



NEWS

Reading into the future

Pilot program at Pendleton Elementary uses tablet computers to teach kindergartners reading comprehension and vocabulary.

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BOOKS

Footsteps2Brilliance has a variety of books for kids to choose from. In addition to reading and vocabulary, each book touches on a particular learning skill. Some are:

"Full Moon Parade": When the full moon is out and the farmer is asleep, barn animals parade around. This book is meant to help with counting skills, as the parade progresses from one cow to 10 squirrels.

"Big Top Job": A circus clown goes about her daily business. The book teaches the days of the week, as the clown does something different each day. Questions ask about the sequence of events.

"Under Construction": Construction workers build on an empty lot. The book includes onomatopoeia – making up words that sound like their meanings – and animals such as a mouse and a hippo.

"Whose Shoes?": From ballerinas to athletes, this book tells which shoes go with which activity. The book teaches about possessive nouns and pronouns.

Source: earlylearningu.com

Alan Martinez's favorite time of day is iPad time.

On a recent Thursday, he chose to spend that time reading a book, "Under Construction."

Illustrations of a construction site appeared on the screen with the text underneath. Alan pressed the left side of the screen, and the words were read aloud.

"This one is using a jackhammer," Alan said about a construction worker.

He tapped the picture and the worker started drilling into the concrete. Alan pressed the right side of screen to turn to the next page. It was a close-up of the jackhammer.

"And here's a jackhammer using itself," he said, tapping the screen to make the jackhammer move.

Alan is a kindergartner at Pendleton Elementary School in Buena Park. His iPad time is a part of a pilot program started this year in which children use the application Footsteps2Brilliance. Every kindergartner in the school plays with an iPad for about 20 minutes each day to help with vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Buena Park had seen such a program successfully implemented in Napa County, Superintendent Greg Magnuson said. Out of the district's six elementary schools, Pendleton was chosen to spearhead the pilot program because of its smaller number of kindergartners, making it easier to manage.

The iPads at Pendleton aren't the only ones in the district. A couple of other schools have roving iPad carts and, for instance, a teacher at Buena Park Junior High uses them for math class. But Pendleton is the only school where kindergartners have access to iPads.

The school has about 60 for about 80 kindergartners. The

GAMES

Footsteps2Brilliance quizzes children using various games, including:

Word Wall: Kids are shown a picture from the book they just read and are asked to drag letters into boxes to spell what that picture is. An audio button allows them to hear the word they need to spell. If they need help, they can click a hint button, which shows them the word.

Mighty Matches: Children match different cards to one other, like which word goes with which picture.

Book Buddies: It tests reading comprehension by asking kids questions about the book they just read. Different levels have different difficulties. The first level asks kids to choose the picture that answers the question. The second level is a multiple-choice quiz. In the third level, the kids have to type the answer.

Create a Book: The book they make is supposed to have some relation to the book they read. To make the book, they can drag images from the book they read to their new one or they can draw their own pictures.

program's \$49,500 cost includes the app, the iPads and related equipment like wireless hotspots and charging stations.

Footsteps2Brilliance includes an array of interactive e-books.

Children can click on the screen to have the words read aloud. They can click individual words to hear them pronounced. And they can click on the pictures to see different animations.

After the kids are done reading, they take quizzes formatted as games.

In Word Wall, students are shown a picture from the book and asked to drag letters into boxes to spell what that picture is.

The program tracks each child's progress and sends that information to the teacher.

In Kelli Palmer's class, each student has already been exposed to thousands words in the program.

The school was a bit worried that 5-year-olds would be too young to know how to use the iPads. But they can work them better than the teachers, Palmer said.

"Some of them fix problems on the iPads that I have no idea how to fix," Palmer said. "They're not inhibited by it, and they're not afraid of it."

It's too early to tell how this year's vocabulary and reading comprehension compares with previous years, Principal Renee Jeffrey said. But the school is talking about adding the program to its first grade next school year.

One benefit of Footsteps2Brilliance is that parents can download it to their device – tablet, cellphone or computer. Even parents who are otherwise poor tend to have some sort of device the program can be used on, Jeffrey said.

"When you're at the laundromat, and your kids are going crazy, you can give them this educational program instead of a video game," she said.

Gavin Cannon was using his iPad time recently to read "Big Top Job." His description of the book: A person wants to be a clown and is squirted with water by an elephant.

After he was done reading, he played a matching game. He tapped the screen to turn over cards and match pictures to words.

When asked, Gavin couldn't remember which words he's learned this year. But, like his classmates, playing with the iPad is his favorite part of class.

And Gavin did learn at least one important lesson from "Big Top Job": "I learned that jobs are sometimes fun and sometimes not."

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