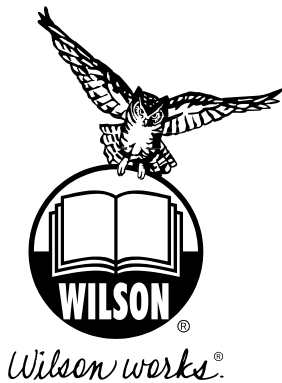


# Just Words® Overview and Studies of Program Effectiveness



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## Program Overview

Just Words® is a highly explicit, multisensory decoding and spelling program for students in grades 4–12 and adults who have mild to moderate gaps in their decoding and spelling proficiency (i.e., moderate word-level reading deficits) but do not require intensive intervention. The Just Words curriculum provides a sophisticated study of word structure appropriate for students beyond the elementary grades. It provides explicit teaching of “how English works” for both decoding and spelling automaticity.

### Program highlights include:

- Supports states’ rigorous college- and career-readiness standards, including Common Core State Standards with strategies for struggling readers—those who have not mastered the foundational skills of language structure typically learned in grades K-3—to independently read and spell words.
- Provides struggling readers with the foundational and language standards that are absolutely necessary to be able to access grade-level text.
- Directed, accelerated pacing of word structure based on the research-validated Wilson Reading System® (WRS).
- Emphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics, word study, and spelling.
- Explicit, systematic teaching of skills through the six syllable types and common Latin roots.
- Extensive student practice with multiple opportunities for skills development.
- Assessments for monitoring student progress throughout the program.
- Instructor Manual and online Intervention Learning Community for comprehensive teacher guidance and support.

### Just Words Implementation

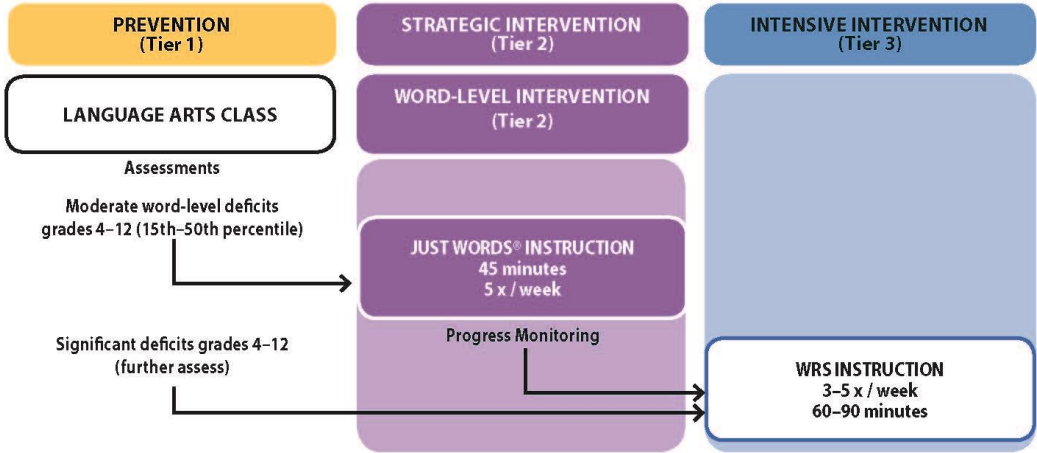
Just Words is designed to be implemented as a 5-day per week class in a year-long curriculum.

- 5 classes per week
- 45 minutes per class
- 14 units (each will take an average of 2 weeks) plus 2 bonus weeks = total of 30 weeks

The curriculum can also be presented as a 3-day per week class but will then be completed over 1 ½ years. Just Words can be delivered in classes of up to 15 students.

