

# Welcome to Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks

*Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks* is an innovative reading programme designed to broaden children's vocabulary alongside learning to read through systematic, synthetic phonics.

Language acquisition is vital for children's academic and social development. This programme introduces children to a set of carefully selected words in the context of motivating texts, supporting them to expand their vocabulary. Questions and discussion points help children to explore and embed this new language.

## The word gap

A study of children's vocabularies found that a child with talkative parents heard 45 million words spoken to them during the first four years of their life, while a child with less talkative parents heard only 13 million words, resulting in a cumulative 30-million-word gap after four years. This study shows the importance of supporting children across the school to extend their vocabularies and to help close this gap.

A recent survey of more than 1,000 teachers discovered that at least 40% of their pupils lacked the vocabulary to access their learning. 69% of primary school teachers and over 60% of secondary school teachers believed that the word gap is increasing.

## Teaching phonics

*Oxford Reading Tree Work Sparks* has all the best ingredients of a vocabulary programme combined with a rigorous phonics structure that helps children build confidence and motivation as they learn about letters and sounds and begin to crack the reading code. It covers Foundation/ Reception (Primary 1), Year 1 (Primary 2) and Year 2 (Primary 3), and follows the structure of the UK Department for Education's *Letters and Sounds* Phases 1–6 and aspects of spelling in Year 2 covered in the Year 2 programme of study.

## Why is Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks different?

- All books are phonically decodable, following *Letters and Sounds*.
- The series includes 300 carefully selected 'focus words' from the Oxford Children's Corpus: these are key facilitating words, words that will unlock the meaning of other words children meet in their wider reading and the stories they listen to.
- Each book contains key vocabulary questions that develop children's understanding of the focus words.
- The series contains original and engaging stories in a range of genres and interesting, informative non-fiction.





## Note from the series editors

*"As experienced primary school teachers, specialists in the teaching of English, and most importantly parents of young children, we are passionate about closing the language gap, in order to ensure all children have the best possible start."*





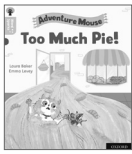
James Clements and Shareen Wilkinson



Please see the inside back cover for details of selected research that has informed the *Word Sparks* programme.

Book Band	Genre	Title	Letters and Sounds	Adjacent consonants	Common exception words	Focus words
Light Blue A	Adventure Mouse Fiction		Phase 4	CVCC	said, were, out	among bare decision final forever friendly
Light Blue B	Adventure Mouse Fiction		Phase 4	CCVC	like, come, there, little	audience awful desperate hardly introduce provide
Light Blue C	Non-fiction		Phase 4	CCVCC	do, what	attach confuse imagine powerful simple unusual
Light Blue C	Non-fiction		Phase 4	CCVCC	do, when, what	altogether announce apart effort delight protect

## Oxford Level 5

Book Band	Genre	Title	Letters and Sounds	Alternative pronunciations	Common exception words	Focus words
Green A	Familiar Fiction: Partner text		Phase 5	ay, ou, ie, ea, oy, ir, ue, aw	oh, their, people, Mrs	action contain conversation learn remain value
Green B	Funny Fiction: Partner text		Phase 5	wh, ph, ew, oe, au, ey, a-e, e-e, i-e, o-e, u-e	Mr, asked	ancient create impossible ordinary otherwise popular
Green C	Non-fiction: Partner text		Phase 5	a, e, i, o, u, c /s/, ow, ie, er, ou	called, could, looked	belong centre distant information narrow present
Green C	Folktale Fiction: Partner text		Phase 5	a, e, i, o, u, c /s/, ow, ie, ea, er, ou	called, could	act choice effect nervous object strength
Green A	Adventure Mouse Fiction		Phase 5	ay, ou, ie, ea, oy, ir, ue, aw	oh, their, people, Mrs	belong centre distant narrow otherwise present

# Phonics and *Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks*

*Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks* is focused on improving children's vocabulary acquisition, but it also incorporates phonically decodable books, which follow the progression of phonemes and graphemes in the *Letters and Sounds* framework. In addition, it covers aspects of spelling covered within the Year 2 programme of study of the National Curriculum in England.

