

# Spark Reading Program

## Why Reading?

In Guatemala, poorly trained teachers use ineffective techniques to teach reading, emphasizing rote memorization instead of comprehension and critical thinking. Kids become bored and fail to learn to read, leading to high dropout rates: 80% of rural indigenous children who begin primary school will not complete it. Without adequate reading skills, these young people enter adult life unable to understand a bank statement, a voting ballot, or the label on a bottle of medicine. They remain targets of exploitation and injustice, and the cycle of poverty continues for them and their families.



“I’ve been teaching for 16 years, and I can tell you that it used to take students up to two years to learn to read well. Now they reach the same level in three months.”

—Dora María, teacher at Agua Dulce

further develop essential literacy skills by authoring original stories on topics or themes important to their lives.

## How the Program Works

The Spark Reading Program trains primary-school teachers in effective reading instruction and provides them with a library of books. Teachers receive two years of intensive training combined with individual support and instruction through follow-up coaching. They also receive approximately 60 to 192 high-quality children’s books (depending on grade level and class size), which enable them to read with their students every day.

These teachers transform their students into enthusiastic, competent, and lifelong readers. Their students achieve more in school, continue their education longer, and overcome the obstacles presented by low literacy.

## The Spark Methodology

With the Spark methodology, kindergarten through third-grade teachers focus on the skills needed to sound out words, along with language knowledge, which allows for reading fluency and comprehension. Fourth through sixth-grade teachers build on these foundations by engaging their students in critical thinking and analysis activities. Students

Spark’s simple and straightforward methodology rapidly builds Spanish vocabulary, strengthens reading comprehension, builds confidence and competence working with written language, and makes the learning process more meaningful. For the first time, young people in these schools are enthusiastic about reading.

## Sustainability

Spark achieves sustainability by building local capacity for reading instruction. Training teachers and working within the rural school system to promote literacy creates permanent and lasting change in program communities. The teachers who participate in Spark increase their skills, share their knowledge and best practices with teachers in other schools, and promote literacy in their classrooms. The children who benefit from the program take their improved reading abilities, as well as actual books they have authored at school, and share them with their families, friends, and neighbors. They become vital links in the chain for promoting a lifelong culture of reading.

## Results

35,701 students

30% drop in failure rates when Spark is introduced to a classroom.

Spark students gain reading comprehension skills 2x as quickly as students in regular classrooms.