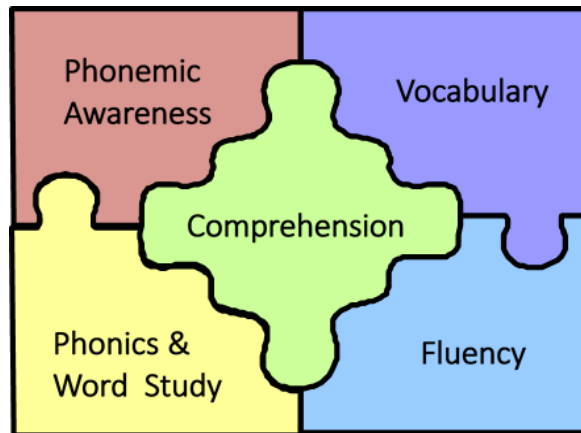
Within the standardized lesson plans, all concepts are taught and practiced continually to foster reading automaticity and spelling accuracy. As students progress through the units, they review all previously taught concepts with continued practice. To accommodate the needs of students who struggle with word-level skills but who can move at a quicker pace than other students, Just Words provides a thorough curriculum for the accelerated study of word structure through the six syllable types in English and the most common Latin roots.

Just Words is appropriate for a Tier 2 intervention. The following graphic illustrates how the Just Words program can be implemented in a school or district. The targeted, high quality literacy instruction provided in the Just Words classroom can help struggling students build the skills they need to achieve at higher academic levels across the curriculum. Just Words is compatible with the Wilson Reading System program. Teachers monitor students in Just Words classes using built-in progress monitoring tools. If the evidence (and further evaluation) indicates that a particular student requires more in-depth, diagnostic instruction, placement with a qualified Wilson Reading System teacher may be warranted.



At Wilson Language Training, we align the content of our reading programs to the science of reading. We do so because this helps to ensure the success of the educators using Wilson programs to teach individuals with diverse learning abilities to read.

**Figure 1. Five Components of Reading**



As depicted in Figure 1, reading is the intersection of five critical components: phonemic awareness and phonics (also referred to as alphabets), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These skills are specified in the Common Core State Standards (National Governors

Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), a recent review of the research on adult and adolescent literacy instruction published by the National Institute for Literacy (Kruidenier, MacArthur, & Wrigley, 2010) and the report of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development (NICHD), 2000). The scientific evidence reviewed in these and other documents reveal that focusing on some of these skills while neglecting others is insufficient to teach reading (Stuebing, Barth, Cirino, Francis, & Fletcher, 2008). Rather, all children should receive direct, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and reading comprehension during grades K-3.

These skills form the foundation upon which higher-level reading skills critical to success in college and the workforce are built. Without an ability to fluently pull print from the page and comprehend it, students lack the requisite skills to comprehend complex text, which is one of the best predictors of college success (ACT, Inc., 2006).

The science of reading also stipulates that these same foundational skills must be taught to students and adults with reading deficits (Kruidenier et al., 2010; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2009; NICHD, 2000). Reading failure is invasive,

cumulative, and does not improve with time (Lyon, Shaywitz, & Shaywitz, 2003). A lack of foundational skills is a major cause of poor performance in struggling readers, with word-level deficiencies limiting an individual's exposure to text, which impedes their vocabulary development and reading comprehension (Stanovich, 1986). To overcome these deficiencies, students and adults with reading deficits require direct, systematic instruction in the foundational skills of reading.

Just Words aligns with these findings from reading research, as well as with Orton-Gillingham principles. It is a teacher- and student-friendly program, built on the success of the research validated Wilson Reading System®. Data collected from school districts experiencing success using WRS led to the creation of Just Words.

Just Words was published in 2009 and based upon the documented success of the Wilson Reading System. Findings from our ongoing research demonstrate that students who receive instruction with Just Words make larger gains in reading comprehension than their peers who receive instruction as usual. In addition, English Language Learners (ELL) who receive Just Words instruction make greater gains in reading comprehension than ELL students who receive instruction as usual.

To date, an impact study of student response to Just Words instruction has been performed in two middle schools located within an urban school district, and an efficacy study has been conducted in an elementary school located in a different urban school district. Findings from these two studies are presented in the following sections.

### **STUDY #1: IMPACT STUDY IN URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOLS**

Wilson Language Training partnered with an urban district to provide comprehensive professional learning for the purpose of achieving implementation fidelity and sustainability of Wilson literacy programs. As part of these efforts, an impact study of student response to Just Words instruction was conducted in two middle schools in the district.

