Table of Contents

AfterSchool KidzLit® Research Base ................................................................. p. 1

Frequently Asked Questions ................................................................................. p. 4

How Is AfterSchool KidzLit Aligned with National Standards? .............................. p. 6

Funding for Developmental Studies Center ......................................................... p. 8
AfterSchool KidzLit® Research Base

The AfterSchool KidzLit program is an after-school literacy program that fosters young people’s motivation to read and helps them develop their reading skills and competencies. This academic focus is carried out through engaging activities that spark young people's interest in and enjoyment of reading, and that are appropriate for the informality of after-school settings. The experience of reading books and hearing books read aloud in a supportive context promotes academic development by exposing young people to the structure and syntax of the written word, building their vocabulary and background knowledge, and offering them unpressured opportunities to practice and further develop the reading comprehension skills they learn in school.

The goals of the AfterSchool KidzLit program are to help young people:

- Develop their reading skills and competencies—specifically to build their vocabularies and background knowledge, which are key to improved reading comprehension
- Develop their motivation to read and enjoyment of reading good literature
- Develop their capacities to think critically and express their ideas and feelings about important issues
- Increase their understanding of themselves, their peers, and others, and make better choices related to their own lives
- Foster their understanding of and commitment to abiding humane values

The AfterSchool KidzLit program builds reading skills based on the latest research. Approaches used by the AfterSchool KidzLit program to improve children’s reading competency are based on empirical research that shows:

- The level of reading comprehension in the first grade can be predicted almost exclusively by a child’s decoding ability, but by second grade deficiencies in vocabulary, background knowledge, and critical thinking are the principal limiting factors of a child’s reading comprehension abilities. This effect increases with each grade (Juel, 1994).

- Vocabulary growth occurs primarily through exposure to language rather than through direct teaching. Exposure to text, rather than conversational language, is the prime contributor to children's vocabulary development. Children’s books have considerably more rare words in them than does adult prime-time television or the conversation of college graduates (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998).

- The size of children’s vocabularies, their background knowledge, reading comprehension abilities, and verbal skills are directly related to the quantity of text they read. Since children are typically given little time for reading in school, reading during out-of-school time is the primary way to increase the amount of reading children do, hence building their reading competence (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1998).

- Reading aloud to students and using questions to activate their prior knowledge are effective techniques for positively affecting students’ attitudes toward reading (Herrold, Stanchfield and Serabiran, 1989).

- Children’s comprehension of the ideas in text increases when they have conversations about that text with peers and teachers (Pressley, 2002).

- Inclusive environments, in which students have consistent opportunities to participate in discussion groups, increase engagement and motivation (Alvermann, 2000).
Based in part on this research the *AfterSchool KidzLit* program purposefully and specifically targets the areas of motivation, vocabulary development, background knowledge, critical thinking skills, and quantity of reading in the following ways:

- **Reading aloud enables all children to reap the benefits of literacy:** Reading aloud to children exposes all of them, even those who are not yet fluent readers, to high quality, enjoyable literature that is relevant to their lives. All the participating children can think, talk, and write about the text, thereby experiencing firsthand the benefits and pleasures of literacy. Being read to also builds young readers’ listening skills, familiarity with the structure and syntax of the written word, and vocabulary and background knowledge.

- **New “cool” words:** Each Leader’s Guide helps youth workers introduce young readers to words and concepts that may be new to them. After reading the story, the children are asked to choose words they want to remember—cool words—write them down, and use them in drama, game, or writing activities.

- **Connections to life experiences build motivation:** Introductory activities suggested in the Leader’s Guides help young people relate their own life experiences to the issues in the book, building their curiosity and motivation to read.

- **Discussions that build critical thinking and verbal expression skills:** The discussion questions suggested in the Leader’s Guides directly relate to children’s lives and the issues they face. Youth workers use the questions to stimulate the children’s critical thinking skills about the issues and the reading. The discussions also provide opportunities for the children to express themselves orally and grapple with the often disparate thinking, perceptions, and experiences of their peers.

- **Time for reading to promote fluency:** Time for individual reading (or reading in pairs or small groups) expands children’s reading experience and further develops their reading fluency. The books in the program have been selected for specific grade ranges, which helps youth workers guide young readers in selecting books that are appropriate for their reading skill level. Successfully reading interesting books is key to building students’ motivation to read.

- **Inclusive, caring environment that supports learning:** The ungraded, noncompetitive environment of the *AfterSchool KidzLit* program helps young people focus on enjoying reading rather than on performing academically. The *AfterSchool KidzLit* curriculum emphasizes the importance of creating a caring, inclusive community in an after-school program and helping all young people feel that they belong and have opportunities to participate and contribute.

