



***Knowledge Adventure
Books by You™:***

A reading and writing software program
that inspires and guides

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Introduction

“Language is the most powerful, most readily available tool we have for representing the world to ourselves and ourselves to the world” (IRA/NCTE, 1996). *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* provides students in grades 1 through 5 with the opportunity to explore the power of language in a positive and supportive environment.

Knowledge Adventure Books by You™ allows students to tap into their creativity while learning and applying reading and writing processes. Reading comprehension and written communication strategies are integrated into the context of writing a chapter book. Within the program, Students witness the use of the strategies, experience them as models, and then apply them intuitively as they create, read, edit, and publish their own books.

Through its engaging, interactive questions and templates and under the guidance of its whimsical and wise mentor, actor John Lithgow, *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* models reading and writing strategies while stretching each child’s critical and creative thinking skills.

Students’ motivation to learn and their belief that they can learn and improve is at the foundation of achievement (Ames, 1992; Jacob, 1999; Slavin, 1983). When the delightful John Lithgow announces to students that he is their muse and that his purpose is to guide and inspire, he fuels positive expectations. When he tells students that they are going to create a “masterpiece,” he underlies their creative and cognitive abilities to do so. And as he leads them through the steps of the reading/writing process, the masterpiece does indeed emerge.

What better way to make the journey to reading and writing literacy then with the self-esteem that accompanies experiencing written language both as a reader and as an author.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension, the capacity to derive meaning from written text, is the DNA of reading (Beck and McKeown, 1998; Durkin, 1993; Flood, Lapp, & Fisher, 2002). In *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™*, students learn reading comprehension strategies within an authentic writing environment. For reading comprehension to occur “active interactive strategic processes are critically necessary to its development” (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Report of the Subgroups, 2000, Chapter 4, Executive Summary, p.2). *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* embeds strategic processes for reading comprehension within its instruction for writing a chapter book. The student is able to understand the reading process from an author’s vantage point.

With the program’s upbeat and supportive mentor, students walk through each of the story templates, learning through embedded instruction how to preview, view, and review a story while applying the creative writing process. *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* contains four book templates to which students add their own heroes, characters, dialog, setting, descriptions, sounds, and plot details. They then read their stories and make their own edits. The

outcome of this book creation is that students fully comprehend what they have written. For many struggling readers, this represents a first success.

The United States continues to experience low reading achievement scores across the nation's schools. For example, the Reading 2005 Snapshot Report for New York for 4th grade shows that 33% of boys and 29% of girls are below basic in reading; for Texas that 40% of boys and 32% of girls are below basic; and for California that 53% of boys and 47% of girls are below basic (NCES, 2006).

Moreover, students who have reading problems as children continue to perform poorly in a downward spiral called the "Matthew Effect." They "fall further and further behind in school, become frustrated, and drop out at much higher rates than their classmates. They find it difficult to obtain rewarding employment and are effectively prevented from drawing on the power of education to improve and enrich their lives" (Kay, 1996).

Knowledge Adventure Books by You™ ameliorates the Matthew Effect by providing underachieving students with a templated program in which a caring mentor introduces reading and writing strategies while they accomplish an authentic task – writing a chapter book. This in turn enhances their reading comprehension. Iterative successes change the downward spiral and the legacy of the self-fulfilling prophecy. *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* thus represents a vehicle for change.

The design of *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* provides the processes, templates, and encouragement necessary to support underprepared students. Struggling readers benefit from the program's scaffolding. The interactions and activities in *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* support students until they can apply new skills and strategies independently (Kame'enui et al., 2002; Rosenshine & Meister, 1992).

Reading comprehension and vocabulary development are inextricably bound: vocabulary development strongly influences reading comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Report of the Subgroups, 2000; Baumann, Kame'enui, and Ash, 2003; Davis, 1944). The story templates in *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* present rich literary vocabulary as well as techniques for helping students use their reading vocabulary in new contexts. Because many vocabulary words are learned incidentally as a function of encounters with words in oral and written contexts, students expand both vocabulary and reading comprehension through the story templates and the language of the mentor in *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987; Sternberg, 1987).

Knowledge Adventure Books by You™ is a unique program that integrates instruction into its playful process, affording readers at every level a positive and enriching reading and writing experience.

Effects of Engagement and Motivation on Reading

"When I'm reading a book I really can't stand, the words on the paper don't mean anything," writes a student in Linda Reif's *Seeking Diversity* (Reif, 1992, p 51). Both research and common sense propose that our reading

comprehension increases when we are reading something that engages and motivates us.

Because the experience provided in *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* is both highly engaging and motivating, it has the potential to affect reading comprehension. “Engagement is strongly related to reading achievement. In the United States, a national sample of students at three ages (9, 13, and 17 years) revealed that the more highly engaged readers showed higher achievement than the less engaged readers (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997)” (Guthrie, 2000, p. 2).