The goal of the impact study was to test if Just Words instruction produced larger gains in reading comprehension than the instruction that the schools had been

using prior to implementing Just Words. To achieve this goal, gains in reading comprehension made by 7th grade students receiving Just Words instruction were compared with the gains made by their peers not receiving Just Words instruction (i.e., were instead receiving instruction as usual).

Students attending both middle schools were tested using the Degree of Reading Power® reading assessment (DRP) in spring 2012 and then again in spring 2013. The DRP provides a holistic, criterion-referenced measure of how well students process and understand text of increasing complexity.

Figure 2 illustrates the progress made by students in Middle School 1 (MS 1) receiving Just Words compared to students receiving instruction as usual. When tested in spring 2012, 54 of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students attending MS 1 were classified as severely at risk based on their DRP scores. Of these students, 7 were assigned to receive Just Words instruction, completing less than half of the curriculum (6 of the 14 Just Words Units) by the end of the year. The remaining 37 students classified as severely at risk were assigned to receive instruction as usual.

In this controlled study, students who received Just Words made greater gains than students receiving instruction as usual. When retested in May 2013, less than 30% of Just Words students were still classified as severely at risk. In contrast, over 50% of the students who received instruction as usual were still classified as severely at risk.

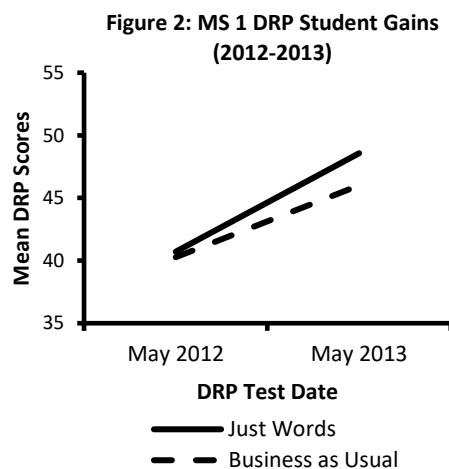
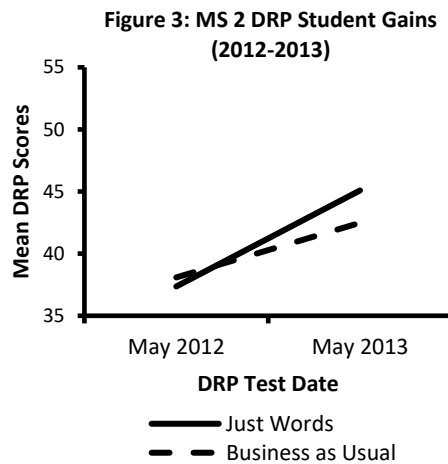


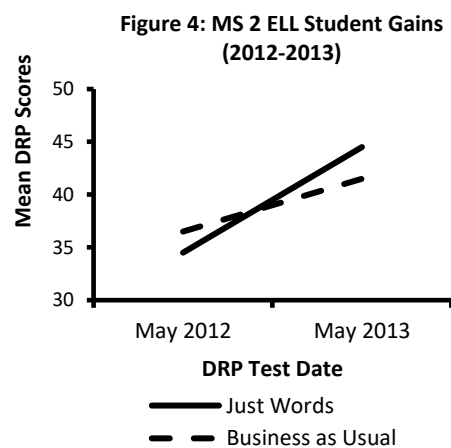
Figure 3 illustrates the progress of students in Middle School 2 (MS 2). At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, 32 of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade students attending MS 2 were classified as severely at risk based on their May 2012 DRP scores. Of these students, 11 received Just Words instruction, completing half of the curriculum (7 of 14 units) by the end of the year, and 21 received instruction as usual.



Students who received Just Words instruction made larger gains, and by May 2013, only 45% of students receiving Just Words instruction were classified as severely at risk. In contrast, 80% of the students who received instruction as usual were still classified as severely at risk.

### Addressing the needs of English Language Learners

A large population of English language learners (ELL) attend MS 2, allowing contrasts to be made between ELL students with moderate word-level reading deficits who received Just Words instruction and ELL students who received instruction as usual. While all ELL students scored higher on the DRP test administered in spring 2013, ELL students who received Just Words instruction made greater gains than ELL students who received instruction as usual (see Figure 4).



