, all of which support maintaining the meaning of the text (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Research shows that rereading text improves word accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Paige, 2020; Rasinski, 2012). Repeated reading is embedded in the Stepping Together framework. Students are also encouraged to reread the books during independent reading time and as an activity in the literacy center. They also take home their Super Stories (short decodable stories they have read together during the lesson) to read to family members. Students are also taught a core of sight words to improve word reading (Foorman et al., 2016). Sight words are high-frequency words that are recognized immediately without requiring decoding. In Stepping Together, a multistep introduction of the new word invites students to map the sounds to words. Students then have many opportunities to practice the new words in isolation and in the context of reading and writing. Using this multilayered approach ensures students will quickly develop a large bank of sight words (Ehri, 2005).

*Vocabulary.* Vocabulary knowledge plays an important role in comprehension. It is important to provide students with explicit instruction in vocabulary for maximum effectiveness (Marulis & Neuman, 2010). Readers also use strategies to discover the meanings of unfamiliar words as they read, such as using the context or graphics for clues to word meaning. It is important to teach students the flexible use of a number of vocabulary strategies (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Stepping Together texts are sequenced in a gradient of complexity that exposes students to challenging vocabulary and new concepts. During the lessons, new words are explicitly taught during the book introduction, and vocabulary strategies are modeled and practiced during the reading of the book: e.g., reread, read on and look for context clues, use the illustrations or text features, substitute a word, use a known part of the word, make a connection, and use the glossary.

*Comprehension.* At the heart of reading is comprehension. It is critical that teachers teach comprehension skills (National Reading Panel, 2000; Paris & Paris, 2007). The Stepping Together lessons center around a comprehension focus which builds in complexity across the year and grade level. The Stepping Together books have been carefully selected and sequenced to enhance and extend student comprehension skills, and lessons feature a gradual release model whereby teachers model comprehension strategies that students are then invited to practice. At the beginning of the lesson, students are introduced to a new comprehension strategy. Then as they read, students are taught to monitor their comprehension and intentionally apply a variety of comprehension strategies when meaning breaks down. After reading, the teacher guides students in discussions that explore literal and inferential meanings about texts. Later, as the writing progresses, the comprehension focus is then threaded through the writing activity.

*Integration of Phonics Skills and Print (Reading and Writing).* Research shows that students need daily opportunities to apply their new skills to real reading and writing experiences (Kilpatrick, 2015; Blevins, 2016). In addition to a daily phonics and phonological awareness activity, each Stepping Together lesson is centered around an engaging, grade-level text that students interactively read with their teacher. Each lesson also features an interactive writing experience that is connected to the new book.

*Applying New Skills to Reading.* All students need daily opportunities to read and discuss complex text that is engaging and authentic, which provides development in academic language and knowledge about the world (Shanahan et al., 2010). Texts also need to be culturally responsive, providing “mirrors and windows” for children, so they see themselves and learn about others (Bishop, 1990; Muñiz, 2019). In each Stepping Together lesson, students interactively read a high-quality fiction or nonfiction book together with teacher support. Shared reading is a collaborative learning activity. Students gather together in a large group to read and reread text interactively with the teacher. There are two learning goals: first, to provide an enjoyable reading experience that motivates young readers to want to read and enjoy books on their own, and second, to provide explicit and systematic instruction in how students can become readers and writers themselves (Parkes, 2020; Holdaway, 1984). In Stepping Together, students also read together decodable “super stories” which provide them with an opportunity to practice their new targeted phonics skill.

**Applying New Skills to Writing.** Interactive writing is an effective approach to teaching writing and improving literacy skills (Roth & Guinee, 2011). Interactive writing can have a positive impact on phonemic awareness, spelling, and word recognition. Through interactive writing, students can learn new vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar rules. They can also develop a strong understanding of how written language works (McCarrier et al., 2000). Writing can also help children recognize words more quickly and accurately (Ehri, 1987). Additionally, research has shown that interactive writing can have a positive impact on students' motivation and engagement in their writing practice, as well as on their overall understanding of the writing process and the conventions of written language (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2020). Interactive writing has also been found to promote social interaction and collaboration among students, which can lead to the development of positive relationships and a sense of community in the classroom (Bates, 2020). Interactive writing is part of each Stepping Together lesson. The teacher guides the students in the writing process, modeling strategies and then giving students opportunities to practice skills.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Daily Stepping Together whole-group lessons provide primary students with numerous benefits that can help them succeed academically and personally. We know that strong readers read more and, likewise, students who struggle with reading read less. It is the Matthew Effect—the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer (Stanovich, 1986). We need to provide powerful and engaging literacy experiences for our children that include all readers in our literate community (Afflerbach, 2022). Stepping Together provides every student with rich content and exemplary instruction in reading and writing that fosters thoughtful and engaged readers.

