

Early Literacy Tool: Model Lessons, Observer’s Guide, and Tier 2 Supports

Introduction

Early literacy is the foundation for later academic success, and research consistently shows that strong reading instruction must be explicit, systematic, and cumulative. Effective literacy teaching balances the development of foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency with opportunities to build vocabulary and comprehension (Foorman et al., 2016; National Reading Panel, 2000). When schools fail to provide consistent and research-based instruction in these areas, gaps widen quickly, especially for students at risk of reading difficulties.

This Early Literacy Tool is designed for leaders and coaches to strengthen Tier 1 instruction while also providing Tier 2 interventions that are targeted, efficient, and connected to the core. Each lesson plan follows a gradual release structure (“I Do, We Do, You Do”) to support teachers in delivering high-quality, consistent routines that maximize student practice and feedback (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

The Observer’s Guide offers principals, coaches, and district leaders a clear lens for monitoring classroom instruction. Look-fors focus on fidelity of implementation, student engagement, and whether scaffolds maintain—not lower—rigor. These observations help leaders move beyond compliance “walkthroughs” to meaningful, evidence-based feedback that strengthens classroom practice (Hall & Mahnken, 2019).

Finally, the Tier 2 intervention extensions ensure that students who need more time and support receive instruction that is aligned with, not separate from, the core curriculum. Research shows that interventions are most effective when they are connected directly to Tier 1, delivered in small groups, and progress-monitored regularly (Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2015).

This tool is not a replacement for a full literacy program. Instead, it provides practical, ready-to-use examples that leadership teams can use to norm instructional expectations, guide professional development, and ensure all students build the foundational skills necessary for long-term reading success.

Lesson 1: Phonemic Awareness & Blending (K–1)

Objective: Students will segment and blend phonemes to create words orally.

Model Lesson Flow

I Do: Teacher models segmenting (/c/ /a/ /t/ → cat) and blending sounds aloud.

We Do: Class segments and blends together, using gestures (arm tapping, finger blending).

You Do: Students practice in pairs; teacher monitors and corrects errors immediately.

Leadership Look-Fors

- Teacher exaggerates sounds clearly (not letter names).
- Frequent student practice (not just teacher talk).
- Immediate corrective feedback (“Listen: /m/ /a/ /p/. Let’s try it together.”).
- Students engaged in kinesthetic routines (tapping, sliding sounds).

Tier 2 Intervention

Format: Small group (3–5 students), 15 minutes, 3x per week.

Routine: Sound manipulation drills (add, delete, substitute sounds).

Progress Monitoring: Weekly phoneme segmentation fluency probe (1-min).



Lesson 2: Decoding & Phonics Patterns (Grade 1–2)

Objective: Students will decode CVC words using short vowel sounds.

Model Lesson Flow

I Do: Teacher models decoding (pointing to each sound, blending aloud: /s/ /u/ /n/ → sun).

We Do: Students read CVC words together using choral reading.

You Do: Students read new CVC words independently or in partners.

Leadership Look-Fors

- Teacher uses consistent phonics routines (pointing, blending, sliding sounds).
- High ratio of student responses (all read, not one at a time).
- Error correction routine: model → repeat with support → independent try.
- Connection to print-rich environment (students see and touch letters while reading).

Tier 2 Intervention

Format: Small group, 20 minutes, 4x per week.

Routine: Rapid practice with word lists, decodable text passages, and word-building (magnetic letters, tiles).

Progress Monitoring: Weekly decoding fluency check (timed list of 20 CVC words).

Lesson 3: Vocabulary & Comprehension (Grade 2–3)

Objective: Students will learn new vocabulary and retell key details from a passage.

Model Lesson Flow

I Do: Teacher introduces 3–5 new words in context, modeling meaning with visuals/examples.

We Do: Students use words in oral sentences and rehearse meanings with partners.

You Do: Students read short text; after reading, retell key details using new vocabulary.

Leadership Look-Fors

- Teacher explicitly defines and models use of new words (not just “read and guess”).
- Students actively practice using the words, not just repeating them.
- Teacher prompts comprehension beyond recall (Who? What happened? Why?).
- Students reference the text in their retell, not just memory.

Tier 2 Intervention

Format: Small group, 15–20 minutes, 3x per week.

Routine: Pre-teach 2–3 critical vocabulary words with visuals and sentence stems.

Scaffold comprehension with guiding questions during text reading.

Progress Monitoring: Weekly oral retell scored for vocabulary use and accuracy of key details.

Observer's Guide (All Lessons)

What to Look For in Teacher Moves

Clear modeling of skill (I Do → We Do → You Do).

Frequent opportunities for student practice.

Immediate, specific corrective feedback.

Explicit connections between lesson objective and student work.

What to Look For in Student Behaviors

Students engaged in responding (choral, partner, written, oral).

Accuracy improves across the lesson (not repeated errors).

Students can articulate what they are learning (“We’re practicing blending sounds to make words”).

Questions for Observers

1. Was the instructional routine followed with fidelity?
2. Did all students get opportunities to respond?
3. Did Tier 1 instruction remain rigorous while supports were provided?
4. How can Tier 2 be layered without replacing core instruction?

References

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