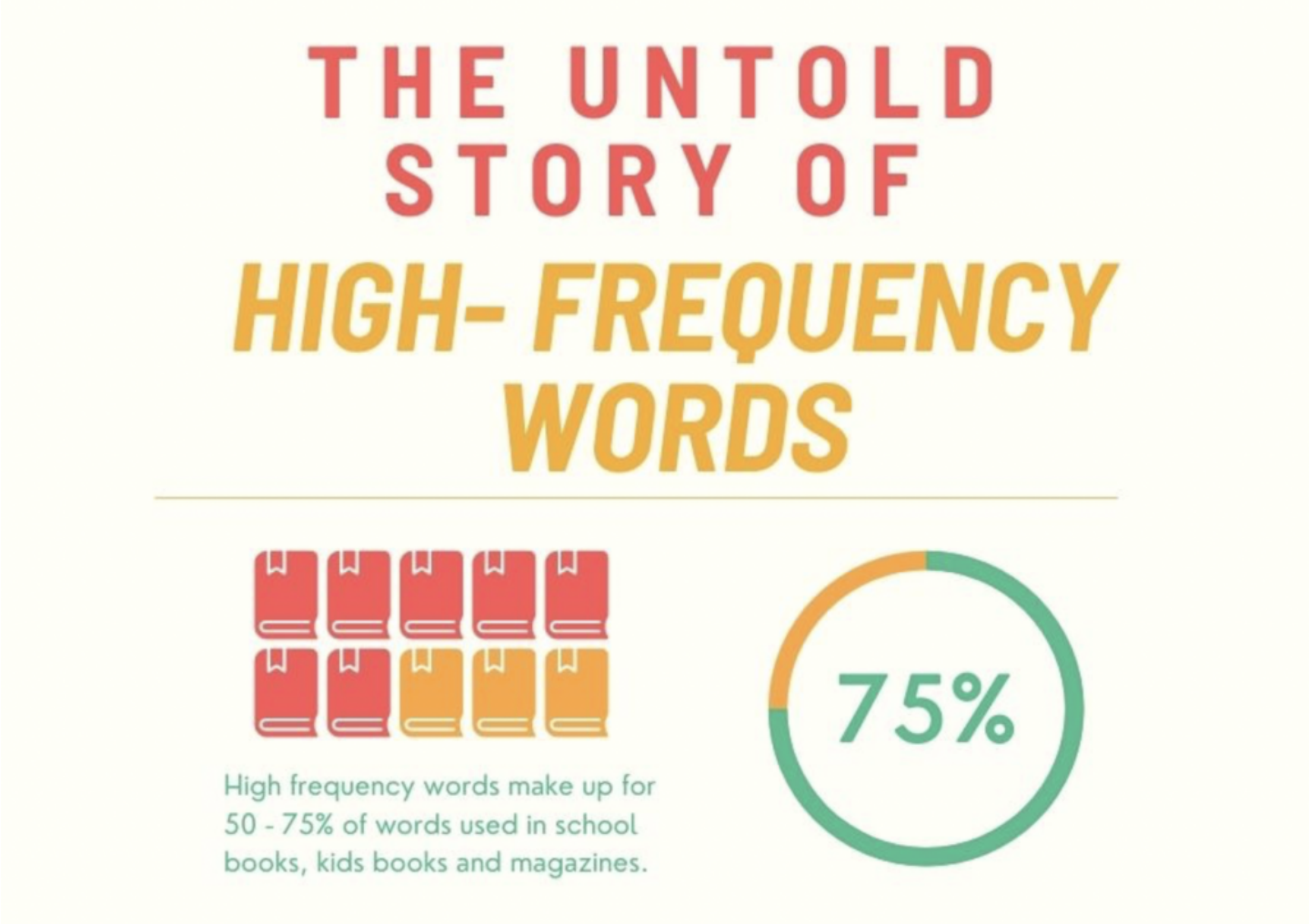
High-Frequency Words Analysis Exposes the Lacks in the Traditional Methods Used for Teaching These Words to Kids

The study analyzed the 220 most commonly used high-frequency words in children's reading instruction.



