

How this school got their students reading & writing from Pre-K



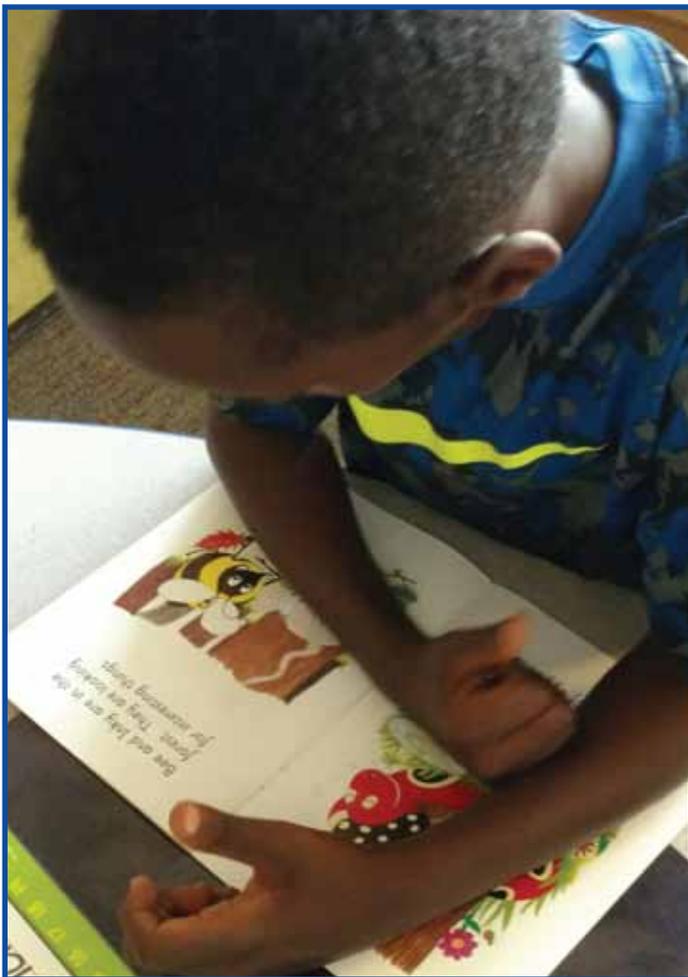
Phoenix Country Day School: The best foundation for learning

A Case Study

Providing the building blocks for children's learning



PCDS was founded in 1961 and is situated in the picturesque Paradise Valley in Arizona. Community is a most highly valued focus of every day. All members of the Lower School community - parents, teachers, and administrators - are focused on providing students with an education that will prepare all students for the world in which they live, while still protecting the joy that they so rightly deserve.



By Jaki Ivins
Head of Lower School

When I was first introduced to the Jolly Phonics program ten years ago, I was stunned by the simplicity of the approach. I found the idea of synthetic phonics aligned with what I knew about teaching reading in developmentally appropriate ways, and so immediately I began implementing it with my class of four year olds. At the same time I began to read the research on this approach, and Jolly Phonics in particular. What I found in the research substantiated the results that I was seeing with my students. First and foremost was the level of engagement. The children were immediately drawn to the stories and songs and displayed a high level of interest in all of the activities. What I noticed next was their ability to begin to blend words, within a few days, as the program is structured in a way to support that. That first school year ended with my deep commitment to this approach and so the next year, when I accepted a pre-kindergarten teaching position at PCDS, I did so with the understanding that I would bring this program to my classroom and to the school. The next four years were filled with many extraordinary moments of seeing my four-year-old students find joy in being able to decode and write, moments that filled my heart with deep professional satisfaction.

The Jolly Phonics program was adopted in our pre-kindergarten and kindergarten, and the Jolly Grammar program followed in our first grade. In my fifth year at PCDS, I was promoted to Head of Lower School and soon after had the opportunity to expand the Jolly Grammar program through our Fourth Grade.

