

Units of Study in Phonics, Grades K—2
By Lucy Calkins and TCRWP Colleagues

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Question: *How did the new Units of Study in Phonics come to be?*

Lucy Calkins:

I'm really excited to be just finishing the phonics program, the phonics Units of Study, and sending them off into the world. And I'm just imagining what the questions are that you're probably asking, and my hunch is that the first question that's on your mind is how is it TC has decided to do phonics Units of Study? All these years we've been doing the writing Units of Study and the reading Units of Study. Why phonics and why now? I want to start and answer that question, and I think that the most important impetus for this really was that we were in your classrooms and we watched what's happening and what we see is that people have a reading workshop and they have a writing workshop and then trying to stick somebody else's phonics in between that ended up being really cumbersome and awkward and often too large to fit neatly into it. And as a result, there was a lack of transference between reading and phonics and writing. And ultimately the only reason to teach phonics is to be teaching phonics in use, to be teaching it towards transfer, to be teaching phonics so that kids are using it as readers and writers. So we wanted to develop a lean and efficient economical approach to phonics that would fit neatly between the teaching of reading and writing and that actually uses workshop structure in teaching phonics so that if kids are used to turn and talk and they're used to stop and jot and they're used to reading mats or they're used to writers' folders and books and so forth, that they're bringing all of that into their phonics instruction. So that was our impetus. What we've ended up doing, though, I think, is actually reimagining the entire genre of curriculum in phonics in a way that I think is going to be really important. Because when we started looking super closely at all the existing phonics programs that are out there, it just seemed to us that there was a kind of sterility to them and that you couldn't exactly picture the faces and voices of kids. We've tried to develop an approach to phonics that honors everything that we know about good teaching and about child development. So it's a curriculum in phonics that invites kids to role play and sing and act and invent and question and, above all, to talk. And it's an approach towards phonics where the teaching of phonics is always brought into reading and into writing, where transference is just a matter of fact, it's where kids are practicing what they're learning. So that's been the most important thing for us.

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