A Viewer’s Guide to

Assessing Early Literacy
with Richard Gentry

J. Richard Gentry, Ph.D.
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Viewing the DVD Assessing Early Literacy with Richard Gentry, you will see children's writing with a new set of eyes. Instead of seeing children who can't write, you will see children who are becoming literate. Instead of worrying about how many letters or sounds or chunks of phonetic patterns they might unnaturally and awkwardly parrot in one minute, you will look deeper and see them moving along a healthy, normal developmental literacy continuum that reveals basic and important aspects of their current literacy development. You will learn when each phase is expected and receive tips on strategies and techniques to move children to the next level.

As you look at children's early writing, your new eyes will see “beginning to be literate”; they will never see “not literate.” With this revolutionary new vision, you will look far beyond the eccentric scribbles or inadequate spellings on the surface and see how these emerging readers and writers are thinking. Are they cueing only on beginning and ending sounds? Do they pay attention to the harder-to-grasp middle part of a word? Do they know chunks of phonics patterns, and do these patterns come to them automatically during reading or writing? Which chunks do they know and which ones need to be learned?

With this new set of eyes and this new vision of reading and writing reciprocity, you will track each step of the way as children decipher the complex English written code in five predictable, evidence-based phases of writing and reading. What you see in early writing will help you understand what young children are thinking as they read and how they are progressing toward breaking the code. That's the power of phase observation. It allows you to see deep into the mind of emerging readers and writers and understand how these children think it all works. Children's attempts at writing—the marks or letters they choose—are more powerful than a neuroscientist's brain scan, because
brain scans aren’t fine-tuned enough to monitor individual progress. A child’s creative spellings are like a traveler’s footprints. They show you how far the traveler has progressed and the mode or conveyance of travel. The child’s invented spelling and your new eyes will tell you how far the beginner has traveled toward breaking the English code.

You may want to stop at this point and view my introductory remarks. If you don’t yet understand the term *phase observation*, don’t worry. By the end of the ninety-minute video, you will. Push the play button, open your eyes, and enjoy the journey as you see seven children, ages four through seven years old, reveal powerful aspects of their literacy development through a simple little spelling test.

The strategy that matches a majority of the spellings reveals the child’s phase or level of development.

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The Monster Test—What It Can Do

The “Monster Test” is a brief developmental spelling test of five or ten especially chosen words. It can show you what phase children are in by revealing the strategy they use to invent spellings of unknown words. If children have moved beyond Phase 0 and can write some letters, they will likely use one of four remaining strategies:

- Phase 0—Scribbling
- Phase 1—Random letters
- Phase 2—Letters for beginning sounds (or for beginning and ending sounds)
- Phase 3—A letter for each sound
- Phase 4—Spelling in chunks of phonetic patterns

The strategy that matches a majority of the spellings reveals the child’s phase or level of development.
Thank you for sampling this resource.

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