

Dear Families,



We are learning an important early reading skill called heart words. Heart words are high frequency words that students learn to read by “heart” because part of the word may not follow the phonics patterns they have learned yet. Students are still encouraged to tap and sound out the parts they know while paying close attention to the part that must be remembered.

For example, in the word said, students can sound out /s/ and /d/, but the ai does not make the expected long a sound. That unexpected part becomes the “heart part” students must remember. Learning heart words helps children read smoothly and recognize common words quickly while still applying phonics skills. There are two types of heart words students may learn:

Temporary heart words: Some words are only tricky for a short time because students have not yet learned the phonics pattern in the word. Once they learn that sound pattern, the word becomes fully decodable. For example, the word look may be considered a temporary heart word until students learn that oo can make the /ū/ sound.

Permanent heart words: Some words contain irregular spellings that do not follow common phonics patterns students will learn. These words usually need to be remembered permanently. For example, in the word said, the ai does not say its expected sound. Students learn to “know it by heart.”

When introducing heart words, students are taught to:

- Look for the parts they can sound out
- Identify the tricky or unexpected sound
- Place a heart under the part they must remember
- Practice reading and spelling the word multiple times

As students learn more phonics patterns, some temporary heart words may become fully decodable. This helps students continue building strong phonics knowledge while also learning to read common words automatically.

Thank you for helping your child grow as a reader. Your support at home makes a meaningful difference as your child builds confidence and strengthens their reading skills each day. Practicing together, encouraging effort, and celebrating progress all help create successful and joyful readers.



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