What a short story can quietly practise: concepts under the covers

Peabody blog · Reading · updated 2026-10-04

Rhymes, word endings, similes, a character who changes. How Peabody's AI stories practise two reading concepts each, from a catalogue of 124, without ever naming them.

Every story Peabody (peabody.kids) writes quietly practises two reading concepts, picked for the child's level from a catalogue of 124: things like rhyming words for preschoolers, -s, -ed and -ing endings in 1st grade, speech marks in 3rd, similes and metaphors in 4th, and a short flashback in 6th. The story uses them without ever naming them or turning into a lesson, and concepts come back on a schedule. Grown-ups with a free account see which concepts each story practised, and where. It's free through the end of 2026.

The idea: good stories already do this

Children's books have always been full of craft. A picture book repeats a line so little readers can join in. A chapter book shows that a character is brave instead of saying "she was brave." A good mystery plants a clue early that pays off on the last page.

Children notice these things long before they have names for them. So when Peabody's AI writes a story, it's asked to do a couple of these things on purpose, at the right level, and to never explain them.

What's in the catalogue

The catalogue holds 124 concepts from Pre-K to 8th grade, about 11 to 15 for each level. Each is tied to the standards it serves: the Common Core where it covers it, otherwise Texas or Florida standards, or Head Start's early learning framework for Pre-K. Each is also tagged with a strand of Scarborough's Reading Rope, the well-known picture of how word reading and language comprehension come together in skilled reading.

A few examples, by level:

- Level: Pre-K · Some concepts a story might practise: Rhyming words, a line that comes back, opposites
- Level: Kindergarten · Some concepts a story might practise: Position words (under, behind), a word with two meanings, who-where-what happened
- Level: 1st grade · Some concepts a story might practise: Consonant blends, -s / -ed / -ing endings, because, feeling and sense words
- Level: 2nd grade · Some concepts a story might practise: un- and re-, how a character reacts, rhythm and sound

- Level: 3rd grade · Some concepts a story might practise: Words that don't mean exactly what they say, speech punctuation, noise words
- Level: 4th grade · Some concepts a story might practise: Similes and metaphors, exact verbs for speaking and moving, showing a trait without naming it
- Level: 5th grade · Some concepts a story might practise: Same spelling with different meanings, rising action and a peak, two characters reacting differently
- Level: 6th grade · Some concepts a story might practise: Things that act human, Greek and Latin roots, a short flashback, a character who changes
- Level: 7th and 8th grade · Some concepts a story might practise: The place shaping the plot, allusions, out-of-order time

How two concepts are chosen for each story

A small scheduler in code (no AI) picks two concepts for each story:

- For early readers, one is about sounds and sounding out, and one is about language or story.
- From 2nd grade up, one is the concept most overdue for review, and the other is a new one from a different strand.

Concepts come back on a spaced schedule, about 2, 7, 21 and 45 stories after the first time, so a child meets each one in several different stories, spread out.

For stories written in paragraphs, there's sometimes a third thread: one or two true facts about a topic that matter to the plot. A topic runs for four stories before moving on.

How the writer uses them

Peabody's AI writer gets a short line about each concept and a never-do list: never explain the concept, never preach, never stop the story to teach, and never state a fact it isn't sure of. It writes the story, says where it used each concept, and code checks those quotes against the text. Where a concept can be detected in code, like rhymes or -ing endings, code looks for it too.

The story also asks one follow-up question about the featured concept, in story terms. Not "What is a simile?", but something like "What did the storm sound like?"

Nothing about concepts ever fails a story. If a concept doesn't land, the story is still shown; the concept just comes round again later.

What this does, and doesn't, mean

We want to be careful here:

- Peabody's stories practise concepts; they don't teach standards. Modelling a simile in a story isn't the same as a lesson on similes. Your child's teacher does the teaching.

- One encounter isn't learning. Children pick up a new word or pattern from a single story only some of the time. That's why concepts come back across many stories.
- We don't claim coverage of any curriculum, and there's no score for concepts.

What we can say is that a story written on purpose is a richer thing to read than one written at random, and it gives you something specific to talk about.

What grown-ups see

With a free grown-up account, each story's report shows which concepts it practised and where in the story, in plain words, plus a suggestion for something to do together. For sound concepts, for example: "Read a page aloud together and listen for the words that sound alike or start the same."

Try it at home with any book

Pick one thing to notice tonight, and just ask about it:

- Pre-K–K: "Which words sounded the same?" or "Can you say the line that keeps coming back?"
- 1st–2nd: "How did she feel when that happened? How do you know?"
- 3rd–4th: "The author said the wind howled. Does wind really howl? Why say it that way?"
- 5th and up: "What happened earlier that made the ending make sense?"

Or make a free story with Peabody and look for the concepts together afterwards. The free library has Peabody's own stories at every level from Pre-K to 8th grade.

Questions parents ask

Do Peabody's stories teach reading skills?

Each story practises two reading concepts suited to the child's level, like rhymes, word endings or similes, without naming them. Peabody models them; teaching is your child's teacher's job. We don't claim curriculum coverage.

Where do the concepts come from?

A catalogue of 124 concepts from Pre-K to 8th grade, each linked to the standards it serves (Common Core, or Texas, Florida or Head Start where Common Core is silent) and to a strand of Scarborough's Reading Rope.

Will my child be quizzed on the concepts?

No quizzes on concepts and no scores. Each story asks one follow-up question about its featured concept, in story terms, among its four to six questions.

Can I see what each story practised?

Yes, with a free grown-up account: each story's report shows the concepts it practised and where in the story they appear.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/concepts-under-the-covers