A Tale of Two Texts: Decodable vs. Leveled Reading Materials

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Abstract

This article compares leveled texts and decodable texts, examining their respective strengths and limitations in supporting literacy development. Leveled texts, categorized by difficulty, offer a wide range of topics but may not always align with phonics instruction. In contrast, decodable texts are specifically designed to reinforce decoding skills, crucial for early readers. This article highlights how teachers can effectively use both types of texts to support students' reading development. It also reimagines the role of leveled texts advocating for a more purposeful focus on language and knowledge development. Authors aim to provide teachers with a clearer understanding of how to leverage both types of texts to enhance reading outcomes and better support students' literacy journeys.

Over the last several years, there has been a growing, renewed interest in code-based instruction and the Science of Reading (Shanahan, 2020). The Science of Reading has been defined as a "vast, interdisciplinary body of research about reading and issues related to reading and writing" (The Reading League, 2024). This research has been conducted over five decades, in many countries, and in multiple languages. Findings from this interdisciplinary research have been used as evidence to inform educators on how reading and writing develop, why some learners experience difficulty, methods for instruction and assessment, as well as how to improve outcomes for those having trouble in acquiring literacy.

The mantle of Science of Reading has been taken up by many journalists (e.g. Sold a Story podcast, Hanford, 2022), educators, and policy makers (H.B.1558, 2023) and not without controversy. Many have argued that what the research behind this rediscovery finds is not new (e.g. explicit phonics instruction helps many readers learn the code). And some have also argued that the reporting and movement that has developed behind the Science of Reading has demonstrated bias and errors in understanding of the research (Auckerman, 2022). Some of the criticism of this movement is the suggestion that all reading problems can be ascribed to using a Balanced Literacy framework or a lack of phonics instruction. Many states have adopted standards and policies that forefront phonics and threaten to over-emphasize that one literacy skill as the solution to all struggling readers' needs. Indeed, many have worried that state and local policies that require practices aligned to this narrow interpretation of the Science of Reading threaten to crowd out other unconstrained literacy skills such as oral language development or the importance of reading comprehension (Bowers, 2020; Duke et al., 2021). Specifically, Indiana House Bill 1558 (2023) mandates the requirements for reading instructional materials to be aligned with the Science of Reading and explicitly prohibits adopting materials that are aligned with the three-cueing model of reading.

Regardless, with this renewed interest in code-based reading instruction comes an onslaught of suggestions for the materials teachers should use in reading instruction. One category of instructional materials many districts are considering are the types of texts beginning readers should be using when learning to read. Two types of texts have been commonly used in classrooms with beginning readers: leveled texts and decodable texts. Many who have embraced the Science of Reading would suggest teachers shift to decodable texts. These texts are designed to be highly accessible and aligned to specific phonics skills taught within a specific scope and sequence. However, for many years schools across the country teaching within a Balanced Literacy framework adopted the practice of using leveled readers and instructional strategies aligned with their design. Leveled readers are texts that include words using multiple phonic patterns along with specific vocabulary words designed to create more authentic stories, and do not necessarily teach specific decoding skills (Ankrum, 2022; Cunningham et al. 2005). With Balanced Literacy having been a widely adopted approach to reading instruction in the U.S. over the last few decades, many teachers have primarily taught with leveled readers and might be wondering how these texts are or are not compatible with the research behind beginning reading instruction. Additionally, schools have made huge investments in programs designed around leveling classroom libraries, assessment systems based on leveling progressions, and training teachers on how to instruct and assess with leveled texts. Given this investment, it is unreasonable and even short-sighted to ask schools and teachers to completely disregard these texts. Moreso, these texts hold a lot of value for beginning readers and have a place in early grades classrooms (Cheatham & Allor, 2012).

This article focuses on understanding the differences between decodable texts and leveled texts, the affordances and limitations of both, and how teachers can reimagine the use of leveled texts in their classrooms.

Background

Decodable and leveled texts are often thought of as discordant opposites when teachers consider how to foster effective reading instruction. Decodable texts are designed to teach a specific phonics sequence (Elson et al. 2024). This approach teaches children to convert a string of letters (our written code) into sounds before blending them to produce a spoken word. Using a code-based approach to reading, this approach is a linear, systematic progression of skills. Features of decodable books include a high proportion of regular phoneme to grapheme correspondences, and letter-sound relationships that have been taught (Moats & Tolman, 2018). Phonics patterns are taught in repeated patterns to build orthographic knowledge and fluency.