As an administrator I continue to see the same delightful results for our students that I experienced within my classroom. We are preparing young learners with the skills to read and write. I also know that I have resources to support our teachers in administering the program, with fidelity, and that is important to the success of any program.

The teacher's story

By Kelli Newsome
Pre-kindergarten Teacher



Teaching Jolly Phonics has significantly changed my beliefs about teaching phonics in an early childhood classroom. For five years, it has been an absolute joy to teach the Jolly Phonics curriculum to pre-kindergarten students (ages 4-5 years old). The programs and teaching practices I used for many years prior to my introduction to Jolly Phonics left me questioning the appropriateness of teaching reading and writing skills at the preschool level. I felt these programs were inadequate in structure and support, and there was very little evidence of learning and retention of "skills" that were introduced and practiced with my students. I explored manipulating and adapting various programs to meet the needs of students (and my own beliefs) within the classroom but continued to feel discouraged with my practice, until I was introduced to Jolly Phonics.

Jolly Phonics is truly one of the best gifts that I have been given as an educator. I have witnessed my pre-kindergarten students take hold of their own "Jolly Phonics magic" by taking ownership of their phonics knowledge, beginning reading skills, and independent and directed writing, to become confident and eager beginning readers and writers! From the start of the school year, students excitedly anticipate each sound, song, and story introduced in each lesson. The surprise on parents' faces as their children share new sounds, words read, and the sounds digraphs make, is further proof of the pure joy children experience when learning with Jolly Phonics! The delight and enthusiasm that has been commonly shared amongst children from year-to-year has made me realize that teaching phonics in this synthetic fashion is developmentally appropriate for the preschool age group.

Each year, I continue to be profoundly amazed at the initiative many children take to use their newfound phonics skills to label pictures and write letters to loved ones, as well as their confidence in sounding out words in their environment.

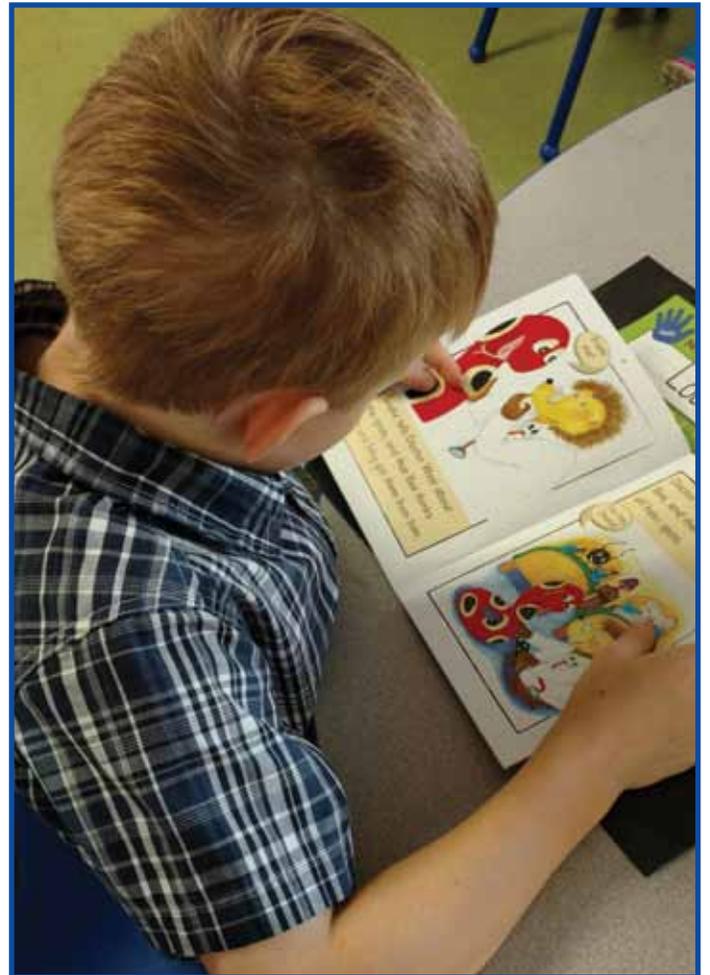
What parents have to say

"Jolly Phonics not only helped our son learn to read, it also provided an engaging method for learning. Our son was so excited he taught his little sister all the sounds and they practice together every night."

