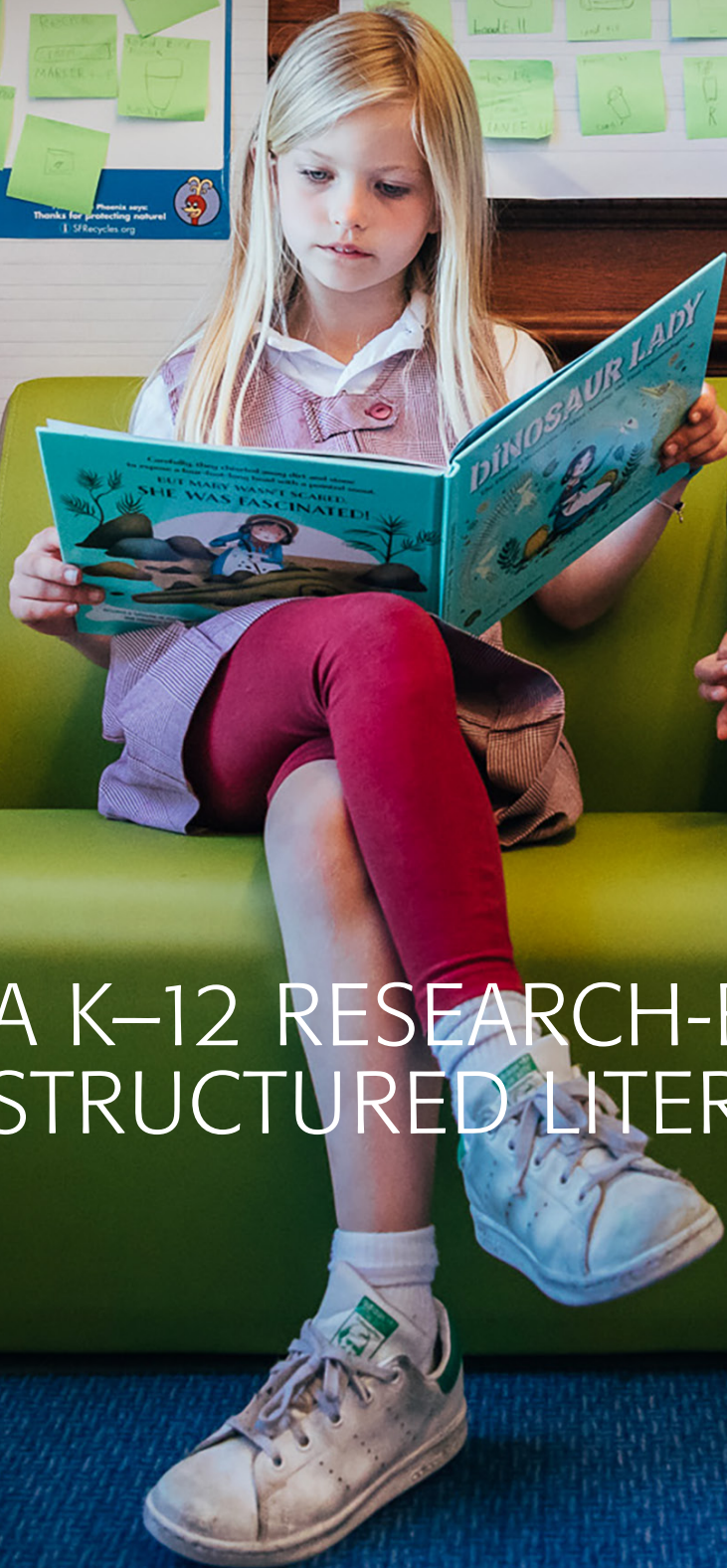




**CONVENT & STUART HALL**  
SCHOOLS of the SACRED HEART SAN FRANCISCO



A K-12 RESEARCH-BASED  
STRUCTURED LITERACY PROGRAM



# THE IMPORTANCE OF READING INSTRUCTION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM



Stuart Hall for Boys kindergartners engaging with picture books. Pictures provide context clues for reading. Previewing a text by first exploring its illustrations is an early literacy skill that helps develop inferential and predictive reading skills in support of phonological and sound-symbol processing.