Decodable books have been found to promote self-teaching, helping children read with greater accuracy and independence (Mesmer, 2005). This leads to greater gains in reading development (Cheatham & Allor, 2012; Birch et al., 2022). Spelling patterns in decodable texts follow a scope and sequence for early readers using words with a restricted word pattern along with a few high utility words to make a sentence work. Decodable texts introduce words that are carefully controlled by the spelling patterns, providing learners with varied opportunities to apply their developing decoding skills (Braid, 2021).

In general, leveling texts is the process of assigning a text a place on a gradient scale according to its difficulty. Typically, difficulty is determined by factors such as the types of words included in the text, the length of sentences, vocabulary demands, overall text length, and knowledge demands on the reader for comprehension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Leveled texts are designed and organized according to various text features that can contribute to reading difficulty. These include sentence length, text length, text organization, vocabulary, picture support, and print features (e.g. diagrams, captions). Publishers typically assign levels using proprietary systems such as letters (e.g. Fountas & Pinnell) or number codes (e.g. Developmental Reading Assessment). Some use quantitative scores like Lexile levels which are calculated using factors that contribute to semantic difficulty as well as syntactic complexity. Leveling texts and identifying students' reading levels has become a deeply embedded practice in many schools' instructional routines, assessment practices, and ways of organizing classroom materials and structures.

An Australian systematic literature review of decodable and leveled texts (Birch et al., 2022) cautions that educators must consider features of texts rather than their types or labels. Evidence suggests that mixed interventions that focus on decoding and comprehension leveled and phonics-based readers produce moderate effects across the board. Teachers and their instructional approaches and attitudes towards reading are critical components, surpassing the type of text used in reading instruction.

Both decodable texts and leveled texts provide instructional opportunities for beginning readers, and both have their own limitations (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). For leveled and decodable text, this article will outline the affordances and limitations of each kind of text as well as how teachers can reimagine the use of leveled texts in their instructional routine.

Decodable Texts

Decodable texts serve as a crucial instructional tool in early reading development, offering specific benefits for beginning readers while also presenting notable limitations. These carefully constructed texts, designed to align with systematic phonics instruction, support students in developing accurate word recognition through controlled exposure to specific phoneme-grapheme correspondences. While decodable texts play a vital role in helping students apply phonics patterns, their inherent design constraints can impact language authenticity and narrative engagement. Understanding both the benefits and limitations of decodable texts is essential for educators making informed decisions about their use in comprehensive literacy instruction.

Affordances

Accuracy

Beginning readers should be attending to every letter in words as they read. Research has shown that good readers engage in sophisticated pattern recognition of letters and do not guess based on context, picture, or syntax (Seidenberg & McClelland, 1989). Decodable texts offer beginning readers the opportunity to apply taught phonic skills in connected text. Decodable readers are designed to introduce specific phonics patterns in a systematic way (Moats & Tolman, 2018; Cheatham & Allor, 2012). Using a code-based approach, decodable readers support a linear method aligned with systematic synthetic phonics. Decodables contain two core elements of proportion of words with regular phoneme to grapheme correspondences and letter-sound relationships that have been taught (Birch et al., 2022). These types of texts typically start with simple, regular letter-sound correspondence (e.g. b=/b/) and progress to more complex phoneme-grapheme correspondences (e.g. eigh=/ā/).

Because the vocabulary in these texts is controlled to align with patterns explicitly taught as part of the reading curriculum, beginning readers have the opportunity to apply their skills

multiple times over the course of one short text. Readers see and have the chance to decode words with that pattern several times to become skilled, accurate readers and not rely on non-word factors (e.g., context or picture cues) strengthening their word reading accuracy (Adams, 1990; Cheatham & Allor, 2012; Share, 1995). As readers continue to build their word reading knowledge, the texts they encounter will continue to move through a systematic sequence of sound-spelling correspondences while revisiting previously taught phonics patterns (Johnston, 2000; Moats & Tolman, 2018). This promotes reinforcement of earlier taught phonics patterns, potentially strengthening accuracy in decoding.

Fluency

Decodable texts contain a high percentage of words that follow specifically taught phonics rules and patterns; therefore, students are able to practice applying these skills with higher degrees of automaticity, leading to the development of fluent text reading (Cheatham & Allor, 2012). Fluency is not only about reading words accurately, but about reading them quickly, without the need to laboriously decode each one. These texts provide students with opportunities to practice reading words with learned phoneme-grapheme correspondences until they can do so with automaticity. As students become more proficient with decoding and build fluency, they can focus more cognitive attention to comprehension and expression.

