



A ReadTheory Story

Going Back to Basics to Improve Reading Levels in the Upper Grades



Carrie Kirkland

🎓 Dougherty Comprehensive High School / Grade Level: High School

📍 Albany, GA

👤 User since 2018



The Challenge



Carrie Kirkland was a 1st grade teacher for 14 years. She also has experience as a 4th and 5th grade intervention teacher and even as an assistant principal. When she made the decision to transition to high school as an English teacher, she encountered a wide range of student ability levels. Since Carrie had so much past experience teaching students to read, she was able to easily recognize these learning gaps.

When she first started teaching high school, she noticed that a student in her American Literature class was always cheating off another student. She said, "Ms. Kirkland, I can't read." Carrie knew she needed to take a step back and find ways to reach the student at her level.

She saw a pattern and many of the 9th graders in her basic reading class had very low reading levels, sometimes not being able to read at all. Her biggest struggle was her class's lack of reading comprehension skills. They were often reading words, but not understanding what they were reading. She knew that she couldn't just continue with the given curriculum without teaching the students the basic skills that they needed. It was more important to see that students' needs were met than just moving them on to the next level.

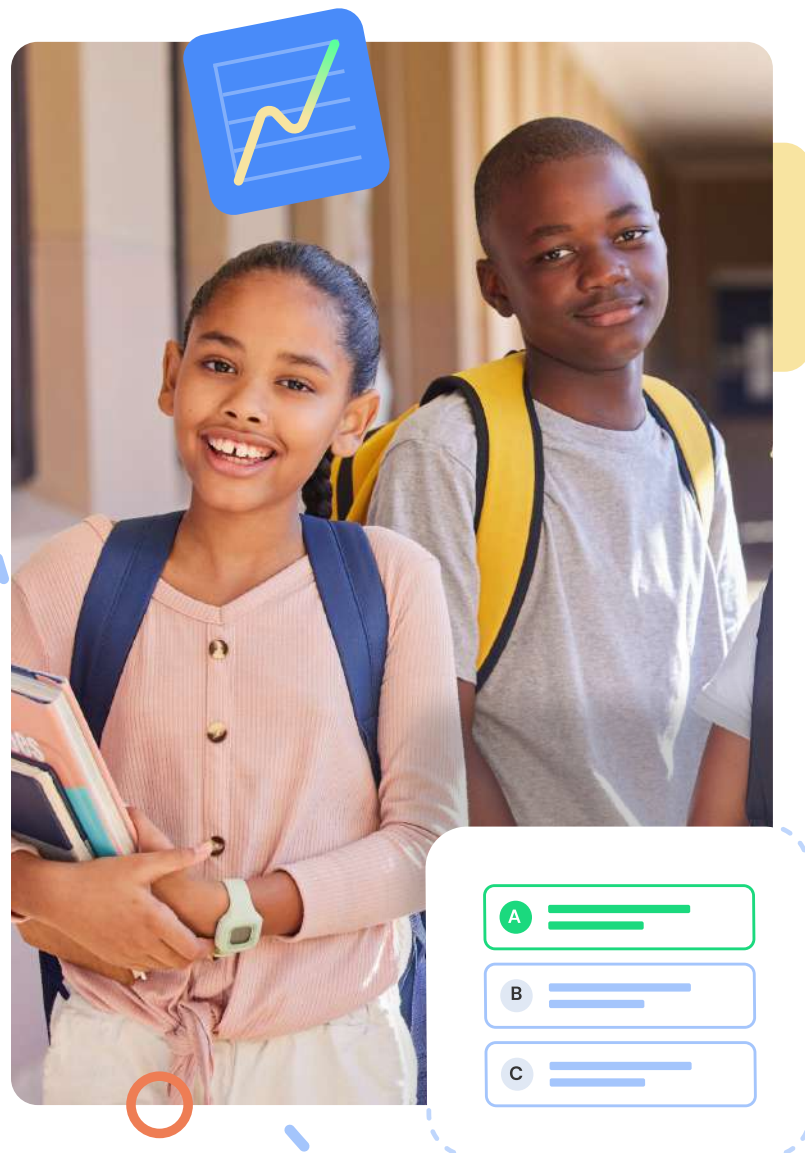
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There's a big gap somewhere between what students are doing in elementary school versus middle and high school when it comes to reading. ReadTheory has helped me to emphasize the basic skills older students may still need for comprehension and to teach them at their ability levels.



The Solution

When Carrie started using ReadTheory, she was able to quickly determine student Lexile and ability levels through pretests. The data she received was exactly what she needed to differentiate her lessons. She was able to put the students in small groups by ability level like she had done when teaching elementary school.



Carrie uses ReadTheory as a bell ringer at the beginning of class. She walks around and monitors student progress and discusses it with them. She also assigns ReadTheory for homework and gives students a grade for completing assignments. She sets goals and tells them how many ReadTheory passages she wants them to complete each week.

Although individual student progress on ReadTheory can only be viewed by that student and the teacher, Carrie's students even got to the point where they didn't care if the other students knew they were on a third grade level, for example. Working towards their goals was a fun challenge for them.

Carrie uses ReadTheory data for individual conferencing with students and parents. She tells parents that ReadTheory is “something that is on their child’s level. It’s something that will help each student grow as a reader.” ReadTheory helps Carrie to individualize instruction for the students, to look at data, and to make reading meaningful for students.



The Impact

All 9th graders have to complete a reading inventory test three times a year, which shows student progress. She saw right away that ReadTheory was making a difference with them. Other teachers started to ask her questions about ReadTheory and are now using it too. Carrie states, “ReadTheory improves the students’ focus, memory, and communication skills. All of that is a part of what we do with reading.”

ReadTheory can be used to spark classroom discussions and motivate students. Carrie often tells them at the beginning of the week that she would like them to pick one of their ReadTheory passages and to do a presentation about it on Google slides. She says, “Looking for a story gives them purpose for doing ReadTheory. They really like choosing one and then selecting pictures for the presentation. I have them talk to the whole class about it or they can video themselves and show the video in class.” This exchange of ideas and information combined with public speaking practice is a great way to prepare students for the real world.



Carrie says ReadTheory can even help with mental health. One student she had was very quiet at first. He didn’t want to interact with other students or do any work and seemed stressed. Carrie soon found out that he couldn’t read. She showed him how he could start learning with ReadTheory and spoke to his parent as well. She says, “There’s no one-size-fits-all model and kids have to understand that you care about them learning to read.” Little by little, her student opened up and started to smile and interact with others as he improved his reading comprehension skills. After using ReadTheory all year, he showed the most improvement in reading out of all of the students in the entire school!