10 award-winning reading and writing programs compared

Peabody blog · Reading · updated 2026-11-08

Lexia, Imagine, Learning A-Z, Reading Eggs, Writable and more: how each teaches reading or writing, how it levels text, the evidence, and what none of them do.

Ten reading and writing products won education software awards between 2021 and 2026, and they fall into five kinds: skill ladders, leveled libraries, home early-reader games, language-immersion programs and writing-feedback tools. This list gives each one's kind, how it levels text, what a child does, and the evidence. It draws on our study of 949 award wins. We read vendor pages, district guides and reviews and could not log in to any of them, so every screen described here is secondhand. Most prices are quote-only.

1. Lexia Core5 Reading (ages 4 to 11, skill ladder). A CODiE winner in 2026 for the science of reading. Placement takes about 20 minutes and branches up or down; children move through levels of six skills, from phonics to comprehension, each in a themed place. Evidence: the vendor says "Strong"; the Evidence for ESSA listing we saw showed an effect of +0.16 across four studies. A Fordham review praised its reports. Price: quote only.

2. Lexia PowerUp Literacy (grades 6 to 12). The blended teen version, with online paths plus teacher lessons. The vendor cites two small trials; we found no independent description of the screens.

3. Imagine Language & Literacy (skill ladder, English learners). Short adaptive sessions with games. Evidence for ESSA lists three studies of 6,090 students, effect +0.16. The vendor's own 2023–24 study found few children met the usage targets.

4. Learning A-Z, including Raz-Plus (leveled library). 29 levels from aa to Z, set by the company's own scale, and thousands of books. A child listens, reads, records their reading and takes a quiz, earning stars. Catch: the level is a letter the company chose, and we found no independent evidence on the registry.

5. Reading Eggs and Mathseeds (home early reader). A map of lessons, golden eggs spent on games, pets and avatar clothes, and a parent dashboard, for ages 2 to 13. About $69.99 a year in the App Store listing. Its ESSA Level III claim is the company's own and correlational.

6. Rosetta Stone for Schools (language immersion). Pictures, words and audio with no translation, and speech scoring, in 24 languages. A CODiE winner for English learners in 2023 and 2026. No independent study found.

7. Writable (writing feedback). A teacher assigns a prompt, students draft, and AI gives feedback that the teacher reviews before it goes out. A CODiE winner for AI implementation in

2024. Teachers can turn AI features off.

8. Newsela Writing (writing feedback). AI feedback at the student's reading level, in two modes, with teacher controls. CODiE's best AI solution for English and writing in 2025. The vendor rates its own evidence at the lowest tier.

9. NoRedInk (grammar and writing). Questions use the student's chosen interests in the sentences, with tutorials after mistakes. We found no ESSA rating.

10. Read&Write (reading help on any text). A toolbar over any web page: read-aloud with highlighting, dictation, word prediction, a picture dictionary. Free premium for K-12 teachers. A 2026 CODiE winner for personalized learning.

What the ten share

- Levels are the company's. Lexia uses numbered levels, Raz-Plus uses letters, Core5 maps its levels to grades. A child sees a letter or a number, not a plain description.
- Texts are fixed. The stories and books are libraries or teacher prompts.
- The money is school money. Most are sold to schools by seat; the home ones are cheap games.

What none of them do

- Let a child pick a topic and get a story at their level.
- Say the level in words a child can read.
- Work for ages 4 to 14 with no school or teacher.
- Listen to a child read on the device without giving a score.
- State, as a design promise, that no name or tracking is used.

Where Peabody fits

Peabody (stories for kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up, and works from a child's choice of story at a level the child can read. It has not won these awards and doesn't measure Lexile levels. Read the library and judge whether it closes the gaps above.

Sources

- Winner lists from codieawards.com, EdTech Breakthrough and EdTech Digest releases, read November 2026.
- Evidence for ESSA, Fordham Institute's review of Core5, vendor pages and district guides, as set out in our study notes.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/10-award-winning-reading-programs-compared