Confidence Building

Finally, because these types of texts contain words that are accessible to students they can serve as a tool to boost students' self-concept as readers. As students develop competence in word recognition and fluency, they build confidence as readers making it more likely they persevere when encountering more challenging texts as they grow as readers (Rasinski, 2014). Likewise, as students build their confidence as readers they will transfer their phonics skills to novel words across a range of texts, contributing to their overall proficiency as readers (Ehri, 2020, 2022).

Limitations

Linguistic Constraints

The purpose of decodable texts is to serve as instructional tools to develop phonics skills. Because of that purpose, the language in these readers can seem artificial or stilted. Constraining most of the words to patterns currently or previously taught can sacrifice the natural sounding flow of language for phonetic consistency (Mantei et al. 2022). Decodable texts can sometimes feel contrived compared to authentic children's literature, and consequently, students may experience transfer issues when moving to authentic literature where more complex and varied words are used to create the stories (Long, 2004; Smith, 1997).

Content Limitations

As a result of the constrained language found in decodable texts, some stories may lack depth or compelling narratives. Many of these stories have limited character development, minimal plots, and may not include any type of theme. Further, because of their lack of rich vocabulary and complex language structures, decodable texts may not be useful as tools to build background knowledge or conceptual understanding of topics (Price-Mohr & Price, 2019).

Engagement Challenges

Finally, because of the limitations already mentioned, decodable texts can be less engaging for students. These texts are designed to be instructional tools to master specific skills, and over-reliance on these books can result in a mechanical approach to reading, rather than meaningful reading experiences. Further, the degree to which these texts demonstrate uniformity and variability can cause further challenges to engagement (Glasswell & Ford, 2011; Dzaldov & Peterson, 2005; Rog & Burton, 2002).

Leveled Texts

For many years, the use of leveled texts to benchmark student growth in reading was an expected instructional and assessment practice in elementary classrooms across the U.S (Au & Raphael, 2007; Boardman & Woodruff, 2004; Kontovourki, 2012). Under the assumption that beginning readers learn more efficiently when following a progressive sequence of difficulty, the practice of structuring and assessing reading along these progressions was normalized in classrooms. Commercially produced and packaged sets of texts were commonly used to determine a student's reading level. These texts are organized along a gradient of progressive difficulty and emerged from the whole language movement, gaining popularity as schools began adopting frameworks like Balanced Literacy and Guided Reading (Fountas & Pinnell. 2006). The idea that students could be matched with books that were at their "just right" level was appealing to educators and parents, suggesting that readers learn best when the texts they read were not too difficult and not too easy. However, research has not demonstrated that using texts at what is called the "instructional level" results in higher reading achievement (Mesmer, 1998; Duke & Pearson, 2002).

Affordances

Engagement Potential

While all controlled texts have significant language and vocabulary constraints, because leveled texts do not greatly control for phonics patterns, they have more potential to resemble authentic literature and present readers with opportunities to engage in problem solving and deeper thinking about text structure and novel words (Ankrum, 2022). These texts attempt to create engagement through familiar topics, supportive illustrations, and manageable text chunks (Rog & Burton, 2002). Leveled texts attempt to include more topic specific vocabulary as well as character development and interesting plot development. Leveled text, with its resemblance to authentic literature, has shown to promote fluency in young readers when the texts have been practiced multiple times (Mesmer, 2009) and even younger children were found to have higher comprehension effects with texts that were not highly controlled for phonics patterns but attended to meaning and vocabulary (Price-Mohr & Price, 2018).

Organization and Convenience

There are practical benefits of using leveled texts. Because of their design and gradual increase in complexity, teachers can efficiently organize reading materials and create student groups based on reading behaviors and skills (Fraser, 2024). This allows for targeted instruction that meet a variety of needs. The systematic organization also allows teachers to plan instructional sequences and implement focused lessons for students (Kontovourki, 2012). In addition to these instructional conveniences, many commercial leveled texts have aligned assessment systems that provide a simple progression to follow, standardized assessment procedures, and clear frameworks for interpreting results.

