

WHITEPAPER

# UNLOCKING EARLY LITERACY

Understanding and  
Supporting the Emergent  
Mono and Multilingual  
Reader





## INTRODUCTION

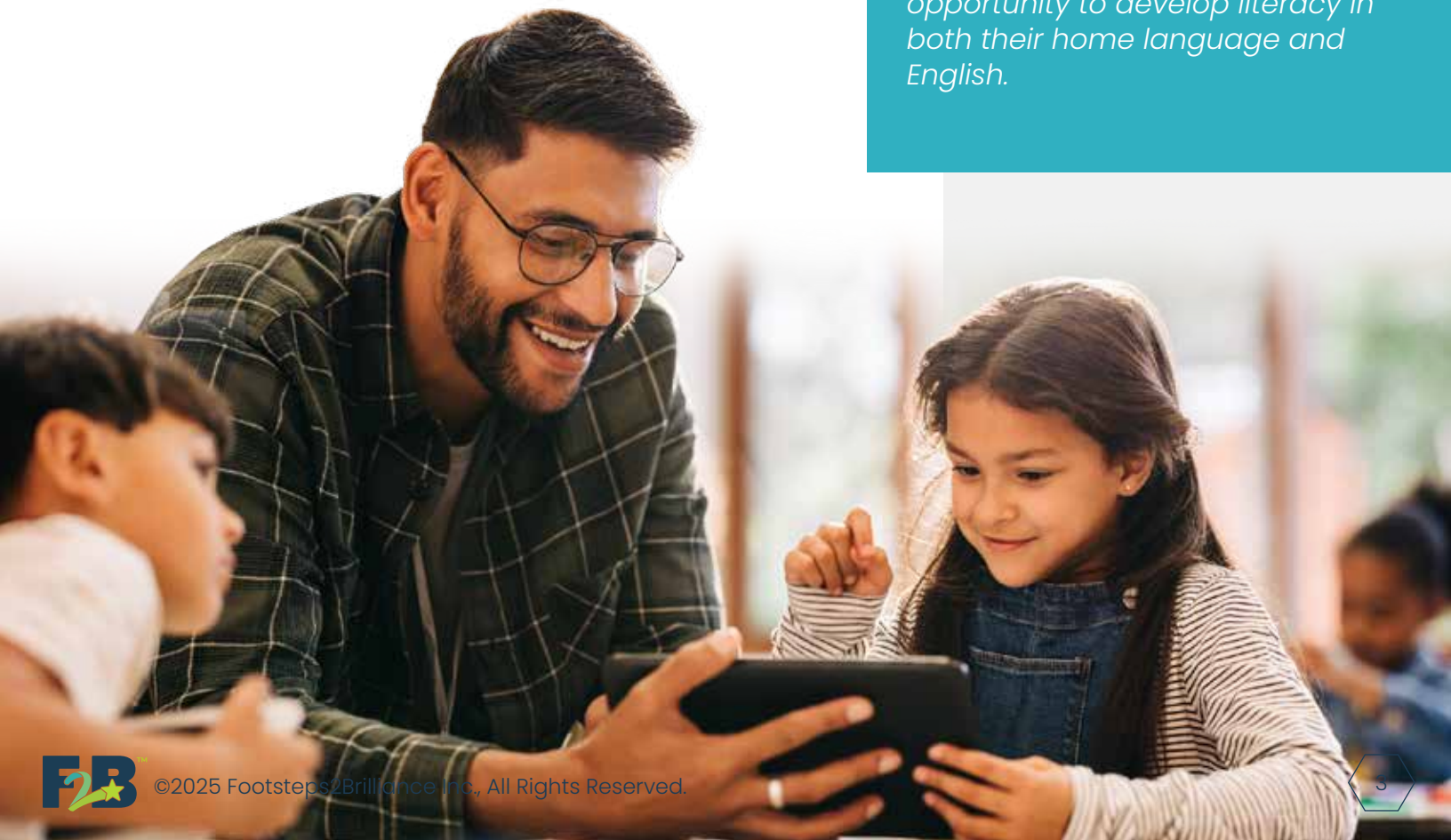
At Footsteps2Brilliance, we believe literacy is the foundation for all future learning. Helping children become successful readers starts long before they can read independently. The emergent reader stage is a critical window of opportunity where the right support from educators, families, and technology can make all the difference. This white paper explores the stages of emergent reading development, offers actionable strategies for educators and parents, and shows how Footsteps2Brilliance helps children thrive at every step.

