

ages 3-7

A crucial but sometimes overlooked component in learning to read is being *read to* – actually listening to what it sounds like. So what do children like to hear? Something cuddly but futuristic, perhaps. The charm of a storyteller with the functionality of R2D2. Oh, and colourful.

Melding all of these into one, this month sees the launch of Red the Robot – a small, soft-talking automaton that reads stories and activity cards to foundation and key stage 1 pupils.

Red (which stands for Rapid Education Programme) is designed to support “letters and sounds”, the Primary

National Strategy’s recently-launched guidance on phonics teaching.

The pupil places the accompanying “magic star”, which connects with Red’s star-shaped sensor, on the text. He reads, asks questions, or helps them practice words, with a voice

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chosen from standard English, precise diction or plain robotic.

Red has been developed by a team of teachers. The stories are written by David Watkins, with some help from his wife Patricia. They are both former primary headteachers from Nottinghamshire.

Red tells stories of his

“life” in a West Country village with the mum and dad who own him and, in particular, his friendships with their three children. He shares in the youngsters’ schooling, friendships and social life.

“It was important to give Red quite a detailed lifestyle,” says David, who tried out a prototype at his old school. “The kids develop an emotional bond that makes them more motivated, especially the boys. It’s a very powerful first contact.”

The stories are about 10 minutes long, after which Red challenges pupils to pick out and practice phonemes and high frequency words. There are plans to expand Red’s capacities in other directions – David is keen on developing modern foreign languages texts for Red, or should that be Rouge le Robot? ■ www.redtherobot.com

Win Red the Robot

Two lucky readers can win Red the Robot starter sets, which include 20 introductory storybooks and about 150 activity cards to support letters and sounds, phases 1, 2 and 3, plus, of course, the little fella himself, courtesy of Head Start Learning Systems. Each set is worth £100.

To win, send a postcard to Treats, *the TES Magazine*, 4th Floor, 26 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4HQ, marking your entry “Robot”, or email treats@tes.co.uk. The first two entries picked will win.

By sending us your name and address, you agree to *the TES* sending you this prize. *The TES* will not use your personal details for any other future communications. The closing date for entries is Friday, November 30.