**APPENDIX A**

**SAMPLE SCOPE AND SEQUENCE IN STEPPING TOGETHER  
KINDERGARTEN KIT**

Module 4

Week/ Title	Day	Comprehension Focus	Sight Word	Phonological Awareness Activity	Word Study/ Phonics Activity	Assessments
<b>Week 1</b> <i>Little Knight and Mom</i>	Day 1	Retelling: Retell the Story	can	RHYMING: Recognizing Rhymes	PICTURE SORTING: Short Vowel a	
	Day 2			BLENDING: Onset-Rime	MAKING WORDS: Short Vowel a	
	Day 3	Analyzing Characters: Track the Character's Feelings	can	SEGMENTING: Onset-Rime	SOUND BOXES: Short Vowel a	
	Day 4			DELETING: Onset	DECODING WORDS IN CONTROLLED TEXT: Short Vowel a	
	Day 5					
<b>Week 2</b> <i>Daisy's Tiny Things</i>	Day 1	Retelling: Retell the Story	look	RHYMING: Recognizing Rhymes	MAKING WORDS: Short Vowel a	
	Day 2			BLENDING: Onset-Rime	SOUND BOXES: Short Vowel a	
	Day 3	Asking and Answering Questions: Red Questions (Inferential)	look	SEGMENTING: Onset-Rime	SOUND BOXES: Short Vowel a	
	Day 4			DELETING: Onset	DECODING WORDS IN CONTROLLED TEXT: Short Vowel a	
	Day 5					

## SAMPLE SCOPE AND SEQUENCE IN STEPPING TOGETHER FIRST GRADE KIT

### Module 4

Week/ Title	Day	Comprehension Focus	Sight Word	Phonological Awareness Activity	Phonics Skill/ Word Study Activity	Assessments
<b>Week 1</b> <i>Jasper's Birthday Party</i>	Day 1	Inferring: Infer from Character Actions	out	RHYMING: Producing Rhymes	Final Blends <i>nd, nt, and pt</i> (MAKING WORDS)	
	Day 2			BLENDING: Phonemes	Final Blends <i>nd, nt, and pt</i> (SOUND BOXES)	
	Day 3	Retelling: Beginning-Middle-End (B-M-E)	out	SEGMENTING: Stretching to Segment Phonemes	Onset-Rime ( <i>int</i> ) (BREAKING WORDS)	
	Day 4			SUBSTITUTING: Rime	Final Blends <i>nt and pt</i> (DECODING WORDS IN CONTROLLED TEXT)	
	Day 5					
<b>Week 2</b> <i>Birds</i>	Day 1	Asking and Answering Questions: Green Questions (Literal) and Red Questions (Inferential)	now	RHYMING: Producing Rhymes	Final Blends <i>ng and nk</i> (MAKING WORDS)	
	Day 2			BLENDING: Phonemes	Final Blends <i>nd, ng, and nk</i> (SOUND BOXES)	
	Day 3	Using Text Features: Illustrations and Diagrams	now	SEGMENTING: Stretching to Segment Phonemes	Onset-Rime ( <i>and</i> ) (BREAKING WORDS)	
	Day 4			SUBSTITUTING: Rime	Final Blends <i>nd, ng, and nk</i> (DECODING WORDS IN CONTROLLED TEXT)	
	Day 5					

## SAMPLE SCOPE AND SEQUENCE IN STEPPING TOGETHER SECOND GRADE KIT

### Module 4

Week/ Title	Day	Comprehension Focus	Sight Word	Phonological Awareness Activity	Phonics Skill/ Word Study Activity	Writing	Assessments
<b>Week 1</b> <i>Chip Moves In</i>	Day 1	Inferring: Infer from Character Actions and Dialogue	<i>friend</i>	BLENDING: Phonemes	Vowel Pattern <i>oa</i> (MAKING WORDS)	Writing about the Characters	ASSESSMENT: Sight Word Review  ASSESS PHONICS FOCUS: Vowel Pattern <i>oa</i> ( <i>road, gloat, foam,</i> and <i>toasting</i> )
	Day 2			SEGMENTING: Stretching to Segment Phonemes	Vowel Pattern <i>oa</i> (BREAKING BIG WORDS)		
	Day 3			DELETING: Onset	Vowel Pattern <i>oa</i> and <i>r</i> -Controlled Vowel <i>or</i> (ANALOGY CHARTS)		
	Day 4			SUBSTITUTING: Rime	Vowel Pattern <i>oa</i> (DECODING WORDS IN CONTROLLED TEXT)		
	Day 5						
<b>Week 2</b> <i>Snowboarding</i>	Day 1	Developing Vocabulary: Use Strategies to Explain New Words	<i>would</i>	BLENDING: Phonemes	<i>r</i> -Controlled Vowel <i>ar</i> (MAKING WORDS)	Writing an Opinion	ASSESSMENT: Sight Word Review  ASSESS PHONICS FOCUS: <i>r</i> -Controlled Vowel <i>ar</i> ( <i>bark, party, sparking,</i> and <i>sharper</i> )
	Day 2			SEGMENTING: Stretching to Segment Phonemes	<i>r</i> -Controlled Vowel <i>ar</i> (BREAKING BIG WORDS)		
	Day 3			DELETING: Onset	<i>r</i> -Controlled Vowel <i>ar</i> and Vowel Pattern <i>oa</i> (ANALOGY CHARTS)		
	Day 4			SUBSTITUTING: Rime	<i>r</i> -Controlled Vowel <i>ar</i> (DECODING WORDS IN CONTROLLED TEXT)		
	Day 5						

## APPENDIX B

### PROCEDURES FOR TEACHING PHONICS

PROCEDURE	PURPOSE FOR WORD STUDY ACTIVITIES
Making Words	Monitor with sounds and letters (synchrony)
Sound Boxes	Hear and record sounds in sequence (orthographic mapping)
Breaking Words	Break words into smaller parts to promote efficient decoding skills (onset and rime)
Analogy Charts	Learn vowel patterns, silent e feature, and inflectional endings (analogies)
Breaking Big Words	Break words into smaller parts (onset, rime, inflectional ending)
Make a Big Word	Break words into syllables (syllabication)
Write a Big Word	Learn prefixes and suffixes in order to read and write multisyllable words (morphology)

RICHARDSON, J. & DUFRESNE, M. (2019)

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