Knowledge Adventure Books by You™ provides students with four high-interest storylines, art, music, and sounds. Moreover, students use these media to create their own unique chapter books, causing motivation and engagement level to spike. Engaged and motivated students, “select tasks at the border of their competencies, initiate action when given the opportunity, and exert intense effort and concentration in the implementation of learning tasks; they show generally positive emotions during ongoing action, including enthusiasm, optimism, curiosity, and interest” (Skinner & Belmont, 1993, 572).

The program fosters an environment that naturally causes students to enter the zone where hard work becomes serious play – an ideal state for optimal learning. Engaged students tend to use more complex and sophisticated cognitive strategies and to try harder and longer when working on difficult learning activities (Chapman, 2003; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich & Schrauben, 1992).

Intrinsic motivation not only produces higher levels of sustained interest, but it also may influence what students learn and how effectively they learn (Malone & Lepper, 1987). *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* provides activities and directions that trigger intrinsic motivation through the:

- Creation of an optimal level of **challenge**
- Opportunities for both sensory and cognitive **curiosity**
- Interface which allows the child a powerful sense of **control**
- Guidance to use not just the mind but the **imagination**

Because *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* kindles a student’s interest, it has the potential to increase reading skills, as interest in reading increases comprehension (Renniger, 1992; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Connections between Reading and Writing

What is the essential connection between reading and writing? “Like writing, reading requires the creation of meaning, this time in collaboration with an author. Like writing, reading becomes meaningful only when it involves the particular response of an individual – one’s own ways of perceiving reality through the prism of written language. And, like writing, reading generates its most significant meanings when the reader engages in a process of discovery, weaving and circling among the complex of behaviors that characterize genuine participation in written language....For in truth, both writing and reading are written language processes (Atwell, 1987, p 155)

The recent emphasis on reading rather than on all the elements of language arts and literacy is undergoing scrutiny. Writing as a key element in the language arts is experiencing a revival. “American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom. Writing is how students connect the dots in their knowledge....Of the three ‘Rs’, writing is clearly the most neglected” (The National Commission on Writing, 2006, p 41). Evidence shows that students who write well perform better in school, enjoy the opportunity for self-expression, and become more self-reliant. “Their writing experiences help them find their own voices and realize that writing gives them new communicative powers (IRA/NCTE, 1996).

Because *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* integrates reading and writing processes, it offers the opportunity for a profound experience with written language. *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* encourages reading and writing behaviors by providing an environment in which they can be integrated, applied, and practiced. Writing is key because it both allows students to construct meaning and to communicate in school, the community, and beyond (Langer and Flihan, 2000). Reading is key because it unlocks knowledge, thought, and imagination. Reading and writing are both necessary for literacy. Together they allow a student to fully engage in the world around them.

Literacy and Parent Involvement

To create an environment that allows the literacy of each child to flourish, both reading and writing behaviors must be nourished at school and at home. *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* is designed to leverage the role of parents in students’ learning experiences, increasing quality involvement and raising expectations.

Research demonstrates that when parents and are involved in a child’s learning, achievement increases (Herman & Yeh, 1983; Berla, Henderson, & Kerewsky, 1989; Hester, 1989; Jeynes, 2006). In fact, a recent meta-analysis of 77 studies that included over 300,000 students in kindergarten through grade 12, concluded that higher academic achievement was achieved by students whose parents were involved (Jeynes, 2006). The particular area of involvement that exercised the most impact on achievement was the expectations of parents. *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* allows each child to experience success as a reader and writer. Its product – a chapter book – allows the child and his or her parents to raise their expectation about a child’s performance as a reader and writer.

Parents are often overwhelmed by the challenge of helping their students with significant academic work. Reading and writing, because they are so critical to a child’s immediate and future success, can create anxiety for the parent who may not know how to help their child progress. The design of *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* supports parent and child through its design; the mentor walks the student through the reading and writing processes, interactive story creation, story reading, story editing, and story publishing. To publish a unique chapter book, the student must only:

- Select one of four engaging story lines
- Answer a series of questions regarding plot, character, setting, literary language, and sequence
- Read and edit the story
- Design a cover
- Write a dedication
- Write an author biography
- Publish the story

Parents learn how to support the child's learning by observing the behavior of the supportive and encouraging mentor.

The Knowledge Adventure website also presents parent tools to develop their understanding of this area of their child's education. The *For Parents* section contains an article on motivating students to read and game ideas to use at home. *Learn More* highlights the key features of the *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* program, and *Talk to Us* allows both parents and students to share their program feedback. Using *Knowledge Adventure Books by You™* offers both parent and child a successful literacy experience, and this success invites ongoing parental interaction, which in turn affects the child's achievement.

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