- **Support for English Language Learners:** The program’s emphasis on building children’s vocabulary and background knowledge supports students with limited English proficiency and provides them with opportunities to read widely and discuss reading critically. In addition, the *AfterSchool KidzLit* program’s use of “cool words” supports students with limited English proficiency who face special vocabulary challenges. The noncompetitive environment fostered by the program helps students with limited English enjoy the reading rather than be intimidated by it.
Summary of AfterSchool KidzLit® Evaluations

Positive effects for the AfterSchool KidzLit program were seen in early findings from an evaluation of “balanced literacy” activities at after-school sites affiliated with CORAL (Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning) in Fresno, Long Beach, Pasadena, Sacramento, and San Jose, California. AfterSchool KidzLit is one of two reading enrichment programs being used at the 23 sites involved in the evaluation, which is being conducted by Public/Private Ventures. At the beginning of the study, 70 percent of the students were reading below grade level, and 50 percent were reading two or more grade levels below. At the end of an average five-month period in the study, students’ overall reading levels increased about a third of a grade level and students who were reading at two or more levels below their grade showed an increase of approximately three-quarters of a grade level. Students who were English Language Learners showed similar average gains to those of students deemed proficient in English.

In another study, researchers from the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), University of California, Los Angeles, conducted an evaluation of the AfterSchool KidzLit program at 13 sites affiliated with LA’s BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow) in 2001–02. Seven of the sites implemented the program, the other six sites served as a control group. When compared to the control group, the AfterSchool KidzLit students had significantly better attitudes toward academic reading at the end of the evaluation period. This is a significant finding, given that (1) past research has indicated that children’s reading attitudes generally become more negative throughout their elementary school years (Kush and Watkins, 1996) and (2) students’ reading attitudes can greatly affect their reading performance (Purves and Beach, 1972; Walberg and Tsai, 1985; Wixon and Lipson, 1992). Survey data from the evaluation also indicated that students from low socioeconomic level families benefited from the learning activities provided by the AfterSchool KidzLit program.

In a third study, researchers from Developmental Studies Center (DSC) conducted an evaluation of the AfterSchool KidzLit program during the 2001–02 school year. The evaluation study took place in eight after-school sites operated by LA’s BEST (Better Educated Students for Tomorrow), a highly regarded after-school program in Los Angeles. Using a pretest/posttest design, the study assessed changes over eight months among second and fourth graders. Reading-related attitudes and behaviors, vocabulary development, and social attitudes and behaviors were measured. Program implementation was also assessed, and was shown to be less than expected at most sites. Nevertheless, findings of this evaluation included:

- Both second and fourth graders showed significant increases in the amount of reading overall.
- Both second and fourth graders showed significant increases in their reading efficacy (their feelings about their reading ability).
- Among Spanish-speaking youth there were significant increases from pretest to posttest in the proportion of correct words that were answered in English.
- Fourth graders showed positive effects related to social/ethical attitudes and behaviors, including:
  - significant increases in concern for others
  - significant increases in altruistic behavior
    (These variables were not assessed at second grade.)
- Although neither second nor fourth graders showed significant increases in vocabulary development when averaged over all sites, there were significant vocabulary gains at one site that had high-quality implementation of the program and where participating youth were exposed to twice as many books as the average site.
- Youth workers consistently reported that participating children showed:
  - greater ability to think critically and express ideas verbally
  - greater understanding of self and others
AfterSchool KidzLit® Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the AfterSchool KidzLit program?
A: The AfterSchool KidzLit program is a wealth of strategies and activities built around 180 compelling, carefully selected books. Its purpose is to help children ages 5–13 (grades K–8) become better and more motivated readers and improve their understanding of themselves and others. Adults may read the stories aloud to children, or children may read in partnerships or small groups or independently.

Q: How is the AfterSchool KidzLit program unique?
A: The program was developed and designed specifically for after-school settings—to complement school, not to simply extend the school day. AfterSchool KidzLit activities are designed with after-school in mind—to be active, engaging, and fun! The Leader’s Guides and Quick Tips Plus were developed for a wide range of leaders with easy-to-follow directions and strategies to support learning. The AfterSchool KidzLit program can be used as a complete program or can be integrated into your existing program.

Q: What are the AfterSchool KidzLit goals for children?
A: There are two. The first is that children significantly increase their literacy skills and their love of reading. But the AfterSchool KidzLit program is more than a literacy enrichment program. Its second goal is social—that children develop a stronger commitment to shared values, a greater understanding of themselves and others, and stronger relationships with peers and adults.

Q: What AfterSchool KidzLit materials are available?
A: Books and guides for grades K–8:
   The complete K–8 program includes 180 trade books, each with a Leader’s Guide. The books and their guides are packaged in broad thematic sets by grade level, each with ten books, their corresponding guides, and a copy of Quick Tips Plus.

   • Grades K–3
     80 books and guides for the primary grades

   • Grades 3–5
     80 books and guides for the intermediate grades

   • Grades 6–8
     20 books and guides for middle-school-age youth

   On-Site Support Kit: An On-Site Support Kit is available to support site staff who are implementing the AfterSchool KidzLit program. The kit includes a handbook detailing six one-hour training sessions, six videos, three practice guides, and three copies of a story book (Jo Jo’s Flying Sidekick).

