



For Immediate Release

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Don Johnston Releases Readtopia™
A comprehensive reading curriculum for students with autism and other complex needs.

VOLO, III, June 15, 2017 – Don Johnston Incorporated released Readtopia™, a comprehensive reading curriculum for middle and high school students with autism and other complex needs. It brings first-hand experiential learning into the classroom—teaching students standards-aligned social studies, ELA, and science content.



Readtopia combines over \$5 million of materials developed over a decade by a panel of educators, innovators, researchers, writers, and videographers. The core of the program features experiential video, graphic novels (at six levels to match student needs), and informational text.

“Readtopia reflects my years of research and work with students. It gives teachers a comprehensive set of instructional materials like we’ve never had before,” said Dr. Karen Erickson of University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “With Readtopia, teachers can break through literacy barriers and bring out the potential of each student to participate and LEARN academically and in life. If you work with students with complex needs, you need to understand what we’ve done here.”

Company founder and Readtopia visionary, Don Johnston, calls this curriculum his “life’s work.” For decades, he envisioned paving a path of discovery that could change the way students with complex needs learn while equipping teachers with the resources they need to make learning to read an experience.

“When I discovered how to make movies in my head, it transformed my experience as a student,” Don explained. “I didn’t have a problem learning when I saw. When reading, I had to transform the words on the page into visual images. Then I got the point.”



To achieve his dream, Don traveled the world filming on-location with film maker Mike Byrne to produce original video. Education visionaries Karen Erickson, Ph.D., and Caroline Musselwhite, Ed.D., created the educational design. Writers, including Jerry Stemach, M.S. CCC-SLP, Carol Seibert, Helen Sillett, Ph.D., and creative design teams developed leveled graphic novels rich with age-respectful images and authentic texts. These materials are complemented with leveled, standards-based activities.

The result is a wide ranging collection of thematic units driven by explicitly guided lessons.



This format of deep and experiential learning takes students to places they may never have the opportunity to visit. Don filmed his own journey down 1,000 feet in a submarine to help students learn about oceanography. He also filmed inside a live volcano in Iceland as a way to introduce them to the book *Journey to the Center of the Earth*.

Other videos in the Readtopia collection include professional actors portraying historical figures and real events. Students can hear from Sacagawea to understand the journey Lewis and Clark faced heading west. They see a reenactment on an actual Civil War battlefield to experience the harsh realities that shaped the history of our country. Readtopia allows students to experience learning as a means to support and reinforce reading instruction.

All of this is supported by authentic literature, phonics/early reading instruction, and informational text that builds foundational reading skills for students with a wide range of special needs including autism spectrum disorders, behavioral disorders, cognitive disabilities, physical/health impairments, and multiple disabilities.



Readtopia delivers the curriculum through thematic units that will help teachers transform classrooms into laboratories of experiential learning.

A Readtopia subscription includes online access to the following resources:

- All of the thematic units available (including all additional units to be added)
- Videos for each thematic unit
- Graphic Novels at six levels
- Leveled Informational Text (10 types)
- Authentic text
- Instructional guides
- Phonics and Word Study
- Assessment

Resource Links:

To learn more about Readtopia, please visit:

<http://donjohnston.com/readtopia>

To watch a video of Readtopia used in a classroom, please visit:

<http://bit.ly/2s55oan>

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About Don Johnston Incorporated

Don Johnston (<http://donjohnston.com>) develops accessible reading and writing technologies to support K-12 and postsecondary students with cognitive, physical, and learning disabilities. Since 1980, the special education company has partnered with literacy experts, AT specialists, SLPs, OTs, special education teachers, university researchers and DSS coordinators to improve access to learning and to increase reading and writing independence. Over a million students with dyslexia, autism, dysgraphia, down-syndrome and diverse learning challenges use our software and hardware devices to accommodate their learning needs in schools, the workforce and at home.

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