New South Wales, Sydney, Nov 2, 2021 (Issuewire.com**)** - High-frequency words are at the core of English reading instruction. According to Dolch (a linguist from the 1930s who compiled what has turned out to be the most popular list of high-frequency words still used to date), high-frequency words **make up for up to 75% of words used in school books, library books, newspapers, and magazines.**

The common approach to teach these words to children is by asking them to memorize them using their visual memory. The words are divided into lists, that are sent home for children to memorize. The lists are normally classified by colour, number, etc. Using flashcards is also common practice. A recent analysis of these works carried out by the **Learning Reading Hub** aimed at understanding if this is the best approach for teaching these words to children.

The reason why they are taught in this way is because of **two widespread beliefs**: The first one is that these words can't be decoded phonetically, so children should not attempt to sound them out. The second belief is that they should be stored in our brain as pictures, so using visual memory seems to be

the most appropriate strategy.

However, an increasing number of reading experts are starting to question these methodologies for teaching high-frequency words to children.

According to **a recent study by the** Learning Reading Hub that analyzed the 220 most frequently used high-frequency words* (often referred to as 'sight words' for the previously mentioned reasons) **only 28.18% are non-decodable phonetically**.

That means that more than 70% (71.82%) are, in fact, decodable phonetically.

Besides, among the decodable ones (71.82%), almost 40% (37.97%) follow pretty basic phonic rules.

On top of that, among the non-decodable words, almost 100% have some decodable parts, which make sense phonetically.

In reality, **only 3.23% are entirely non-decodable**.

The Learning Reading Hub refers to the conclusions of this study as ***The Untold Story of High-Frequency words***, as the data clearly reveals a different narrative about these words.

What's more, the data dispute the traditional beliefs around high-frequency words and open avenues to explore more appropriate ways for high-frequency words instruction**.**

The **balanced methodology for teaching children to read**, which is a common approach to teaching reading in most English-speaking countries, is still influenced by the theories of the whole language movement (from the late 20th century). Advocates of this movement believe that there are better ways for learning to read than phonics. The balanced approach relies greatly on the cueing system (promoting using first letter guessing, word shapes, picture clues, context, etc.) and visual memory for high-frequency words.

However, **modern neuroscientific studies, conclusions from the National Reading Panel reports** (such as this one [1]: '*The meta-analysis revealed that systematic phonics instruction produces significant benefits for students in kindergarten through 6th grade and for children having difficulty learning to read. The ability to read and spell words was enhanced in kindergartners who received systematic beginning phonics instruction*') and other studies and **analysis**, such as the one on high-frequency words **carried out by the Learning Reading hub** contradict the views of the whole-language movement.

For more information about the analysis: The Untold Story of High-Frequency Words.

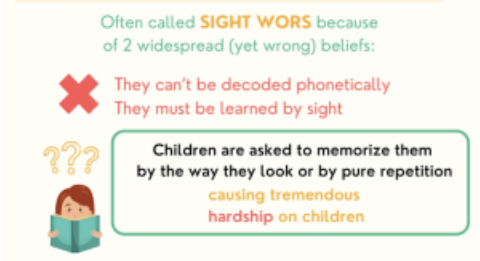
Check the information on video format (YOUTUBE) here:

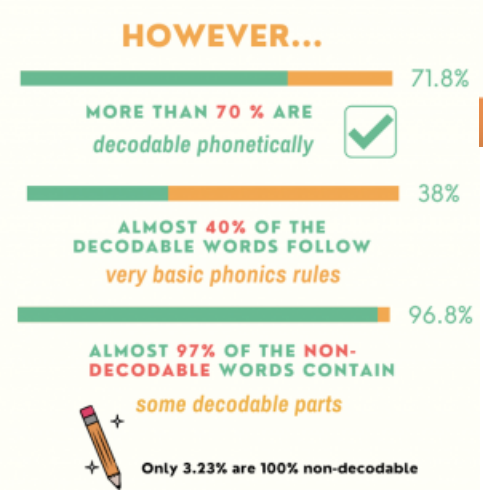
https://youtu.be/ZtalfqmY48o

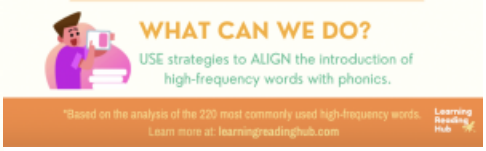
**220 Dolch words. Check the whole list* here*.*

[1] National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). Report of the National Reading

Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction (NIH Publication No. 00-4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.







Media Contact

Laura D, Learning Reading Hub

contact@teachchildrentoread.online

Source : Laura D, Learning Reading Hub

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