## **Conclusions**

Student data from two urban middle schools demonstrated Just Words instruction to be more effective at improving the reading comprehension of students with moderate word-level reading deficits than the instruction that was being used in these schools prior to the introduction of Just Words (i.e., instruction as usual). In addition, ELL students who experienced moderate word-level reading deficits made greater gains in reading comprehension in response to Just Words than instruction as usual.

## **STUDY #2: EFFICACY STUDY IN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

Wilson also partnered with an urban elementary school to perform an efficacy study of Just Words to address two questions:

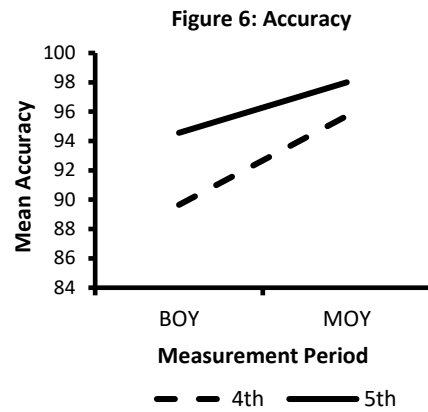
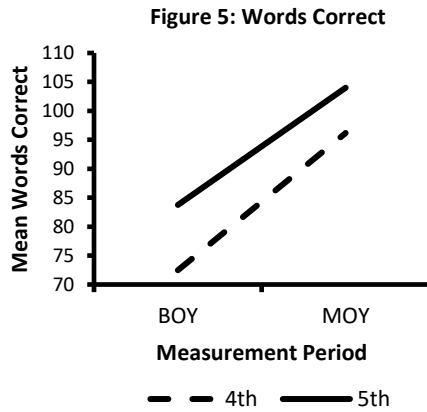
1. Does Just Words instruction improve the oral reading fluency of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with moderate word-level reading deficits?
2. Does Just Words instruction improve the oral reading fluency of ELL students with moderate word-level deficits?

The oral reading fluency of 29 students receiving Just Words instruction was measured at the beginning and middle of the school year using the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), a standardized, nationally norm-referenced assessment of literacy skills. Of these students, 17 were native English speakers and 12 were English Language Learners (ELL). A comparison group of students not receiving Just Words instruction was not available for this study.

### **Question 1 Results: Improving Oral Reading Fluency**

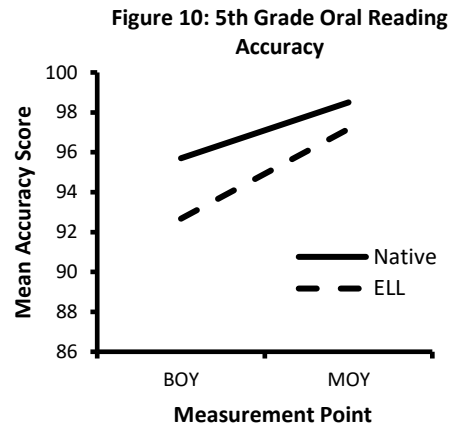
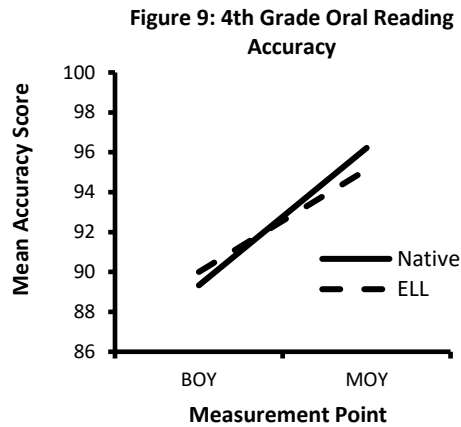
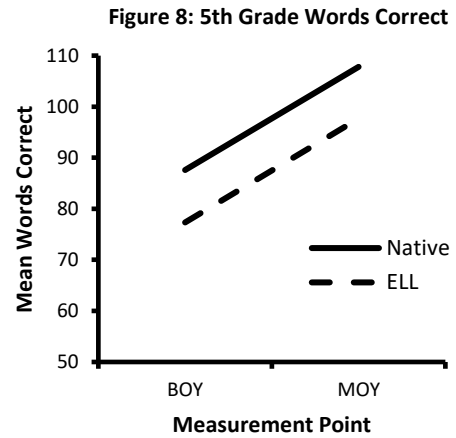
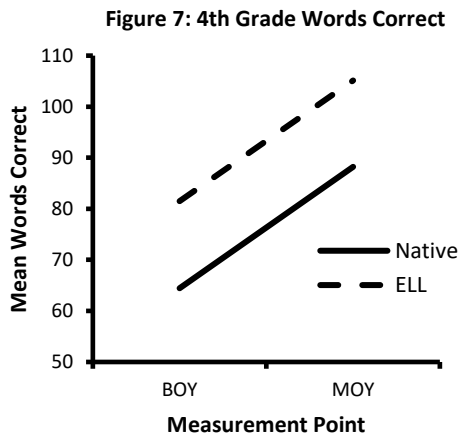
Fourth and fifth grade students receiving Just Words instruction made statistically significant gains on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency measures (DORF) of number of words correctly read and reading accuracy. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the progress made by Just Words students from the beginning of the year (BOY) to the middle of the year (MOY).





