

# Tips for Parents: Whole Language

## What is whole language?

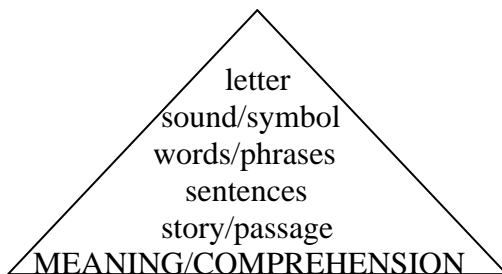
Whole language is the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing into meaningful learning. Whole language is a whole thing.

The emphasis is on student-involved and student-directed learning experiences. With whole language, learning occurs in meaningful ways.

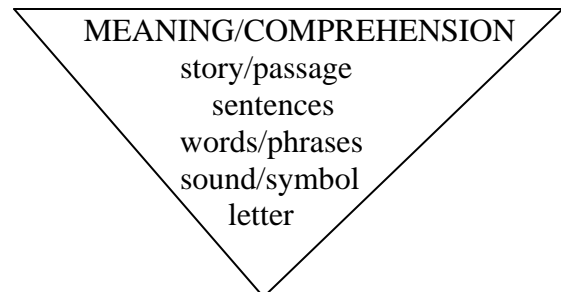
## How is whole language different from reading?

Traditional reading programs tend to teach independent skills in isolation. Whereas a skills-based reading program teaches students by moving from the part to the whole, whole language instruction moves from the whole to the part:

### Skill Based Approach:



### Whole Language Approach:



## How do children learn?

Think about how children learn—they develop strategies to communicate at a very early age. Children learn to become highly skillful talkers because we immerse them, from birth, in a world of speech.

If children are to become as proficient in reading and writing as they are with talking, they must be immersed in a world of print.

The link between language and the written word is the foundation of whole language.

## What does a teacher do in a whole language classroom?

A whole language teacher sees children as individual, curious, natural learners and not as reading groups—(top, middle, or low).

A whole language teacher is committed to teaching children and not just a particular basal reading program. The teacher's focus is on providing language-rich learning experiences.

Children learn to read by reading—and to write by writing. Using a child-centered approach, students in whole language classrooms learn to read and write because there are real reasons to do so.

A whole language classroom provides a safe and non-threatening environment: validating children, respecting their ideas and opinion, and encouraging risk-taking.

### **What can parents do?**

- Create a home environment that is “print rich”, encouraging reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- Demonstrate the whole language process. As you read, write, listen, or speak, allow your child to share in your language activities.
- Set expectations. Children are influenced by the expectations of the adults around them. When you believe in your children, they will believe in themselves.
- Teach responsibility. Children grow in self-reliance if they are encouraged to make decisions in their daily lives.

For more information:

### **Web links:**

The US Department of Education's “Helping Your Child Become a Reader”:  
<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/reader.pdf>

The US Department of Education's “A Guide to Reading Tips for Parents”:  
<http://www.ed.gov/parents/read/resources/guide/reading-parents.pdf>

### **Books:**

Cowen, John E. “A Balanced Approach to Beginning Reading Instruction: A Synthesis of Six Major U.S. Research Studies”. International Reading Association, 2003.

MacGowan-Gilhooly, Adele. “Achieving Clarity In English: A Whole-Language Book”. Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2001.

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