Limitations

For decades many educators have used and embraced text levels as a cornerstone of their understanding of how children learn to read and grow as readers (Kontovourki, 2012). However, research suggests (Connor et al., 2004) they may not be efficient and effective for beginning readers. Three key reasons why these texts should not be the first choice for teachers of beginning readers are 1) misalignment to the science of reading, 2) inconsistent decodability, and 3) limitations for assessment.

Misalignment to the Science of Reading

Leveled texts are based on the framework of Marie Clay's Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) and the Three Cueing System. This framework relies on using strategies that do not initially cue the reader to attend to the spelling of words (Cunningham et al., 2005). As more emphasis is given to the Science of Reading in states and school districts across the U.S. educators are becoming aware of the flaws in the Three Cueing System and ways leveled texts do not align with this vast body of research (Seidenberg, 2013; Pitcher & Fang, 2007). With letter-sound knowledge underemphasized and semantic and syntactic cues prioritized in leveled texts (Davis et al., 2021), those with rigid views of the Science of Reading may highlight these perspectives as reasons to reject leveled texts outright.

Inconsistent Decodability

Leveled texts are mostly designed and written to mimic authentic text while controlling for the features mentioned above (e.g. sentence length, picture support). This makes the texts coherent and allow students to read stories that follow clear narrative structures or informational text that can teach them about a new concept. Because of this, the texts are not always accessible to beginning readers (Cunningham et al., 2005; Dzaldov & Peterson, 2005) because they contain words with phonics patterns they have not yet learned or contain very few words with phonics patterns they have been taught. Therefore, while reading these texts, children will encounter words that they have no tools to decode and can fall back on the strategies that encourage guessing or they may become frustrated and be discouraged to continue reading.

Limitations for Assessment

Students assessed using leveled text are expected to progress linearly through levels (Brabham & Villaume, 2002) according to the growth recommendations supplied by the publishers of the assessment systems. The approximate level of difficulty of a text corresponds to specific reader-directed skills for both word attack and comprehension and can provide teachers with a reader-specific information when selecting texts for both word recognition and strategy instruction (Glasswell & Ford, 2010). However, the specific level of a text is almost irrelevant because the critical information for teachers should come from analyzing a student's actual performance when reading that text (Glasswell & Ford, 2011; Kontovourki, 2012). Analyzing students' strengths and needs when reading will reveal which word recognition skills need to be strengthened, and which comprehension strategies students are or are not applying. While deep analysis of reading level assessments can prove beneficial in identifying student needs, because of the high-stakes nature of assessment, teachers may feel pressured to move students through levels (Kontovourki, 2012). Additionally, many leveling assessments have been shown to have

challenges with reliability (Burns et al, 2015) and can lend themselves to subjective interpretation.

Reimagining Leveled Readers

Schools have invested a lot of resources in leveled text from acquiring sets of leveled readers, training teachers, and educating parents on how to understand reading levels. While these texts may not be appropriate for teaching students to develop word recognition skills, they are still valuable resources for schools and classrooms (Burkins & Croft, 2017). However, teachers need to consider several things before incorporating them into their instructional routines. Rather than completely abandoning these texts, educators can strategically use these texts for specific purposes and at appropriate times.

Purpose

When selecting any instructional materials, teachers need to consider the purpose and ask themselves, "What do I want my students to learn right now?" The primary purpose of decodable texts is to apply phonics skills in connected text to build automaticity and fluency. With this consideration, teachers should ensure decodable texts align to taught phonics skills and spelling patterns and incorporate them into direct instruction for word recognition development. One specific purpose appropriate for leveled text teachers can consider is for knowledge building (Castles et al., 2018).

Knowledge Building

Because many leveled readers are designed to resemble authentic literature, text sets supplemented with leveled readers can be built around a single topic, theme, or literary device for focused study. Teachers can source texts that are written with different features of complexity (e.g. text structure, text features, vocabulary) to create sets that are accessible to a variety of students, can be used during read-alouds, or close reading lessons. Students can use leveled readers as part of these sets to develop their synthesizing skills and move beyond reproducing knowledge to intentionally create or refine their ideas on a topic.

Similarly, teachers can consider the complexity of leveled text according to text structure, text features, or literary devices (Castles et al., 2018). These can supplement lessons on teaching students craft and structure and allow students to experience these text characteristics in familiar materials (Birch et al., 2022). And as students progress in their word reading skills, the teacher can remove scaffolding and encourage more independent reading of these texts to strengthen knowledge building. Hiebert (2024) suggests semantic category analysis to reorganize leveled texts to build knowledge by topic from leveled texts.