### Footsteps2Brilliance Fast Fact

*Footsteps2Brilliance works on any device, online or offline—making early learning truly accessible for all families.*

### Multilingual Learners Matter

*Footsteps2Brilliance offers bilingual content and family access in English and Spanish, ensuring multilingual learners have the opportunity to develop literacy in both their home language and English.*



# WHAT IS AN EMERGENT READER?

An emergent reader is a child who is beginning to develop awareness of print and language, typically between birth and age six. At this stage, children develop foundational skills--like knowing letter names and sounds, hearing and playing with the sounds in words (phonemic awareness), building their vocabulary, and an enjoyment of reading--all of which are essential for becoming confident readers.

These foundational skills are critical to preventing future reading difficulties, as emphasized in the landmark report by Snow, Burns, & Griffin (1998).

Investing in early literacy during these foundational years isn't just beneficial; it's essential for building strong readers and lifelong learners. (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

## Did You Know?

*The early years—from birth to age five—are a critical period for brain development and skill formation. Experiences during this time profoundly shape a child's ability to learn, communicate, and thrive.*



# STAGE 1

## AWARENESS AND EXPLORATION (BIRTH TO AGE 3)

### Key Characteristics:

- » Recognizes familiar sounds and rhythms in language
- » Imitates sounds and begins babbling
- » Enjoys listening to songs, rhymes, and simple stories
- » Begins recognizing that books are read left to right

### Contribution to Proficient Reading:

This stage helps young children begin developing the skills they need for language and reading. By listening to sounds and sounds and rhythms, and beginning to notice how books and print work, they build the foundation they'll need to sound out words and understanding what they read later on. Early language experiences are crucial in developing vocabulary and comprehension skills (DeBruin-Parecki, Reading Rockets).

### How Parents Can Help:

1. Read aloud daily using expressive voices and repetition
2. Sing songs and nursery rhymes to develop awareness of sounds in speech
3. Talk about what you see and hear throughout the day
4. Let children handle board books and picture books
5. Create a print-rich environment with labels and simple words

### Learning Through Play

*Songs, rhymes, and narrated books on Footsteps2Brilliance build early phonemic awareness (awareness of sounds in speech) and vocabulary through play.*

### How Educators Can Help:

1. Incorporate story time and music
2. Use puppets and props to bring stories to life
3. Model book-handling skills
4. Introduce picture-word associations
5. Encourage verbal expression through play and conversation

## Multilingual Learners:

At this stage, children who are learning in more than one language are developing parallel systems of sound and meaning. Multilingual learners benefit from frequent, rich oral language exposure in both their home language and English.

### Strategies for Multilingual Learners:

- » Encourage families to speak, sing, and read to children in their home language
- » Use bilingual books and songs to support language transfer
- » Label classroom objects in multiple languages
- » Model gestures and visual supports when introducing new vocabulary
- » Provide opportunities for storytelling in all languages spoken at home

### How Footsteps2Brilliance Helps:

- » Offers bilingual books with read-aloud narration and engaging illustrations
- » Includes songs, rhymes, and animations that support listening and speaking skills
- » Promotes early vocabulary through interactive picture books
- » Accessible on any device, allowing families to build routines at home



# STAGE 2

## EXPERIMENTAL READING AND WRITING (AGES 3–5)

### Key Characteristics:

- » Begins to understand that print carries meaning
- » Pretends to read familiar books
- » Can recognize letters and some high-frequency words
- » Attempts to write letters or names

### Contribution to Proficient Reading:

This stage builds crucial connections between spoken and written language. Children begin to experiment with letter-sound correspondence, which is foundational for decoding, while also developing a sense of story structure – such as beginning, middle, and end – which supports early comprehension skills.

