

### FAQ Video Transcripts

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**Question:** *What are some specific examples of how the phonics units support transfer into students' reading and writing?*

#### **Rachel Rothman:**

As we have been writing the units, we've been keeping transfer at the forefront of our minds as really thinking about how we want to make sure that the children are seeing connections across their reading work, their writing work and their phonics work. We started by thinking about the units of study in reading and writing and making sure that we were making really strong connections between those units and the current phonics units that we're writing. In some cases those connections are made with a storyline. For example, if we're thinking about the superpowers reading unit we're thinking about how the kids are getting their superpowers and that's helping them with their reading. Well, in phonics the same thing happens—they earn their word part power, which helps them to be able to read and write words more efficiently using particular phonics features like ending word parts.

It's also that we're thinking about some of the strategies that are being taught in the reading and writing units and trying to make sure that we bring those also into the phonics units. The kids will see connections in multiple ways so they'll feel like everything they're doing across the day is connected. In the phonics units, when we wrote the teaching points, we'd been thinking really carefully about making sure that the teaching points not only teach about phonics features such as initial sounds or digraphs, but they also teach kids how the work that they're doing connects to reading and writing. For example, let's say we're working on initial sounds or ending phonograms and we're going to do some sorting in a lesson with those phonics features, in the minilesson that day we make sure to tell kids in the teaching point what the purpose of that sorting is.

We say that readers and writers make sure that they get their ear muscles stronger. One way to do that is to be really listening to different parts of words and comparing the sounds and that strengthens our ear muscles because when we write, we have to really be using those ear muscles to hear the differences in parts and sounds, which will help us spell. We've been really thinking carefully about how we're communicating that through the teaching points. Also, we are making sure that's there's a balance of focus on teaching phonics features such as digraphs, blends, short vowels and making sure that we're balancing that with teaching word

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solving strategies for reading and spelling unfamiliar words. We know that that's important for transfer—kids are not just getting phonics feature after phonics feature; they're also seeing how they integrate that into their reading and writing.

In a lesson it might be that the phonics feature is introduced through a little shared reading and then they might be doing a little sort or a little matching with that particular phonics feature and then at the end of the lesson they might take out whiteboards or their own writing and use that phonics feature in the context of writing. Then there are also entire lessons on using word solving strategies to be able to transfer this knowledge of phonics into their own reading and writing. There are actually some units with entire bends that have that focus. In the first unit in kindergarten there is a bend where kids are learning about how they use their names to be able to spell words, especially labels that they're trying to write in their own writing. Now that they've been learning a lot about letters and sounds through names, they're seeing how they can apply that knowledge.

In the word part power book in unit three in kindergarten, we have a bend that's helping kids use their superpowers from reading and transfer those superpowers for their writing and using everything they've learned up until that point about letter sounds in their own writing. In this way, the entire bend is focused on that transfer. In order to do that, we had to be really selective about which phonics features we are including and really put a lot of emphasis on them in the units. We worked carefully to make sure that we're choosing high leverage phonics features and concepts because we cannot be teaching everything—we want to make sure we are teaching some phonics features that are really high leverage that come up again and again in words kids want to write and books kids are going to be reading and make sure that we're having that balance of teaching word solving strategies to apply those.

We went through and found the most frequent phonograms that exist in the world that if you know them you can write over 500 words with those phonograms so that's why it was really important to make those decisions because we didn't want this to be about "Let's cover every phonics feature that exists." Instead, let's be really thoughtful about which ones we choose and get kids practicing them a lot in context. Then one other point that we had been thinking about is making sure that there are particular materials that we're having kids use across the phonics units, the phonics workshop, reading workshop and writing workshop. For example, the alphabet chart or the word wall, those materials are ones that are being used in phonics workshop and we want kids to be using in reading and writing workshop. Often what we find is that kids are not using those materials really efficiently in reading and writing workshop because they haven't really learned how to use them really well, they haven't interacted with them in ways that get them to really learn the concepts that are on them and learn how to be flexible in using them.

For more information on the Units of Study in Phonics from Lucy Calkins and TCRWP colleagues, visit: [unitsofstudy.com/phonics](https://unitsofstudy.com/phonics)

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We try to build that into the phonics units where the kids really interact with the alphabet chart and they're getting to know their letters and sounds that way, they're also getting to learn how to use that as a support when they're reading and writing. In the lesson where some of the pictures fall off the alphabet chart, the kids come in and realize that the pictures have fallen off and they have to figure out where the pictures go, and they're really having to think about what they know about letters and sounds and even the position of where those letters are on the chart. So then when they're trying to use that chart in their writing, they've had so much experience using it that they're able to use it efficiently to get the information they need to help them with their spelling.