## What does the series include?

- Phonically decodable books that promote a phonics first approach.
- Small steps of progression that mean children build confidence steadily.
- A cumulative vocabulary progression: children encounter focus words more than once in order to consolidate and review learning.
- Teaching notes with questions and activities for each book, which are available on [www.oxfordowl.co.uk](http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk)

## Common exception words

Whilst the books are phonically decodable, there are some words that are tricky to decode using phonics. These are generally called 'common exception words' but are sometimes known as 'tricky words'. Examples include *said, we, was, people*. They are included in order to allow a wider range of sentences and because children will frequently encounter them.

## Supporting children in using their phonics skills

- Encourage children to sound out the words using their fingers before blending them together. E.g. *cat* can be broken down into *c-a-t* and then blended to make *cat*.
- Ensure children are given lots of praise and positive affirmation. Some of the words may be challenging at first, but with plenty of practice, children will become familiar with them.

- When exploring common exception words, identify or point out the tricky part of the word (e.g. the 'ai' in *said* is the tricky part of the word) and then blend the rest.
- For some sounds, it might be useful to give children a mirror (where appropriate) and encourage them to review their mouth movements when sounding out words.

## Teaching phonics successfully

- *Word Sparks* books introduce a few new GPCs in each book. By matching the GPCs children learn in phonics sessions to the *Word Sparks* books they read, children will have the chance to practise what they have learned.
- When introducing a new GPC, prepare a bank of words that reflect what you are teaching. This might include familiar words, rhyming words and children's names.
- When teaching split digraphs, give children the opportunity to physically split the digraph to 'wrap around' the following phoneme. For example, with the word *bike*, you might share the three GPCs on paper (*b, i-e, k*) and then split the 'i-e' and place on either side of the 'k' to show 'i-e' is representing one sound, even though the two letters are not next to each other.
- Give children the chance to investigate where different GPCs are most often found in words by collecting and sorting different words.
- Phonics is not just for lessons and decodable books. Encouraging children to use their reading skills in the real world will help to consolidate learning and give reading a real purpose. You might collect new words to display on working walls, and encourage children to spot words or GPCs they have learned in books adults share with them or in the wider environment.

# Vocabulary and Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks

## The importance of a rich vocabulary

Words are important. Repeated research suggests that the language skills that children develop when they are young can have a long-lasting effect on their education. While individual words are just one thread in the fabric of language, developing a rich vocabulary is a key factor in educational success.

Children's *receptive vocabulary* (the words they understand) provides them with the means to understand new ideas and make sense of the world in which they live. Their *expressive vocabulary* (the words they use to communicate) allows them to communicate with others and to express their feelings. Academic research suggests that a child's word knowledge and vocabulary size are strongly related to reading comprehension and other wider academic outcomes, as well as to their ability to communicate their ideas in writing. A wide vocabulary gives children the means to learn about the world and a voice to express their opinions and ideas.

## Developing a wide vocabulary

*Oxford Reading Tree Word Sparks* supports children to develop their vocabulary through a number of approaches:

### Introducing children to focus words

*Word Sparks* uses 300 carefully chosen focus words drawn from the Oxford Children's Corpus. Children need these words to understand the books that they will read and to expand their everyday vocabulary. With limited teaching time available, it is important to choose the most useful words to introduce to children.

## Opportunities for discussion and turn-taking

Research suggests the *quality* of talk is as important for language development as the amount of words children are exposed to, with turn-taking and genuine dialogue being especially important. *Word Sparks* books feature opportunities for children and adults to talk together, using the new language children are learning in meaningful contexts.

## Encountering words as part of a rich reading experience

Books tend to draw on a far broader palette of words than spoken language, so many of the new words children learn at school will come from reading, rather than talking. Being taught a new word in class is useful, but by encountering the word in a text, a child has the chance to see it working in context and to see it interacting with other words. The focus words used in *Word Sparks* have been carefully sequenced so children will encounter them more than once in engaging, motivating texts.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

We've been learning these words at school. Please stick this sheet on the fridge to remind me to use them! Talk to me about these words, ask me what they mean, and help me to use them in sentences.