### How Parents Can Help:

1. Point out and name letters in books and the environment
2. Encourage storytelling and retelling in their own words
3. Provide opportunities for drawing and scribbling
4. Make writing fun with sidewalk chalk or magnetic letters
5. Play rhyming and sound games

### How Educators Can Help:

1. Create literacy centers with books, writing tools, and labels
2. Use interactive read-alouds to build comprehension and vocabulary
3. Introduce letter-sound relationships with visual aids
4. Provide structured opportunities for dictation and drawing
5. Use songs and poems with predictable patterns

### Creating, Not Just Consuming

*With the simplified tools in Footsteps2Brilliance's Create-a-Book, even young learners can author and illustrate their own digital stories.*

## Multilingual Learners:

Multilingual learners at this stage begin transferring oral language into print. Maintaining their home language while introducing English supports cognitive and literacy development in both languages.

### Strategies for Multilingual Learners:

- » Pair new English words with home-language equivalents
- » Encourage code-switching and dual-language storytelling
- » Use visual word walls in both languages
- » Provide sentence frames and sentence starters modeling in English
- » Celebrate and incorporate students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in class activities

### How Footsteps2Brilliance Helps:

- » Reinforces letter recognition and sounds through interactive games
- » Encourages writing with the Create-a-Book feature
- » Builds fluency and comprehension with interactive read-alouds
- » Offers repetition with variety, helping children internalize language patterns



# STAGE 3

## EARLY READING AND WRITING (AGES 5–7)

### Key Characteristics:

- » Begins reading simple texts independently
- » Recognizes an increasing number of sight words
- » Can decode CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) words
- » Writes simple sentences and attempts invented spelling

### Contribution to Proficient Reading:

In this stage, children develop the ability to independently decode and comprehend text—critical for fluent reading. They also gain confidence in using reading and writing as tools for communication and learning.

### How Parents Can Help:

1. Read simple books together and take turns
2. Play word games like bingo or scavenger hunts
3. Encourage writing letters, cards, or short stories
4. Praise reading efforts and celebrate progress
5. Ask questions about stories to build comprehension

### How Educators Can Help:

1. Offer leveled texts for guided and independent reading
2. Teach phonics systematically and explicitly
3. Provide opportunities for journaling and creative writing
4. Use graphic organizers to build comprehension skills
5. Offer feedback and encouragement in small group settings

### Track Progress with Confidence

*Educators and families can use real-time analytics in Footsteps2Brilliance to monitor usage, literacy growth, and student engagement.*

## Multilingual Learners:

As multilingual learners begin to decode and write in English, continuing support in their home language helps reinforce literacy skills and comprehension. Scaffolding and targeted feedback support fluency across both languages.

### Strategies for Multilingual Learners:

- » Provide dual-language texts when available
- » Teach cognates and root words across languages
- » Use peer partnerships and small groups for reading support
- » Highlight text structures and vocabulary explicitly
- » Encourage students to write in both languages when appropriate

### How Footsteps2Brilliance Helps:

- » Provides leveled books with comprehension checks
- » Reinforces phonics and decoding through interactive games
- » Encourages daily writing with digital publishing tools
- » Tracks student progress with real-time data for educators and families



## CONCLUSION

The journey from emergent to independent reader is one of the most important a child will take—and it begins early. Each stage builds on the last, helping students become proficient readers as they develop the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in speech, apply decoding skills, read with comprehension and express themselves in writing. These stages align closely with research-based

recommendations for early intervention outlined in *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). By understanding the stages of development and using tools like Footsteps2Brilliance, families and educators can work together to give every child a strong, joyful start in literacy. Together, we can close the gap, one brilliant mind at a time.

### References:

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## ABOUT FOOTSTEPS2BRILLIANCE

Footsteps2Brilliance is the leading provider of effective next-generation digital tools, bilingual content, and learning experiences that connect school and home, and enhance, not replace, excellent teaching. Since 2012 we've committed our research and resources to closing the reading achievement gap for all students from birth through elementary school using a collaborative impact approach. In partnership with educators, families, and communities we are unlocking brilliance and empowering students to realize their full potential.

Learn more at [www.Footsteps2Brilliance.com](http://www.Footsteps2Brilliance.com).