Schools that had been working under a Balanced Literacy framework likely have adopted various sources of leveled readers (e.g. Fountas & Pinnell, Scholastic, Reading A to Z). This offers a vast resource of topics teachers can browse to develop thematic and cross-curricular sets. Deliberately choosing texts that fit a specific topic or approach a theme from a cross-curricular perspective allows students to deepen their understanding and develop synthesizing skills (Allington et al., 2015). Selecting texts that are written at various levels also allows for multiple access points to a topic as well as opportunities for teachers to scaffold instruction as necessary.

Vocabulary Development

Creating sets of texts on one topic or theme increases the variety of complex language and vocabulary that students will encounter. When texts approach topics from different content areas like social studies, science, and art students will more likely gain exposure to complex, generalizable Tier 2 words along with domain specific Tier 3 words (Beck et al., 2002). Lower level texts without complex vocabulary can be used to support general language and concept development for young students or English language learners (Davis et al., 2021).

However, it is important for teachers to keep in mind the specific decoding skills necessary for students to read these texts and design instruction accordingly. Texts written at higher levels may need to be used as read-alouds or in a shared reading context. Or, teachers may need to pre-teach content vocabulary students may encounter when engaging with these texts (Hiebert, 2024). Some examples of text sets are included within Table 1 for a cross-curricular topic, Table 2 for the narrative text structure, and Table 3 for universal theme of family.

Table 1

Text Set for Cross-Curricular Topic: Animal Characteristics

Title	Publisher	Level	Tier 2 or Tier 3 Words
Stick out Your Tongue!	Fountas & Pinnell Classroom	D	sticking (T2), anteater (T3), bark (T2)
Animal Eyes	Fountas & Pinnell Classroom	G	ray (T2)
Hang by Their Feet	Fountas & Pinnell Classroom	H	cave (T3), branch (T3), tuck (T2), claws (T3), skill (T2)
Tongues	Fountas & Pinnell Classroom	J	sticky (T2), anteater (T3), gobbles (T2), orca (T3), hummingbird (T3), spikes (T3)
The Bird That Cannot Fly	Fountas & Pinnell Classroom	N	flap (T2), ostrich (T3), protect (T2), transparent (T2), peer (T2), graze (T2), insects (T2), predator (T2)

Table 2
Text Set for Narrative Text Structure

Title	Publisher	Level	Text Structure	Tier 2 or 3 words
Not That Way!	Fountas & Pinnell Classroom	K	Text Structure: Narrative	arrived (T2), bossy (T2), pedal (T3), muttered (T2), responded (T2)
The Elves and the Shoemaker	Scholastic Guided Reading Program	I	Text Structure: Narrative	leather (T3), fierce (T2), shoemaker (T3)
Caps, Hats, Socks and Mittens	Scholastic Guided Reading Program	I	Text Structure: Narrative	mugs, snug (T2), twigs (T3), moss (T3), caps, husk (T3)

Table 3
Text Set for Universal Theme of Family

Title	Publisher	Level	Tier 2 or 3 Words
My Family Quilt	Harcourt	E	quilt (T3), yard (T3), corn, nap
Family Fun	Fountas & Pinnell Classroom	A	family, mom, dad, grandma
Granny's Visit	Houghton Mifflin	F	visit (T2), treats, fireworks (T3)

Using Text Sets for Cross-Curricular Instruction: Animal Characteristics

The following is an example of how teachers can use one of the above text sets in a unit focused on animals and their characteristics. This example leverages texts identified to be at various reading levels with multiple ways students can access the texts while building knowledge of scientific concepts and essential vocabulary. This set is developed from Fountas & Pinnell Classroom and levels range from D to N and would be appropriate for students at various skill abilities in first-grade. These texts provide an engaging and concrete way to develop students' content knowledge while also enhancing their literacy skills. By focusing on specific vocabulary terms like *predator*, *flap*, and *transparent*, the set creates opportunities for students to develop precise language for describing the natural world but is also generalizable to contexts beyond animals and their characteristics.

This example outlined in Table 4 shows how teachers can design a unit to support student progress through a carefully structured sequence of activities that build from direct teacher instruction to independent application. Students will explore how animals use specific

characteristics to survive, communicate, and thrive in their environments. Throughout the process, vocabulary development remains the core focus with multiple opportunities for students to listen, speak, read, and write these terms in meaningful contexts.

