

# Doc Leeda

A Color-Coded Approach to Reading

## About the Doc Leeda Series

**Synopsis:** The Adventures of Doc Leeda is a set of 11 books that use a color-coded technique for different phonetic sounds and features a fun female veterinarian that can communicate with animals. The color-coding approach for sound recognition helps children build reading confidence while simultaneously retaining the basic sound concepts and phonics lessons.

**Interest Level:** Ages 5-9 / Grades K - 5

**Readability:** Lexile 450-530

[Link to Purchase Books](#)

## How Doc Leeda Came to Be

In late 2nd grade / early 3rd grade, my daughter started struggling with reading. Like many kids with Dyslexia, in early elementary school, she relied on picture books to give her context for guessing and memorizing words. Once we moved to books with fewer pictures and more words, we started seeing her substituting words that in context made sense but were not the words on the page (e.g., "the" and "a" are often interchangeable). She started to lose her love for stories as her frustration for reading grew.

The tipping point for me was the day my daughter said to me, "Mom, if the rule is that *when two vowels go walking, and the first one does the talking* - then why is "head," not h"ee"d - like the word "read." If it's a rule, then shouldn't it always be that way? This is too hard."

I understood my daughter's struggle. As an engineer, I also want rules to be absolute.

Watching her not only start to hate reading but hate school overall was hard. The kids who used to ask for math problems at bedtime now refused to do math because they were word problems.



## What was I to do?

At this point, my daughter was struggling to read, affecting her ability to learn and her self-esteem. **What was I to do as a parent?** Of course, I worked with the school and got a private diagnosis of Dyslexia. **I also decided to try out a different approach at home.**

As individuals, we know that every person/child learns differently, yet we continue to try and use a "one size fits all" method as a society. Many children who struggle with reading do not have a deficit of intelligence but an excess of it. Many of these children are highly creative and gifted in abstract problem-solving. Instead of learning to read words by sounding out and blending (e.g., decoding), they often memorize the whole word (sight word approach) or guess based on context. In a language where phonics is king but fails to follow its own rules over 50% of the time, we needed many different approaches. My daughter needed a method for learning to decode in a way that her brain would process and retain information.

*In a language where phonics is king but fails to follow its own rules over 50% of the time, we needed many different approaches.*

During my master's degree research on visual stimuli effects on memory for pilot training programs, I came to relevant studies that could apply to helping children who have issues decoding. Even though the research was geared toward the study of pilots in stressful situations, the science still applied. **The use of color increases the brain's memory retention.** I did some additional research and found several other studies that showed that using color could be an effective tool to improve reading performance in young readers. Ultimately the use of color increases the reader's ability to encode, store, and retrieve information. The studies suggested that color codes should be tailored to specific reading or spelling rules (I have references at the end of this blog for those interested in the science behind this approach).

*Studies suggested that color codes should be tailored to specific reading or spelling rules.*

The approach taken for Doc Leeda uses color-coding to teach phonics decoding. For example, the "long-e" or "ee" sound shows up in the color green (e.g., **F**ee**t**, **R**ead, **H**appy, **H**ere, **F**ield, **R**elax, **W**e, **K**ey), and the "short-e" or "eh" sound shows up in the color red (e.g., **y**es, **h**ead, **s**aid). Each book starts with a "lesson of the day" that goes over the different vowel combinations that make the sound. Then the color codes are used throughout the book to help with sound recognition and build decoding pattern retention.



"Didn't you say there was only one baby?" asked Doc Leeda. "I hear two babies. Lilly is going to have twins!" "Really?" screamed Lilly. Doc Leeda understood her. But Zookeeper Halley



"Thank you for helping us, Doc Leeda. Next time, instead of fighting, we will work together," said Emma. Doc Leeda smiled. She understood Emma. Again, Zookeeper Ed had heard a trumphant sound.

In addition to the color-coding, the adult helper is also asked to follow a **3-step approach intended to keep stress low and retention high** (1. Explain Lesson of the Day; 2. Echo Reading; 3. Independent Reading). Learning to read can be very stressful, especially if the traditional approaches to learning have not been working. Children can feel frustrated, embarrassed, and self-conscious. Their fight or flight responses can kick in when they make mistakes, causing a battle of wills on the task or a complete shutdown of trying. This stepped approach combined with the color-coding throughout should help to avoid that fight or flight response. Additionally, many kids with Dyslexia and similar reading difficulties tend to be systems thinkers, needing to see the whole picture before understanding the parts. The echo reading step fulfills this need to see the entire picture first before getting into the details.

## Getting the books out

Finding a story that would be fun and engaging was a daunting task. Lucky for me, years earlier, my daughters had created the character Doc Leeda, a veterinarian who was granted the magic gift to talk to and understand animals by a magic squirrel. We have been telling bedtime stories ever since. Doc Leeda became the perfect character to help me try this new approach.

I worked closely with the reading specialist at my daughter's school, local librarians, dyslexia specialists, and writer groups in writing these books. In my quest to help my daughter, I had also come across High Noon Books, a division of Academic Therapy Publications (ATP) that focuses on the needs of children reading below grade level. I teamed up with their expert staff and a fantastic illustrator to publish this first set of 11 books.

## Final Thought

Although these books are intended for struggling readers, new readers or those learning English as a second language would also benefit. Learning to read is challenging, especially in English, where the rules always seem to have exceptions.

**Disclaimer:** I am not claiming that these books alone will help struggling readers. I believe these books, combined with other approaches, including working with a reading specialist, will make a significant impact in helping children learn to decode and hopefully grow their love for books. In addition to these books, both of my daughters are working with a private dyslexia intervention program.

I hope these books can help children struggling with reading. If you use these books, I would love to hear your thoughts and experience using them in the comments below.



- Studies References for how color impact memory and help with Dyslexia:
- 1: Dzulkifli and Muhammad Faiz Mustafar The Influence of Colour on Memory Performance: A Review
  - 2: Pinna, Deiana: On the Role of Color in Reading and Comprehension Tasks in Dyslexic Children and Adults
  - 3: Pinna B., Deiana: New conditions on the role of color in perceptual organization and an extension to how color influences reading.
  - 4: Cramer, Antle, Fan: The Code of Many Colours: Evaluating a Dynamic Colour-Coding Scheme in a Tangible Spelling System for Children with Dyslexia

No comments:

[Home](#)

Subscribe to: [Posts \(Atom\)](#)

Search This Blog

[Home](#)

About Me



[Mindy Reese](#)

[View my complete profile](#)

August 2021 (1)

[Report Abuse](#)