"Cassel has responded well to the concept of breaking words into sounds. At night when we read, he has started to cover up part of a word, sound out the first part, then cover the other part, sound it out, and put the two parts together. He gets so excited when a group of letters he doesn't initially recognize becomes a word he is familiar with."

Since he and Scarlett are so close in age, and are both doing Jolly Phonics, the sound book has become a nightly ritual that the two of them share and have a lot of fun with. Since Cassel is a little older, and on his second round of the program, he loves helping Scarlett learn the sounds and motions. I took some video last weekend of him helping her read a Bob Book; pretty priceless."

Stephanie and Jay- pre-kindergarten parents

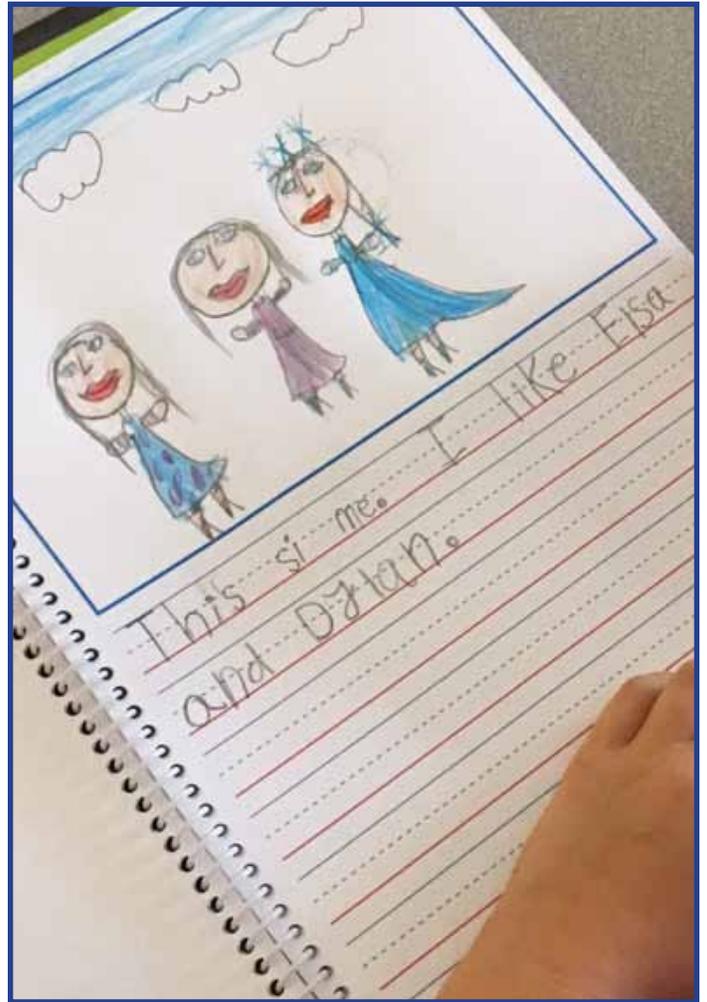


The teacher's story

By Pam Gagner
Kindergarten Teacher



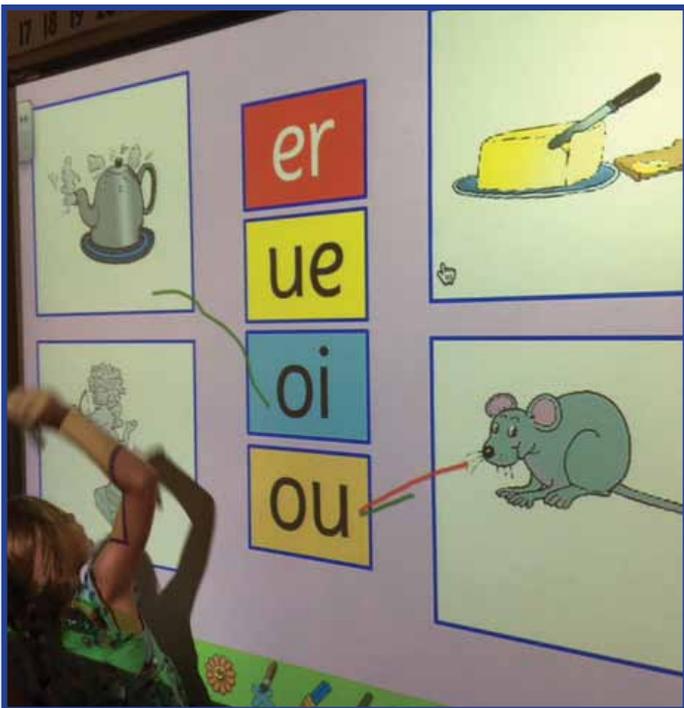
I worked in a highly respected private school in Canada and a Core Knowledge charter school in the United States. I spent hours each week creating lessons, adapting lessons from various programs, collaborating with colleagues, and constantly looking for resources in order to best meet my students' needs. I attended workshops, read articles and books in order to apply best practice and knowledge in the area of Language Arts. As hard as I worked, I found teaching reading and writing quite frustrating at times. It seemed to take so long to get through the alphabet, to teach children how to decode, to teach reading comprehension strategies, to find leveled books appropriate for each child's ability, to teach sight words, to teach spelling rules, to teach sentence structure and then to begin the writing process. Reading and writing go together and yet all the pieces of the "Language Arts puzzle" did not feel like they fit together.



Then in 2014 I was introduced to Jolly Phonics. I took the online training and was so impressed by the program! It is the most comprehensive and developmentally appropriate program that I have seen in all my years of teaching. When I began teaching Jolly Phonics, I could not believe how teacher-friendly it was for me and how fun and engaging it was for my students. All of a sudden, all the pieces of the "Language Arts puzzle" fit together and it made sense to the children.

Jolly Phonics honors the child. Pedagogy is embedded in this synthetic phonics program. Children learn through stories, jingles, movement, and the interactive lessons. The Jolly Phonics resources are outstanding. I am no longer spending hours looking for resources; they are provided.

The best part is seeing ALL my students succeed. They are confident, independent, and happy readers and writers. I LOVE Jolly Phonics!



The teacher's story

By Linda Drate

First Grade Teacher



I find that incoming first graders who have experienced Jolly Phonics have a solid knowledge of letter sounds and blends. They are able to decode phonetically spelled words with ease and comfortably transition from the Jolly Phonics readers to our Houghton Mifflin Harcourt series. Because of the decoding skills taught through Jolly Phonics, we are able to begin our reading program at a higher level than previous years.