Table 4

Lesson Sequence: Animal Characteristics (Levels D-N)

Day 1: Vocabulary Preview
● Give a pre-assessment to determine students' familiarity with selected words. ● Introduce words in context from the text: *bark, sticking, ray, tuck, skill, gobbles, flap, protect, transparent, peer, graze, predator* ● Examples: *predator*, *flap*, and *transparent* (repeat with remaining words) ● Predator: "Another way ostriches try to stay safe is by hiding…From far away, the [ostrich] looks like a mound of dirt. A *predator* doesn't know the ostrich is there." ● Flaps: "Have you ever tried to get a close-up look at a bird in a tree?...But as soon as you get near, the bird *flaps* its wings and flies away." ● Transparent: "An ostrich has huge eyes— each eye is bigger than the bird's brain…Each eye has a special flap of skin that is *transparent*, or see-through." ● Create an anchor chart with student-friendly definition and visual supports if necessary
Day 2: Read-Aloud and Build Connections
● Read aloud the higher-level text *The Bird That Cannot Fly* (Level N). ● Focus on Tier 2 words: *flap, protect, transparent, peer, graze, predator* ● Read aloud *Tongues* (Level J). ● Focus on vocabulary: *sticky, gobbles* ● Compare animal characteristics across texts using vocabulary in discussions.
Day 3: Guided Practice
● Differentiate instruction independently or in small groups based on reading skills. Instruction is focused on identified vocabulary per text and the connection to animal characteristics. ● Advanced readers: *Hang by Their Feet* (Level H: *tuck, skill*) ● Grade level readers: *Animal Eyes* (Level G: *ray*) ● Developing readers: *Stick Out Your Tongue!* (Level D: *sticking, bark*)
Day 4: Vocabulary Application
● Engage students in various activities to connect vocabulary terms to meanings. ● Instruction can be in guided small groups or completed without teacher support. ● Activities can include word-to-picture matching, sentence completion, drawing/labeling animals with specific characteristics.
Day 5: Vocabulary Extension
● Have students sort vocabulary into categories. This can be completed as a whole group or small group activity. The class can then create a semantic map connecting vocabulary words to animal characteristics. ● Movement words (*flap, tuck, graze*) ● Protection words (*protect, predator*) ● Description words (*transparent, sticky*) ● Action words (*peer, gobbles, bark*)

Day 6: Text Comparison
● Students can read text in mixed-skills pairs and complete a Venn diagram comparing animal characteristics across texts. The focus should be on how vocabulary helps describe their features and behaviors.
Day 7: Creative Extension
● Students can create “Animal Characteristic Collecting Cards” using target vocabulary to explain how specific animals use these characteristics. Students can share cards with partners or trade with friends.
Day 8: Assessment
● Administer post-assessment to gauge student depth of understanding of selected target vocabulary terms. ● Options include asking students to draw and label specific animals with appropriate characteristics, sentence composition (written or dictated) on how characteristics help animals survive using target vocabulary terms, or fill-in-the-blank sentences using vocabulary words from the unit.

Conclusion

As schools across the country continue to align their literacy instruction with the Science of Reading, many educators are grappling with how to effectively use their existing resources, particularly leveled texts. Rather than viewing the shift toward decodable texts as a replacement of leveled readers, teachers can thoughtfully integrate both types of texts to support different aspects of literacy development. While decodable texts are essential for beginning readers to develop accurate word recognition skills and build reading fluency, at the same time, leveled texts can be strategically repurposed to support knowledge building, vocabulary development, and engagement with complex topics across the curriculum.

What can teachers do next?

1. Audit current materials to develop text sets that align to grade-level topics and themes.
2. Select texts that are interesting and intellectually rigorous.
3. Design lessons with appropriate scaffolding and pre-teaching as necessary to ensure student accessibility
4. Provide opportunities for students to engage with texts across multiple settings in varied modalities (i.e., independent reading, shared reading, and read-alouds).
5. Communicate with families on how leveled texts will be used moving forward.

By carefully considering the purpose of each instructional tool and designing appropriate supports, teachers can create rich literacy environments that honor both the Science of Reading and their schools' investments in leveled texts. The key is not to abandon existing resources but to reimagine their use within a comprehensive literacy framework that prioritizes explicit phonics instruction while maintaining opportunities for students to engage with meaningful, knowledge-building texts.

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