

What Works Clearinghouse



Little Books

Program description The *Little Books* are a set of books designed for interactive book reading between parents and children or teachers and students. The books use thematic topics familiar to children. They are written with high-frequency words and use simple phrases and sentences. They also have strong links between illustrations and text.

Research One study of *Little Books* met the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The study included 325 kindergarten students from 12 rural and urban schools in Newfoundland, Canada. Three variations of using *Little Books* (at home only, at school only, and both at home and school) were compared to a comparison condition that did not use *Little Books*.¹

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Little Books* to be small for general reading achievement. No studies that met WWC standards with or without reservations addressed alphabetics, fluency, or comprehension.

Effectiveness *Little Books* was found to have potentially positive effects on general reading achievement.

	Alphabetics	Fluency	Comprehension	General reading achievement
Rating of effectiveness	na	na	na	Potentially positive effects
Improvement index ²	na	na	na	Average: +12 percentile points

na = not applicable

1. The evidence presented in this report is based on available research. Findings and conclusions may change as new research becomes available.
 2. These numbers show the average and range of improvement indices for all findings across the study.

Additional program information

Developer and contact

Little Books—Decodable Little Books by Christine McCormick, *Little Books from A to Z* by Christine McCormick and Jana Mason, and *Little Books 123* by Christine McCormick—are published by Good Year Books. Address: PO Box 91858, Tucson, AZ 85752. Email: sales@goodyearbooks.com. Web: www.goodyearbooks.com. Telephone: (888) 511-1530.

Scope of use

Information is not available on the number or demographics of students, schools, or districts using *Little Books*.

Teaching

Little Books are sold as sets of reproducible little books, designed to be colored and read at home or at school.

Cost

Sets of 20 to 26 reproducible books are available for \$11.95.

Research

Two studies reviewed by the WWC investigated the effects of the *Little Books* program. One study (Phillips, Norris, Mason, & Kerr, 1990) was a randomized controlled trial that met WWC evidence standards. The other did not meet evidence screens for the Beginning Reading topic.

Met evidence standards

Phillips et al. (1990) included 325 kindergartners in 12 schools and presented final results for 314 students. The schools were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: those that used *Little Books* at home only, used *Little Books* at home and school, used *Little Books* at school only, or did not use *Little Books* but continued using the prescribed language development program (comparison group). Schools were distributed across three types of geographic areas: rural (drawing students

from one small community), rural collector (drawing students from a number of small communities), and small urban communities.³

Extent of evidence

The WWC categorizes the extent of evidence in each domain as small or moderate to large (see the [What Works Clearinghouse Extent of Evidence Categorization Scheme](#)). The extent of evidence takes into account the number of studies and the total sample size across the studies that met WWC evidence standards with or without reservations.⁴

The WWC considers the extent of evidence for *Little Books* to be small for general reading achievement. No studies that met WWC standards with or without reservations addressed alphabetics, fluency, or comprehension.

Effectiveness

Findings

The WWC review of beginning reading addresses student outcomes in four domains: alphabetics, reading fluency,

comprehension, and general reading achievement.⁵ The single *Little Books* study reviewed in this intervention report (Phillips

3. The study authors presented data separately for each condition by geographic setting. The WWC combined effects across the geographic settings because there was only one of each of the intervention conditions and one comparison group within each geographic setting, making it difficult to separate the effects of the intervention from other characteristics of the schools.
4. The Extent of Evidence categorization was developed to tell readers how much evidence was used to determine the intervention rating, focusing on the number and size of studies. Additional factors associated with a related concept, external validity, such as students' demographics and the types of settings in which studies took place, are not taken into account for the categorization.
5. For definitions of the domains, see the [Beginning Reading Protocol](#).

Effectiveness *(continued)*

et al., 1990) addresses student outcomes in the general reading achievement domain.⁶

General reading achievement. On the Metropolitan Readiness Test, Phillips et al. (1990) found a statistically significant effect for all three treatment groups (home only, school only, and home and school) compared to the comparison group. These effects were substantively important but not statistically significant, according to WWC criteria (effect sizes of at least 0.25).

The single study reviewed for this report had a strong design and was categorized as having potentially positive effects on general reading achievement.

Rating of effectiveness

The WWC rates the effects of an intervention in a given outcome domain as: positive, potentially positive, mixed, no discernible effects, potentially negative, or negative. The rating of effectiveness takes into account four factors: the quality of the research design, the statistical significance of the findings,⁶ the size of the difference between participants in the intervention and the comparison conditions, and the consistency in findings across studies (see the [WWC Intervention Rating Scheme](#)).

The WWC found *Little Books* to have potentially positive effects for general reading achievement

Improvement index

The WWC computes an improvement index for each individual finding. In addition, within each outcome domain, the WWC computes an average improvement index for each study and an average improvement index across studies (see [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#)). The improvement index represents the difference between the percentile rank of the average student in the intervention condition versus the percentile rank of the average student in the comparison condition. Unlike the rating of effectiveness, the improvement index is based entirely on the size of the effect, regardless of the statistical significance of the effect, the study design, or the analyses. The improvement index can take on values between

–50 and +50, with positive numbers denoting results favorable to the intervention group.

The improvement index across the three variations of *Little Books* for general reading achievement was +12 percentile points for each group, resulting in an average of +12 percentile points for the study.

Summary

The WWC reviewed two studies on the *Little Books* program and one study met WWC evidence standards. The WWC categorized the study as having potentially positive effects on general reading achievement with kindergartners. The evidence presented in this report may change as new research emerges.

References

Met WWC evidence standards

Phillips, L. M., Norris, S. P., Mason, J. M., & Kerr, B. M. (1990). *Effect of early literacy intervention on kindergarten achievement* (Tech. Rep. No. 520). Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for the Study of Reading.

Did not meet WWC evidence screens

McCormick, C. E., & Mason, J. M. (1989). Fostering reading for Head Start children with Little Books. In J. Allen & J. M. Mason (Eds.), *Risk makers, risk takers, risk breakers: Reducing the risks for young literacy learners* (pp. 154–177). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.⁷

6. The level of statistical significance was calculated by the WWC and, where necessary, corrects for clustering within classrooms or schools and for multiple comparisons. For an explanation, see the [WWC Tutorial on Mismatch](#). See [Technical Details of WWC-Conducted Computations](#) for the formulas the WWC used to calculate the statistical significance. In the case of *Little Books*, a correction for clustering was needed.
7. The sample is not appropriate to this review: the parameters for this WWC review specified that students should be in grades K through 3 during the time of the intervention; this study did not focus on the targeted grades.

References *(continued)*

Additional source:

McCormick, C. E., & Mason, J. M. (1986). *Use of Little Books at home: A minimal intervention strategy that fosters early reading* (Tech. Rep. No. 338). Champaign: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Center for the Study of Reading. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED314742)

For more information about specific studies and WWC calculations, please see the [WWC Little Books Technical Appendices](#).