

Phonics

What is Phonics?

Phonics involves connecting the sounds of spoken English with letters or groups of letters (e.g. that the sound /k/ can be represented by c, k, ck or ch spellings) and teaching them to blend the sounds of letters together to produce approximate pronunciations of unknown words. In this way, phonics enables people to use individual sounds to construct words.

For example, when taught the sounds for the letters t, p, a and s, one can build up the words "tap", "pat", "pats", "taps" and "sat"

Terminology

The children will be taught and be familiar with the correct terminology from their classroom teaching (Letter and Sounds sessions). This terminology should be consistent across classes and reinforced while we hear children read.

phoneme — the smallest single identifiable sound, e.g. the letters 'sh' represent just one sound, but 'sp' represents two (/s/ and /p/)

digraph — two letters making one sound, e.g. sh, ch, th, ph.

vowel digraphs comprise of two vowels which, together, make one sound, e.g. ai, oo, ow

split digraph — two letters, split, making one sound, e.g. a-e as in make or i-e in site

grapheme — a letter or a group of letters representing one sound, e.g. sh, ch, igh, ough (as in 'though')

segment — to split up a word into its individual phonemes in order to spell it, e.g. the word 'cat' has three phonemes: /c/, /a/, /t/

blend — to draw individual sounds together to pronounce a word, e.g. s-n-a-p, blended together, reads snap

cluster — two (or three) letters making two (or three) sounds, e.g. the first three letters of 'straight' are a consonant cluster

grapheme-phoneme correspondence (GPC) — the relationship between sounds and the letters which represent those sounds; also known as 'letter-sound correspondences'

mnemonic — a device for memorising and recalling something, such as a snake shaped like the letter 'S'

VC, CVC, CCVC — the abbreviations for vowel-consonant, consonant-vowel-consonant, consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant, which are used to describe the order of letters in words, e.g. am, ham, slam.

Strategies and Misconceptions

Grapheme Phoneme Correspond

Flash Cards: Quick recall of **phonemes, diagraphs and trigraphs**. In order for children to read a word they need to be able to have sight recognition of all of the phonemes (sounds) they see. Through using flash cards children can quickly recall of the sounds they have learnt so far. Making a game of this can be fun for the children. e.g. SPLAT! You start by putting the sounds that a child finds difficult in front of them. Then say the sound for them to SPLAT as quickly as possible.

Misconception: Ensure children are correctly pronouncing sounds. Often sounds such as **t, b, w, d** become **t(u) b(u) w(u) d(u)**. We need to feel confident that we are also modelling the correct sounds.

Blending

Sound Buttons: Children need to know that words are made up of phonemes. We encourage children to push “sound buttons” underneath each of the phonemes, diagraphs or trigraphs. You may say to the child, “push the sound buttons ... what sounds can you hear?” If they can’t blend the sounds it may be that they don’t have a firm recognition of the phonemes.

Robot Talk: Children may be able to segment (see above) but they can’t always hear the sounds making a word. We tell the children to blend the sounds together what word can you hear. Robot talk makes the process a little bit more exciting. “Let’s robot talk the word... h----a-----n----d, say it fast h-a-n-d, what can you hear?” When children initially start blending they find hearing the word quite challenging.

‘Simon Says’: ‘Simon Says touch your f-ee-t, h-ea-d, ch-i-n, ch-ee-k, j-u-m-p, h-o-p, point to the ch-air, d-oor, f-l-oor’.

Children find this stage challenging and will need lots of good models of blending in order to start hearing the words.

Misconception: Children will blend every single sound e.g. r-a-i-n rather than r-ai-n or n-i-g-h-t rather than n-igh-t. This will be very common in reception as they may encounter diagraphs and trigraphs in their books that they haven’t been taught.

Segmenting

Robot Talk: Use a Robot voice to segment (chop up) the word you want to write. e.g. “I want to write hand”. The Robot the children say the word and then use their Robot arms to chop the word. ‘What is the first sound, middle sound, last sound?’ The Robot can make mistakes or pretend it can’t hear the middle sound for the children to correct.

Misconception: Children can’t hear all of the sounds in the word. If they can’t put the word back together they may need more practise of blending.

Tricky Words

These are words that don't blend together to make a recognisable word. e.g. was, there, because etc. Children will need to learn these words by repetition and by visual recall. In reception we send home „Key Word“ books which encourage children to learn these words with their parents.

Games to engage: Flash Cards, Bingo, Splat the Word, Win the Word.

Misconception: Children blend the sounds to make a word e.g. w...a....s Children don't read words by sight or check if it makes senses in the context of the sentences.

Rhyme

Children need to be able to rhyme. Once they hear and recognise rhyming strings they are able to quickly decode other words. For example, if they can read rain they can also read pain, stain, grain etc.

Rhyming Tennis: I say a word 'cat' and the child bats it back with 'sat' then I bat it back with 'mat'

Rhyming Ladders: Children draw a ladder and climb up the ladder with as many rhyming words as possible, "who can climb the highest?"

'Reading On' or 'Reading for Sense'

Once children are more confident in their reading they will read with greater fluency. At this point they may read words incorrectly as they are trying to read by sight rather than by decoding. They will need encouraging to check what they have read makes sense. 'Does that make sense?' 'Can you read on to the next word to see what would make sense?' You can read the sentence back to them with their mistake to see if they can hear the missing word.

The Whole Picture

It is vital that children are confident with all of the above to ensure they are able to read for meaning and enjoyment!

They will develop vital comprehension skills through their interactions with their books. This interaction is encouraged through questioning and discussion either with their peers in 'Guided Reading' with their teacher or through adults questioning them.