

Publisher's Response to the Texas Rubric Review Report for
HMH ¡Arriba la Lectura! Grades K–3 Phonics Instruction
(January 2023)

INTRODUCTION

HMH appreciates the thorough and insightful review that the Texas Resource Review (TRR) at Safal Partners, the Texas Education Agency, and participating educators conducted of the phonics lessons — a sub-strand of the integrated foundational skills lessons — in *¡Arriba la Lectura! Grades K–3*. We find the TRR report to be balanced and one that points out the many strengths in the program, of which we are proud.

To support that endorsement, we would like to highlight additional aspects of *¡Arriba la Lectura!*'s foundational skills instruction that are especially important for educators to understand.

Foundational skills instruction in *¡Arriba la Lectura!* is developmentally sequenced. The scope and sequence of skills reflects an explicit and systematic approach to teaching children the rules of Spanish phonology and phonetics with a view to supporting their reading comprehension and fluency as well as writing skills.

That approach is also completely in consonance with the Spanish Language Arts TEKS — as evidenced by the 100% compliance certification bestowed to the program by the Texas Education Authority.

¡ARRIBA LA LECTURA!: SCOPE AND SEQUENCE RATIONALE

Vowels

At the emergent and early-alphabetic stages, children are introduced to and given frequent practice with strong- and weak- vowel auditory discrimination and invariant vowel sounds/spellings.

Consonants and Consonant Digraphs

Consonants are introduced in accordance with the traditional sequence of teaching Spanish sounds and letters, and predicated on these general criteria:

- **Letter-Sound Correspondence Regularity** Graphemes/letters with absolute (1:1) sound-spelling correspondence are taught first; graphemes that represent more than one phoneme/sound — or phonemes/sounds that can be spelled differently — are taught later.
- **Utility Level** Graphemes and phonemes used more than others are taught first. High-utility sounds/letters such as /m/ *m*, /p/ *p*, /l/ *l* are taught before low-utility ones such as /k/ *k*, /y/ *y*, and /s/ *z*.

Vowel Combinations

Diphthongs, hiatuses, and triphthongs are introduced only after children have mastered vowel and consonant sound-spelling correspondences and received explicit instruction in written-accent rules and the function of the written accent in syllable stress. This is in

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accordance with the Grade 3 SLAR TEKS 2.A.iv: *becoming very familiar with the concept of hiatus and diphthongs and the implications for orthographic accents.*

Vowel combinations are generally taught in this order:

- weak-strong vowel diphthongs
- strong-weak vowel diphthongs
- diphthongs with two weak vowels
- hiatuses with two strong vowels; strong vowel-stressed weak vowel combinations
- triphthongs

A GENERAL OVERVIEW: GRADES K–3

Kindergarten lessons introduce and reinforce phonological awareness and phonics skills following the synthetic method, known as the "método silábico," and progress from teaching children to pair vowel and consonant sounds to form syllables to focusing on identifying, blending, segmenting, and manipulating syllables; identifying sound-letter correspondences; and decoding and encoding words and sentences with common consonant and vowel patterns.

Syllable-by-syllable blending and segmenting is taught for multisyllabic words; sound-by-sound blending and segmenting is taught for monosyllabic words (e.g. *mar, van, sol*).

Grade 1 lessons impart foundational skills instruction at a more accelerated pace, and follow a similar sequence of instruction as Kindergarten, but skill complexity progresses over the course of the school year. Some consonants are taught earlier or later in the sequence. Also introduced at this grade are consonant blends, digraphs, diphthongs, special plurals, high-frequency prefixes and suffixes, and word families.

Grade 2 lessons main cover commonly-used affixes; sounds with multiple letter correspondences; rules for forming special plurals; diphthongs, triphthongs, hiatus, and compound words.

Grade 3 lessons focus on progressively more complex skills. Phonics and spelling instruction starts with a review of previously-learned patterns (spelling rules for phonemes; silent letters; homophones; homographs) and moves into the structural-analysis categories of compound words; affixes; accent marks; and word origins.

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A MORE DETAILED OVERVIEW: GRADES K–3

GRADE K

The scope and sequence of decoding (phonics) and encoding (spelling) skills is systematic. Students identify and match the most common sounds in Spanish that letters represent, which include the /k/ sound spelled *qu* and /g/ spelled *gu* and /rr/ spelled *rr* before they decode words with consonant digraphs *ch*, *ll*, and silent *h*.

