

# Foundations & Frameworks

## An Instructional Reading Program

**Foundations & Frameworks (F&F)** is a uniquely designed research-based and research-supported instructional reading program developed at Briarwood Christian School. Since its introduction in 2001, an increasing number of schools across the US and Canada have adopted and implemented the program and are witnessing student achievement gains in vocabulary, reading comprehension, total reading, critical thinking, problem solving, and written expression.

Recognizing the need for equipping all students to fully understand ideas conveyed in text, instructional designers studied the latest findings in reading, critical thinking, and neuroscience research. The study of latest findings in **reading research** revealed the need to address five quintessential elements: *phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension*. Remarkably, in 2000, the National Reading Panel produced an extensive report based upon its exhaustive research that identified the same five crucial areas of reading instruction. This report's publication coincided with the research and development of Foundations & Frameworks, confirming its instructional designers' findings to that point.

The study of **critical thinking** resulted from emerging support for their initial premise: *reading comprehension is the result of effective thinking about written text*. If students can learn thought processes that enable them to consider an author's intended message at the deepest levels, they will be equipped to understand ideas not only within text addressed in reading but in other content areas as well. Therefore students exposed to deep learning in an Foundations & Frameworks instructional reading program would be equipped to transfer their understanding to mathematics, science, and social studies classes, among others.

Finally, the latest findings in **neuroscience** revealed the need to tailor instruction to the way learning occurs. Understanding learning would result in more effective teaching. Therefore, Foundations & Frameworks would incorporate brain-friendly methods of instruction to maximize learning.

**Foundations & Frameworks is an instructional reading program that uses a collection of best instructional practices for equipping students to fully understand ideas conveyed in text.**

**Thinking skills are explicitly taught and modeled.** Because comprehension results from the thoughtful interaction between reader and text, improving student thinking positively impacts student comprehension. *When a student fails to think while he is reading, he is not truly reading.* By breaking thinking down into its component steps, teaching these steps explicitly, and extensively modeling the use of these steps, teachers can equip students with the cognitive abilities needed to fully understand a text.

**Time is dedicated to skill mastery.** Learning to use a skill requires extensive guided and independent practice. Insufficient time devoted to learning results in insufficient learning; students must understand the structures of text and the accompanying thinking skills so that independent application and transfer of thinking skills to other areas of learning can occur. Developing such understanding, such automaticity, requires time. Foundations & Frameworks units devote adequate time and provide adequate practice for students to truly master each comprehension skill.

**High quality literature is used as a natural conduit for skill instruction.** Great literature captures a reader's imagination and motivates further reading. Foundations & Frameworks uses real, complete works of children's literature to engage students and provide adequate material for in-depth comprehension. The literature is clustered according to readability and is used for comprehension skill instruction. For example, a book with cliff-hanging events may be used to teach and practice understanding plot, whereas a book with great character development may be used to study and practice character or comparison/contrast. Fifteen years of researching quality literature preceded the selection of Foundations & Frameworks titles.

**Small group interaction is a daily practice.** Small groups enable teachers to know their students and adjust instruction to meet the needs of individuals. Small groups also provide an opportunity for students to further develop their understanding of text through thoughtful discussion with the teacher and with others reading the same text. The small groups structure also gives teachers the flexibility to group students for re-teaching, reviewing, or for providing additional, individualized guided practice. While small group sessions take place, other students in the classroom prepare for their small group session by reading, adding entries to SPECS Logs, and completing practice with vocabulary words. SPECS Logs (SPace for Extending Comprehension Skills) are specially designed notebooks that foster student comprehension of text by providing space for the development of visual tools.

**Visual tools are used to organize and represent patterns of thinking.** Visual tools are graphic tools used to organize and connect information from a text. Because they represent the thinking process that has been explicitly taught and modeled, visual tools foster the thinking necessary to comprehend a text. With an associated visual tool for each skill, Foundations & Frameworks equips students to think effectively in reading and in every other area of learning. For example, a flow chart used in the study of sequence of events provides an image of the process-sequence looks like a chain of boxes arranged in order. This understanding helps students understand the sequence of history, the sequence of the scientific process, the sequence of steps involved in long division, the sequence of throwing a ball correctly, and much more content in every area.

**Vocabulary instruction emphasizes complete word understanding.** Vocabulary instruction must emphasize complete word understanding to be effective. Definitional, contextual and conceptual word understanding leads to ownership, allowing the student to not only comprehend new words, but to use them effectively in speaking and writing. Foundations & Frameworks emphasizes all three areas of word understanding through individual, small group, and whole class instruction and activities. Frequent feedback from teachers enables students to refine their understanding of words and promotes intentional and accurate word usage.

### **Foundations & Frameworks is an investment in education's most valuable asset-its teachers.**

Research has repeatedly confirmed that the most significant factor in a student's academic achievement is the classroom teacher. To improve reading achievement, improve reading instruction. A sound professional development investment in teachers results in greater intentionality with teachers knowing why they do what they do. Foundations & Frameworks is such an investment. Teachers who have completed Foundations & Frameworks training are better equipped to teach reading because they understand the basic elements that make up the process and they understand the process itself. This enables them to make instructional decisions that positively impact student achievement. They know the students, and they know reading so they can design instruction intentionally, matching student need with instruction. For a school to implement Foundations & Frameworks, teachers are required to attend a ten-day training in major elements of reading instruction, including: instructional design, reading comprehension, visual tools, small groups, vocabulary, assessment, and content area reading.

### **Research of Foundations & Frameworks validates its effectiveness.**

Endeavoring to evaluate the validity of Foundations & Frameworks and its effectiveness within the school setting, Robertson (2002) studied the program's impact on third and fourth grade student grades in reading. 100 percent of the study's participants improved in vocabulary and reading comprehension, and more than half increased their percentile ranking by 10 points or more.

On a larger scale, Albee (2004) researched the program's impact on nearly 1500 students in grades three through six at six different schools in different regions of the country and with diverse student populations. After only seven months, the average vocabulary gain represented 1.7 years' worth of development. Similarly, comprehension growth averaged 1.3 years' worth of development. Since only seven months passed between the pre-test and post-test in this study, the results represented remarkable gains. Additionally, the results did not include the top 25 percent of fifth grade students and the top 30 percent of sixth grade students because their post-test scores were higher than the testing instrument's ability could adequately measure.

And currently, research conducted by Washburn (2005) will reveal the program's impact on reading and critical thinking skills. Preliminary results indicate significant growth in critical thinking by sixth grade students in an Foundations & Frameworks classroom. Results on the post-test show the group's average gain of 15 percentage points over the pre-test results. Further study within this and other grades is ongoing and will be forthcoming.