Q: How were the 180 AfterSchool KidzLit books chosen?
A: We’ve carefully selected these stories because they are well written pieces of literature and are likely to be interesting to children. They cover a wide range of formats and genres: picture books, chapter books, fiction, nonfiction, biography, autobiography, and poetry. The characters in the stories reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity that is America. Many of the characters in the stories make decisions that the children weigh in, question, and talk about.
Q: What is in the guides?
A: Each of the 180 guides is keyed to a specific book. Each guide includes a menu of ideas for the leader to choose from when using the book:
• Ways to introduce the story to build the kids’ interest.
• Open-ended questions to encourage discussion and invite the kids to apply their own experiences to the story.
• Activities to connect the kids to the big ideas in each story through art, music, role-play, physical activity, writing, and vocabulary games. A significant part of each guide may be reproduced for children who are reading together as partners or in small groups.

Q: Was the AfterSchool KidzLit program piloted or field-tested?
A: Yes, extensively. During the first year of development, staff from Developmental Studies Center piloted draft materials in the San Francisco Bay Area. Over the next two years, staff from 64 after-school sites across the country field-tested AfterSchool KidzLit draft materials and sent back their comments and suggested revisions. Many of the activities in the guides come directly from practitioners working in the after-school field.

Q: Is there an AfterSchool KidzLit outcome evaluation?
A: Yes. A summary of the evaluation is available on DSC’s website: www.devstu.org. Some of the findings include the following: Both second and fourth graders showed significant increases in the amount of reading overall. Both second and fourth graders showed significant increases in reading efficacy (their feelings about their reading ability). Fourth graders showed positive effects related to social/ethical attitudes and behaviors, including significant increases in concern for others, and significant increases in altruistic behavior.

Q: Does the program support the English Standards?
A: Yes. The program is correlated with 8 of the 12 National Council of Teachers of English Standards.

Q: Who is using the AfterSchool KidzLit program?
A: School-based sites, community-based organizations, intermediary organizations, and school districts are implementing the AfterSchool KidzLit program. They include: Child Development Centers in the San Francisco Unified School District; LA’s BEST (Los Angeles Better Educated Students for Tomorrow); Sonoma SERVES Cool School; after-school sites in the Kansas City, Missouri School District; Children’s Aid Society sites in New York City; and sites across the nation operated by Girls Incorporated, the I Have a Dream Foundation, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and the YMCA of the USA. Sites using the AfterSchool KidzLit program are in urban, rural, and suburban settings.

Q: Is Staff Development available?
A: Yes. We offer half-day, one-day and two-day experiential, hands-on workshops using AfterSchool KidzLit strategies and materials. Staff Development fees are $1,500–$2,000 for a one-day workshop. Costs include all workshop materials. Staff Developer travel expenses are additional. An on-site support kit for those sites that would like to conduct their own staff development workshops is also available.
**How Is AfterSchool KidzLit® Aligned with National Standards?**

*AfterSchool KidzLit* addresses eight of the twelve NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts. The standards are sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA).

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<th>NCTE Standard . . .</th>
<th>How <em>AfterSchool KidzLit</em> Addresses It . . .</th>
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<td>Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment.</td>
<td>In <em>AfterSchool KidzLit</em>, students are exposed to a variety of literature that highlights the “big ideas” that are important to their lives. Through discussion and interactive follow-up activities, students explore their own experiences, as well as those of others—others in their after-school peer group, others in the books with life circumstances similar to their own, and others whose lives are quite different.</td>
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| Students read a wide range of literature from many periods and many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. | The 180-book *AfterSchool KidzLit* collection is diverse in genre and scope. In addition to high quality fiction and non-fiction, there are several books of poetry and a number of photo-essays. *AfterSchool KidzLit* books are chosen because they:  
  • are likely to interest young people  
  • highlight important ethical issues  
  • focus on the unique and common dimensions of the human experience  
  • depict diverse populations and cultures accurately |
| Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, graphics). | Students draw on their prior experience and interactions with other readers/writers as each *AfterSchool KidzLit* story is:  
  • introduced, read, and discussed  
  • explored through art, drama, writing, games, and other activities  

Students draw on and expand their knowledge of word meanings with “cool word” activities. Specifically, they:  
  • select, identify, and define new/interesting words  
  • use new words in writing, role-plays, and games |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. | Students regularly express their ideas and opinions through speaking, writing, and drawing. Some examples include:  
  - discussions  
  - role-plays  
  - games  
  - drawing/writing captions, cartoons  
  - letters to authors and others  
  - poetry  
  - idea list-making |
| Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. | AfterSchool KidzLit journals, charts, games, and other activities give students a chance to generate a wide range of writing (while having fun). |
| Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles. | With AfterSchool KidzLit, students are exposed to a rich variety of characters from various cultures, communities, and parts of the world. The writing and dialogue in these books reflects and develops respect for the diversity of language use throughout the U.S. and the world. |
| Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum. | AfterSchool KidzLit facilitators are encouraged to support non-native English speakers in using their first language to express their ideas. |
| Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities. | This is the crux of what AfterSchool KidzLit is all about—the opportunity to be a member of a caring, inclusive, thoughtful community of readers. |
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