Triple R Teaching

In today's episode, we're going to talk about what makes a high quality decodable.

A decodable book, of course, is a book that has primarily words whose phonics patterns are those the students have already learned, so they can sound out most of the words in the book.

It used to be, if we wanted to use decodable books with our students, we just had to take what we could get. There weren't many options, and if the decodable book was a bunch of unrelated sentences with stilted language, so be it.

Well, times have changed, and now we have options. New series are being published all the time. So here are my qualifications for a good decodable book.

Number one, if it's a fiction decodable book, it tells a story. You know it tells a story because you can actually ask questions about the book. If you have a decodable book that goes all over the place, and you don't even know what you would say when it's done, you can't even think of a question to ask, that book should be a pass.

Number two, the best decodable books sound like we talk. In other words, we don't stuff in extra words just to get in more decodable text. This means we might have to put something in there that hasn't specifically been taught in order to preserve the sound of the English language. We wouldn't put, "He did sit on it." We don't talk like that, so I don't think books should include that. I would much rather have a book have an ED ending, even though that hasn't been explicitly taught, than throw in that word "did" or mix tenses, which is one of my pet peeves in decodable books.

Number three, the pictures should support the story without giving away the words. I'm ALL for pictures in decodable books, especially for the early ones, because you really can't tell much of a story with only one vowel and five consonants, but the pictures can carry the story, right? We can just have a single word on each page and the pictures can help us know exactly what's happening.

Number four, the books contain mostly decodable words. Some people think a decodable book should be one hundred percent decodable, except for a few irregular high frequency words, like "the" or "to." There's actually very little research about the use of decodable books, and there's definitely not research that says you need one hundred percent decodability, or any percent. It's really good to remember that if you are consistently using decodable books, and not leveled books, with your beginning readers, so they have learned to actually look at the words and sound them out, and their first go-to is not the pictures or the context or looking up at you, then it's not going to hurt them if, once in a while, there's a story word that they have to use the picture. It's okay.

I know this is really concerning for people. Wiley Blevins talks about this quite a bit, that it's not the end of the world to have a story word here and there to carry the story. We just want to make sure that our students are being taught to actually look at the words to read them.

So there you go! Those are my qualifications for high quality decodables. Fiction decodables tell a story. The best decodable books sound like we talk. The pictures support the story without giving away the words. And the books contain mostly decodable words, with perhaps a few story words thrown in for the books to be comprehensible, so that they actually make sense.

Next week, I'm going to share some of my favorite decodable books series! Check out the show notes for this episode at reachallreaders.com/episode 14.