Convent & Stuart Hall believes that strong reading skills provide an essential foundation for intellectual and personal development. As a K–12 school, we are committed to supporting reading development throughout the educational journey. We immerse students in continuous language development so that they are capable of engaging in ever more sophisticated acts of reading and comprehension as they move through the K–12 curriculum.

Our K–2 teachers are experts in reading instruction. Beyond the early reading instruction years, all K–12 faculty are equipped to teach the “language” of their discipline, recognizing that specific academic subjects have a language unique to their area.

In math, for example, what is a “derivative” or an “exponent”? What does that mean?

## What is reading?

Simply defined, reading is decoding + comprehension.



Since 19th century French physician Paul Broca’s groundbreaking work to identify regions of the brain that are responsible for language, continued breakthroughs in neuroscience, including the presence of MRI imaging in today’s research, show that the reading brain is an integrated network. The skilled reading brain is an effective operating system of interconnecting neural pathways.





# THE FIVE PILLARS

The five pillars of the reading process, each of which needs to be taught systematically, are:

## 1 Phonological Awareness

The phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in language. When children become phonemically aware, they are able to hear the components of words as individual sounds. Teachers create many opportunities for our youngest students to practice playing with rhymes, alliteration and syllables in words. They also practice blending and segmenting words orally before attaching sounds to symbols (phoneme to grapheme).

Starting at the Kindergarten level, we practice manipulating sounds in words using alliteration, rhymes and inserting or deleting sounds to make silly, new words. This is all done orally without assigning letter names or graphemes to the sounds we hear. This is an essential step in becoming a strong reader and writer.

— **Natalie Ohanessian**  
K–4 Learning Strategist

3 In second grade, we use a multisensory approach to dictate words. Students use their five senses to explore all facets of the word, and teachers assign gestures to consonant digraphs. For example, the digraph “sh” is modeled by the teacher by putting their finger over their mouth as students mirror them. For the digraph “ch,” the teacher models the sound and adds a throwing motion for students to mirror.

— **Anne Warda and Karin McCarthy**  
Stuart Hall Grade 2 Faculty

## 3 Oral Reading Fluency

Oral fluency (the ability to express ideas in spoken language) is a precursor for reading fluency. In group and individual “read alouds,” children develop their reading fluency, the components of which are:

- Speed/rate**
- Accuracy**
- Prosody (tone and delivery)**

## 2 Phonics

Written language is a code with an orthographic system where each sound correlates with an alphabetic letter. In Kindergarten, children learn sound-letter correlation through instruction on handwriting, spelling and patterns of syllabication.

## 4 Vocabulary

As children develop as readers, they build an ever-expanding repertoire of words. We teach vocabulary in context, intentionally and with careful planning. An understanding of morphology and semantics supports vocabulary development.

### Making Sense of Text: Morphology and Semantics

A morpheme is the smallest unit of language that has meaning, so it is critical that students are able to recognize morphological connections between and among words. Recognizing a root word such as “end,” students are able to understand the prefix “un” and the suffix “ing” to make sense of “un-ending.” Semantics is the study of meaning, and in the earliest grades, children learn how to build semantic “webs” to help understand a word and its opposite, or words that are similar or related. Semantic instruction is core to reading development, with teachers using “semantic gradients” or Frayer cards to explore words and their meaning.

## 5 Reading Comprehension

Since, at its core, reading involves decoding and comprehension, teachers must check for understanding whenever reading is taking place. Techniques such as making predictions or using background knowledge to prepare reading (schema), along with comprehension checks for both literal and inferential understanding, must occur from the earliest stages of the reading journey, continuing through high school. Other comprehension strategies such as meta-cognitive thinking (thinking about your thinking), including asking questions before, during and after the reading, also ensure that students are accessing and understanding text.

