



Developing Phonics Skills

Foundations of Reading

To learn to read well, children need to know how to recognize and pronounce words (**decoding**), what words mean (**vocabulary**) and how to understand the meaning of a group of words or connected text (**comprehension**). To build these foundations of reading, teachers use a balanced approach and focus on the goal of reading for meaning. Parents play a vital role in supporting this work at home.

What is phonics instruction?

Phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses learning how letters match sounds and how to use this knowledge in reading and spelling.

What role do phonics play in reading?

In the early grades, elementary phonics are introduced and letter/sound associations are stressed to help prepare children for reading and writing. By the second grade, most phonics instruction is completed and children have the basic skills they need to move on to more interpretive reading skills, such as drawing conclusions, making inferences and finding the main ideas. Some children may need continued reinforcement of phonics learning.

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”

– Joseph Addison

How can I help to build my child’s phonics’ skills at home?

There are several things you can do to support your child’s progress with phonics.

Read books that emphasize rhyming and/or word play.

Read rhyming stories and stop before the rhyming word, so the child can guess the word.

Dr. Seuss books, such as *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* are great fun to read and help children apply phonic skills.

Alliteration is the repetition of a beginning consonant sound across several words. Books with alliteration offer a fun way to work with initial sounds.

Place **magnetic letters** on the refrigerator for your children to use to practice letter names and sounds, form words and/or create messages.

Trace letters in or on multi-sensory surfaces like cloth or sand. Practice sounds and letter formation.

Construct letters using various materials, such as macaroni, clay and pipe cleaners.

Change letters to show changes in sounds. When we take a word and change one of the letters, we are able to create a new word.

bit → bat

bat → cat

cat → cab

cab → car

After each change, the last word in the pair becomes the first word in the next pair. This helps children see that different letters make different sounds, and that the different sounds create a different meaning.

ALPHABETICAL ORDER

Have your child practice putting cards with pictures into alphabetical order according to the first letter of each word. Words that begin with the same letter can be put into order according to the second letter, etc.

As well as having fun working on phonics, your child will have a collection of words to add to their reading vocabulary!

CARD SORT

Using cards with pictures, have your child sort the cards into groups of words that begin with the same sound. When initial sounds have been mastered, the cards can be sorted by ending sounds and then according to vowel sounds.

Write the names of the objects on the back of the cards, so children can check the cards to see if they have grouped the words correctly. If you have your child group words according to vowel sounds, you will need to make the vowels either long or short.

MEANINGFUL WORD MAKING

Write a word on paper and cut the letters apart. Magnetic and felt letters can also be used for this activity. Have your child mix the letters and spell as many words as possible using those letters; for example, using the word *breakfast*, you can make words like *task*, *fast*, *take*, *brake*, *skater* and *karate*.

SOUND BINGO

Using bingo cards with pictures, have children mark their cards if one of their pictures has the same beginning (or ending) sound as the word said by the caller. This game requires at least two children to play.

PHONICS GAME

Have children play a game using cards with pictures. Each person takes a turn drawing a card from a face-down pile and placing it in a face up pile. When a newly drawn card has the same beginning (or ending) sound as the top card in the face-up pile, the first child to identify the match by saying “BAM” collects the pile.

WORD FAMILIES

Use magnetic letters to create words within word families; for example, use ‘at’ and have your child place different letters in front of it to create new words (e.g., hat, bat, sat, rat).

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Last updated: March 2020