**Question 2 Results: Addressing the Needs of English Language Learners**

ELL students made statistically significant gains in both the number of words read correctly and reading accuracy during the first semester they received Just Words instruction. Moreover, the gains made by ELL students were equivalent to those made by native English speaking students for both the number of words read correctly and reading accuracy. As illustrated in Figures 7 and 8, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELLs made significant gains from the beginning to the middle of the year in the number of words they correctly read, and the gains made by ELL students were equivalent to those made by native English speaking students. The same was true of the gains made by 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade ELL students in their oral reading accuracy as depicted in Figures 9 and 10.



## Conclusions

On average, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students with moderate word-level reading deficits made significant gains in oral reading fluency after receiving a semester of Just Words instruction. Additionally, ELL students with moderate word-level reading deficits made significant gains in number of words read correctly and oral reading accuracy after receiving a semester of Just Words instruction. And, the gains made ELL students were equivalent to the gains made by their native English-speaking peers.

## STUDY #3: IMPACT STUDY IN SMALL RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

An independent analysis of assessment results from 24 sixth and seventh grade students enrolled in the Just Words program for three semesters in a small rural middle school in Illinois beginning in fall 2013 through the following fall of 2014,

identified a significant increase in the mean grade equivalent score for these students on word recognition and nonsense word decoding measures and in the mean percentile rank in these areas.

- Mean grade equivalent in word recognition for these sixth and seventh graders rose from an average of 4.2 to an average of 6.2, an increase of two grade levels.
- The average student’s ability to recognize words in isolation improved by two full grade levels in three semesters (KTEA-II Letter and Word Recognition Subtest comprising mostly of irregular words).
- The average student’s ability to decode words improved 3.4 grade levels in three semesters (KTEA-II Nonsense Word Decoding Subtest).

The table below describes the mean grade equivalency for these sixth and seventh graders at the start of Just Words in fall 2013 and at the end of fall 2014 on selected measures:

	Average grade level equivalency		Average growth
	Sept 2013	Dec 2014	
<b>Mean grade equivalency</b> <i>Word Recognition</i>	4.2	6.2	+2.0 grade levels
<b>Mean grade equivalency</b> <i>Nonsense word decoding</i>	3.1	6.5	+3.4 grade levels
<b>Mean Percentile Rank</b> <i>Word Recognition</i>	18%	32%	+14 percentage points
<b>Mean Percentile Rank</b> <i>Nonsense word decoding</i>	16%	42%	+26 percentage points
<b>Mean Percentile Rank</b> <i>Decoding Composite</i>	14%	34%	+20 percentage points

## Conclusions

On average, these sixth and seventh grade students made substantial and meaningful gains in word recognition and nonsense word decoding that reduced the gap with their grade-level peers after three semesters of instruction. Students with a wide range of starting scores made significant gains.

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