**Definition**  
A violently rotating column of air, often attached to the base of a thunderstorm

**Characteristics**  
Strong wind, loud, swirling cloud, up to 300 miles per hour

**Examples**  
Storm, twister, raging cloud, eerie shape

**Non-Examples**  
Still, quiet, peaceful, serene tranquil, still air

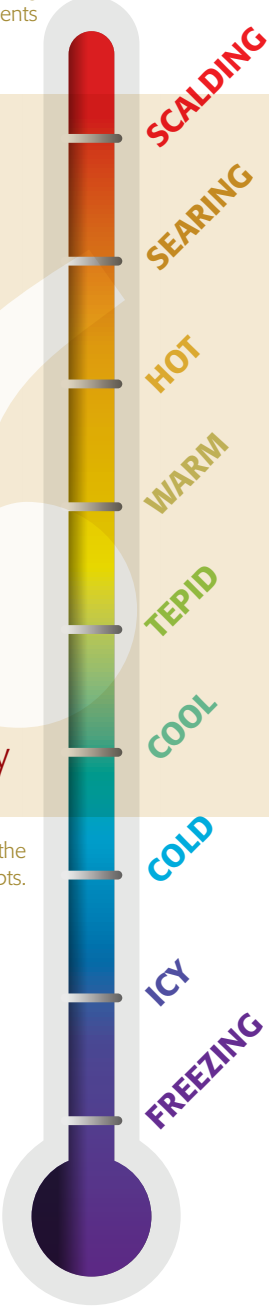
**Tornado**

A Frayer Model is a graphic organizer that encourages vocabulary development and ensures that students understand words or concepts at a deep level.

We use semantic gradients when introducing new vocabulary words to students. After a word is defined, we use a variety of antonyms and synonyms that students come up with and then arrange them to distinguish between shades of meaning.

— **Diane Holland**  
Convent Grade 2 Faculty

A semantic gradient is a tool that shows the relationships between words or concepts.





# THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF A PHONICS-BASED PROGRAM

Over the past few decades, there have been two main theories about the nature of learning to read: a structured, phonological approach and “balanced” or “whole language” literacy. Recent research and discoveries in neuroscience conclude that taking a structured approach to reading instruction that is direct and explicit, systematic, and cumulative and multi-sensory (visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile) is the most effective approach to teaching the reading process.

The code of language must be taught directly in order for children to become fluent and confident decoders who are able to understand text at the literal and inferential level. Through ongoing assessment and evaluation of students’ skills, we devote time for students to immerse themselves in a wide range of texts arising from our Great Texts Canon. As such, our students reach — and often surpass — grade-level expectations while developing the essential skills of decoding, word recognition, vocabulary, oral reading and comprehension.

5

## Components of Reading Assessment

A structured approach to literacy instruction serves all students and allows teachers to identify when a child may need additional instruction that is individualized to their needs delivered by one of our learning strategists.

Our evidence-based approach to measure instructional effectiveness and reading development includes:

- Teacher observation
- Reading aloud
- Fountas and Pinnell screenings
- Quick Phonics Screener
- Quick Spelling Screener
- Words Their Way Spelling Inventory
- Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)
- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)



6

## Benchmarks and Key Outcomes

### Grades K–2

- Phonological awareness and phonics: sound/letter recognition, early reading and writing tasks
- Reading and writing fluency: wordplay, vocabulary-building, reading aloud and oral linguistic fluency
- Early genre appreciation: fiction, poetry, autobiography, biography and nonfiction

### Grades 3–5

- Increased fluency in reading and writing with the goal of reading more complex texts and the ability to appreciate increasingly different “text types,” both fiction and nonfiction
- Research skills across the curriculum, with spoken and written projects that demonstrate learning

### Grades 6–8

- Reading narrative and informational texts independently across a variety of disciplines
- Constructing meaning from multiple texts by researching, comparing and contrasting

### Grades 9–12

- Reading complex texts, including primary and secondary source material at the college level
- Understanding how literary genres have developed across time periods, not just in the United States, but globally

The school’s literacy program supports a well-established Great Texts Canon and philosophy, which invites students to think critically, flexibly and passionately as engaged citizens of the world. Learn more on the back cover.



# GREAT TEXTS CANON

At Convent & Stuart Hall, we believe that an expansive reading list is the foundation for all students to develop the essential cultural literacy that crosses and connects all academic fields. The texts that guide this engagement cover topics that build a critical and varied perspective of the events, ideas, thoughts and emotions of centuries of human experience. As one school within a global network of schools, the selected texts represent many cultures and illuminate multiple vantage points.

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