The introduction of the grapheme and consonant digraph *rr* after *r* reflects a systematic sequence. Because the /rr/ sound is highly common in Spanish and represented in words by initial *r* and the consonant digraph *rr*, the graphemes are introduced in consecutive instructional weeks to reinforce to students that although the spelling of the /rr/ phoneme varies, they can follow predictable rules governed by the position of the letter *r* (at the beginning of a word) and by the consonant digraph *rr* to decode and spell words with the /rr/ sound.

In the program, students learn "oral syllables" or "sílabas orales" before decoding. This is in accordance with TEKS K.2.B(i): *identifying and matching the common sounds that letters represent*). The emphasis of the phonics lessons is on the sound that the individual letter represents.

GRADE 1

The foundational skills lessons in every week of instruction provide systematic, direct instruction for connecting phonemes to letters within words. Letter-to-phoneme correspondence in Spanish is highly consistent, with the exception of a few irregular patterns such as *h*, *gue/gui*, *que/qui*, which contain or represent an unvoiced (silent) letter.

Once students have learned the invariant vowel sounds and the regular sounds of most consonants in Spanish, blending consonants and vowels to form syllables becomes the basis for blending and segmenting to decode.

¡Arriba la Lectura! focuses on a key tenet of Spanish phonology: the syllable is the most meaningful unit of a word at both the phoneme as well as grapheme level. Once students master understanding of consistent letter/sound relationships, the instructional focus moves to syllable structures. They then learn to decode by syllable, learn to spell by syllable, and learn accent-mark rules based on syllables. This decoding routine facilitates moving quickly to a focus on the ultimate purpose of decoding: fluency and comprehension.

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GRADE 2

The progression of skills in Grade 2 does assume student understanding and/or mastery of skills taught in Grade 1, but the materials nevertheless provide a systematic sequence for reviewing and learning new decoding (phonics) and encoding (spelling) skills, based on the sequence articulated by the SLAR TEKS.

Because the phonetic variations of Spanish consonants can prove challenging to early learners, the progression of skills in Grade 2 — as in Grade 1 — moves from targeting simpler sound-spelling patterns to more complex ones, irrespective of whether they have been taught in prior years. This is in accordance with the progression outlined in the SLAR TEKS for decoding as well as spelling, which articulate teaching simpler skills such as multiple sound-spelling patterns before progressing to more complex ones such as diphthongs, hiatuses, and abbreviations.

Students are expected to practice and master the rules of reading and writing word types and of syllable stress based on the guiding principles of syllable division — which they do in Modules 1–9 — before they move on to targeting diphthongs, triphthongs, and hiatuses. Those skills are predicated on students' prior knowledge gained in earlier modules of vowel types (open, semi-open, closed) and the role of the written accent, which they can then apply to learning the rules of syllabification of words with diphthongs and hiatuses, which include how vowel combinations are dissolved by written accents.

GRADE 3

The focus on diphthongs and hiatuses and their implications for written accents reflects a systematic sequence that is in consonance with the progression of skills outlined in the SLAR TEKS.

The TEKS articulate the following progression from simpler to more complex skills: decoding and spelling words with a prosodic or orthographic accent and decoding and spelling words with multiple sound-spelling patterns before progressing to becoming familiar with the concept of hiatuses and diphthongs and their implications for orthographic accents. The Grade 3 sequence of skills reflects this general progression of skill complexity.

In Grade 3, the focus on diphthongs and hiatuses in the last quarter of the academic year is based on starting with previously learned simpler skills and progressing into more complex ones over the course of the year. This responds to TEKS 2.A.iv: *becoming very familiar with the concept of hiatus and diphthongs and the implications for orthographic accents.*

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Student familiarity with diphthongs and hiatuses and their implications for written accents is predicated on explicit prior instruction and review of vowel types (open, semi-open, closed) and consonant-vowel patterns in open and closed syllables and their implications for syllabification. The rules governing the various uses of the written accent in word types such as *agudas*, *graves*, *esdrújulas*, and *sobreesdrújulas* are also reinforced before students review the rules of syllable division in diphthongs and hiatuses and how written accents dissolve diphthongs. This approach assures deeper student familiarity with hiatuses and diphthongs.

Thank you to TRR and our loyal customers.

We would like to thank the Texas Resource Review at Safal Partners and the Texas Education Agency for including *¡Arriba la Lectura!* in this review. The program's 100% alignment to the SLAR TEKS and the overwhelmingly positive feedback present in Safal Partners' report on behalf of Texas Resource Review reflect our commitment to ensuring, through the sound and carefully constructed pedagogical practices evident in the program, that young students of all backgrounds and abilities become successful readers. We strongly believe in the strength of the program and look forward to continuing to grow with our customers and meet students' and educators' needs.