By Mary Kay Meyers

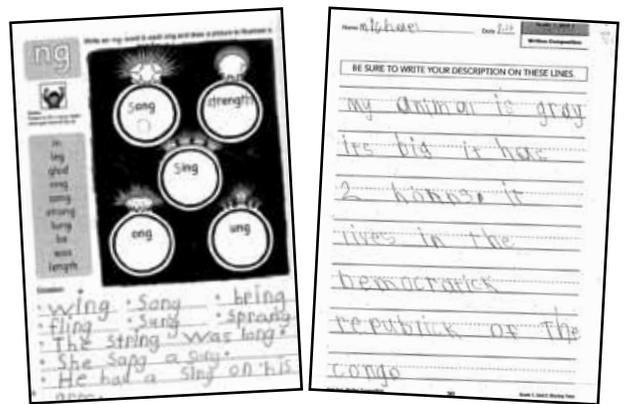
First Grade Teacher



The continuity of Jolly Phonics and Grammar through the primary grades has proved to provide an incredible advantage in literacy education. The systematic nature of Jolly Phonics lends itself to a clear understanding of the goals of each lesson. The students seem to look forward to the introduction of our weekly spelling list and enjoy playing “guess the focus”. They are quick to identify the sound we will be reviewing and draw on past experience to support their understanding. For example, when introducing consonant digraphs such as /sh/ and /ch/, the students immediately recall the actions they used to learn the sound, and in some cases, they recite the song. In addition, when highlighting vowel digraphs, the children are quick to recite, “when two vowels go walking, the first does the talking”. The presentation of the spelling lesson becomes a fun activity rather than a daunting task. Along with the logical progression of the spelling lessons, the grammar element is straightforward and child-centered. Students quickly show an appreciation for the importance of expressing their thoughts in writing neatly with proper sentence structure.

The retention of learning by the children is significant. We utilize the Jolly Grammar student workbooks every week and follow the Jolly Grammar spelling list. I especially like the dictation words and sentences in the workbook. They provide a great way to check on the students’ retention of spelling and punctuation rules while providing an opportunity for extra practice. The students learn to listen to the sounds that make up words and are able to spell with more accuracy. The grammar lessons are presented in an easily understood and meaningful manner, which allows the children to easily follow the concepts.

Jolly Phonics is the most extensive phonics program that I have ever worked with. It builds confidence in struggling readers and gives all children wonderful tools to use when approaching new vocabulary.



They seem to take pleasure in enhancing their writing with lively verbs and expressive adjectives. Some of their favorite workbook pages, for example, include the adjective page featuring the well-known Jolly Phonics Snake character. The lesson stimulates the children’s creativity and they begin to propose a long list of interesting adjectives. Finally, the year culminates with a comprehensive review of the parts of speech. The students typically seem to be amazed at how they have mastered the parts of speech. During our guided reading lessons, our students clearly incorporate the strategies they have learned through Jolly Phonics to read challenging selections. They identify the sounds in words, blend the sounds, and patiently take the time necessary to read fluently. Students will consistently recognize, and bring to the group’s attention, tricky words or words that include the blend or digraph of the week. Additionally, as the year progresses, the students will note parts of speech in the text, particularly if it is an unusual or humorous adverb or adjective.

What parents have to say

The Jolly Phonics program has helped my boys, with their disparate learning styles, learn to read in a way that is marvelous to watch. The program has the ability to transcend both teaching and learning styles to work for everybody. My boys have mild speech issues, which we have worked on for years, and I greatly admire the way Jolly Phonics teaches the sound, not the letter. My boys are bummed when they come in and their teachers tell them there is no new sound for the day. They sing the songs they learn all day long, starting the minute we get into the truck to drive home after school. They truly love this program. To observe my boys, that were scared to sound out words because they couldn't figure out how the sound works together, boys that would flat out refuse to try rather than fail again, boys that repeated "I can't read that", now say "puh-ah-r-tuh-ee", and see their faces light up with recognition and pride, "party, that word is party!" is beyond wonderful! They sound out words at the store, while we drive, in magazines, during commercials, and proudly stop me while I'm reading a book to tell me, "I want to read this page". To hear two formally fearful readers tell me, "I'm very smart mommy" and "that's a tricky word, but I know I can do it", well, how do you adequately describe the joy that brings to a mother? Sometimes, even with Jolly Phonics, there are no words. *A very grateful Pre-K mom*



I think Jolly Phonics is a wonderful program for students of all levels! My daughter Izzy learned to read at a young age, but when she started the Jolly Phonics program in pre-k, she loved it! She enjoyed learning the motions and the sounds, and also would come home and highlight the sounds learned that day in school in the words she was reading in her books. The sounds created a final piece of the puzzle for her reading; she not only could see the words but also the building blocks that made those words. This has been an extremely helpful tool in Izzy learning to spell. This year, as she has reviewed the sounds, her writing has blossomed! She feels empowered to spell any word because she can break it into its basic sounds. I will ask her to spell a word, and she will close her eyes, think about the sounds, and then spell the word using the phonemic sounds rather than the letters. Because of Jolly Phonics her brain thinks in phonemes! It really is a joy to watch!
Katie, Parent