

# Locally Developed Books Help Students with Dyslexia

Written by Susan Stein Kregar. Photos courtesy of READING IS FUN!

Is it a *b* or a *d*? Is the line on the left or right? Which is left and which is right? For someone with dyslexia, deciphering the letter *b* from *d* and left from right can be difficult.

Dyslexia, as explained by the [International Dyslexia Association](#), is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and poor spelling and decoding abilities.

Symptoms may include:

- delayed speech development.
- difficulty pronouncing long words properly and “jumbling” up phrases.
- problems expressing themselves using spoken language, putting sentences together incorrectly.
- little understanding or appreciation of rhyming words, such as “the cat sat on the mat” or nursery rhymes.
- difficulty with, or little interest in, learning letters of the alphabet.

Reading is Fundamental reports

- 34% of children entering kindergarten lack the basic skills needed to learn how to read.
- 65% of fourth graders read below grade level, contributing to 8,000 students dropping out of high school every day.
- 37% of students graduate at or above reading proficiency.

Dyslexia is an inherited condition. Scientists have identified the gene.

Green Valley resident, Cheryl Anthony, M.S. Ed., owner/president of Southern Arizona Educational Services LLC., provides assessments for dyslexia, direct services for reading, spelling, handwriting, and time-management difficulties.

“A typical classroom teacher asks students to read 10 to 20 minutes a night with parents (or guardians). When a student with dyslexia pulls a book off the shelf, the ‘guess and go’ strategy, often taught in instructional settings, will eventually impact the student’s reading comprehension.”

Even for students who use more specific level reader systems, Anthony cautions, there is not enough reading instruction and practice time for letter-to-sound pattern learning in the typical classroom, and the child with dyslexia is forced to guess many words. Anthony’s experience has taught her that the reading systems for the child with dyslexia must have explicit, direction instruction that is systematic and multi-sensory for the instruc-

tion. Anthony, living in the Pacific Northwest at the time, bought the Sonoran Desert Series to share with her students who knew little about the Southwest. Because the books were too difficult for them, John-Thorpe created podcasts. “This was so sad for me when I first started working with Cheryl,” says John-Thorpe. “I used to hold workshops for kids as young as six who would write

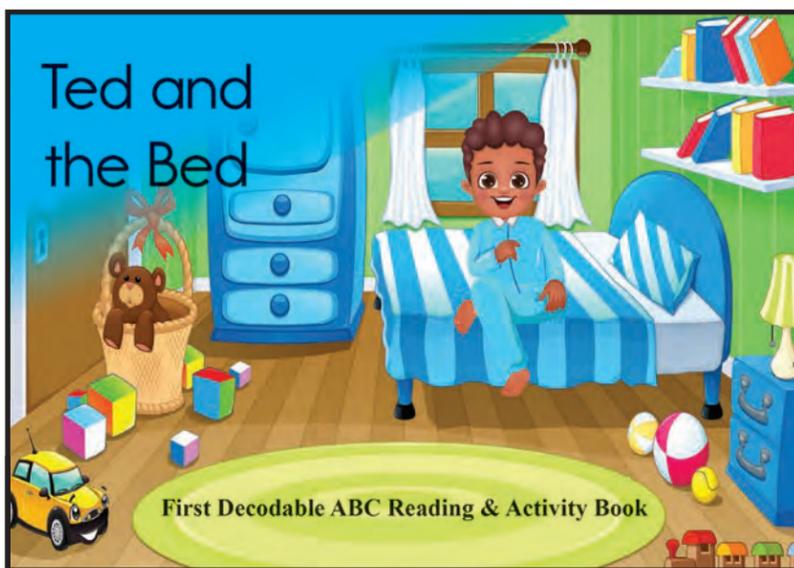
books. Then Cheryl told me about the kids, third grade and up, that fall through the cracks and can hardly read.”

It was the next year John-Thorpe and Anthony began working together to write books for children with dyslexia.

“The story takes a backseat,” says John-Thorpe. “I have to be careful with how I imagine the story.”

## Decoding The System

The books created through Reading Is Fun (RIF) must be “decodable.” Decoding is the ability to correctly sound out and blend symbols to sounds, which create words. With their system, the reader practices the symbol-sound patterns they have learned during their instruc-



The cover of Unit A's first book, Ted and the Bed.

tion to have the impact needed. Additionally, reading practice that allows for the student to practice the same letter patterns just learned must accompany the instruction.

## A Local Solution

How do educators, parents, grandparents, and other guardians help children decode the wonders of reading?

Anthony, in collaboration with Green Valley/Sahuarita residents, Yasmin John-Thorpe and Nikole Haumont, developed a solution – *decodable books*. Their READING IS FUN! books use decodable text in the early stages of literacy instruction to ensure that a child has the opportunity to read without guessing. Their decodable books include reading and other activities to keep kids engaged while learning.

John-Thorpe is a children’s author, fiction and non-fiction writer, and mentor to writers. Her books include the Sonoran Desert Series featuring, *Cruz Coyote & Rory Roadrunner*; *Jenry, the Silly Javelina*; and *What Am I?*, an ABC book for beginner readers, introducing the animals, birds, and plants in the series.

Haumont, the founder of Shield Bar Marketing, was named one of “AZ-



Helping struggling readers one book at a time.

Books and other resources are available at [rifbooks.com](http://rifbooks.com).

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continued on page 25

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Reading is fun continued from page 24

tional time with their teacher. The books provide the practice needed to consolidate the child's recent learning.

"The font makes a difference," says Haumont. "Of the 1,400 Adobe fonts available, we found only three that work." They chose the font, Report School.

The books start with consonants, short vowel sounds, and specific sight-to-symbol sound patterns. According to Anthony, when students have specific sound-to-symbol patterns, they can decode or read 100 percent of the books. The guesswork is removed from reading.

Vocabulary, sound-to-symbol practice, fluency, and reading comprehension questions are incorporated. "We have to be cautious in thinking that these are 'simple' books," says Anthony. "These books can be a lot of work because now that the child has learned something, they have to apply it. But suddenly, the students who struggled and given up, say 'I can read this! I can do this!' It

changes everything for them."

Unit A is only eight pages with one line per page and is fundamentally created for kids who have just begun the explicit, systematic instruction

ditional letter-to-sound patterns. There will be three titles released soon in this unit: Aa - Zz (the entire alphabet), Aa (just the letter Aa), and Bb (just the letter Bb). The rest of the alphabet will soon follow.

The 27 sketched books in this unit include *The First Decodable ABC Reading and Activity Book*, which features the 26 letters of the alphabet. The 26 letters will be taught in eight-page reading and activity books.

Each page will have two or three lines instead of one. Comprehension questions, activities, and jokes round out each book in this unit. Eye-hand coordination is practiced in this unit.

The Unit C books are being fine-tuned. John-Thorpe says it takes months to write the books for each unit. The Sonoran Desert Series will be introduced in later units.

**Where To Buy The Books**

The books are available at [rifbooks.com](http://rifbooks.com). The cost per book is \$14.99

and includes shipping in the continental U.S. The website's initial launch will include three titles in Unit A and Unit B. Each month thereafter, another title (or two) will be added.

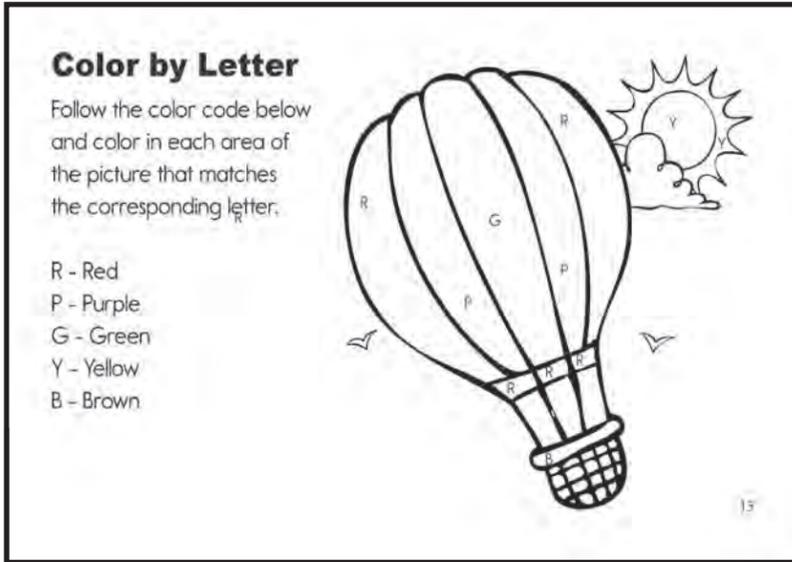
As the books gain traction, authors will be added to the RIF marketplace. "This is a way to have one area for people to find the right specialty books for a particular learning disability," says Haumont.

**Help A Struggling Reader**

Visit <https://rifbooks.com/dyslexia-indicators> for a comprehensive list of symptoms for preschoolers through adulthood. If the person you are concerned about has three or more, pursue an assessment. From there, you will have the information to know what to do next.

"If you guess what is causing a child's learning difficulties and begin applying remedies, you may be wasting very precious resources and time," says Anthony.

With practice, the RIF elements help the dyslexic individual become a good reader, she states. "I have seen this with many, many, struggling students reading below grade level. Then they graduate from high school and go on to college. It's a game-changer!"



An activity page from a Unit B book.

and need targeted practice with their newly learned letter-to-sound practice. They may have recently been diagnosed with dyslexia or may just have begun a phonetic-based reading instructional program.

Titles in Unit A include *Ted and the Bed; The Cat, the Red Bat and the Red Bed; and Bob, the Mop and the Mob*. There are six titles in this colorfully illustrated unit.

Unit B are for kids who know ad-



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