

Phonics@Home

What are phonics and why should we do them?

Phonics are special sounds - the sounds which make up 'talk'. The reason we should do them is because children progress naturally from talking to writing, and from listening to reading. We need to encourage this process!

To really help our children, we need to:

- (i) understand what is going on in their learning to read and write;
- (ii) have a good 'bank' of activities and resources to help;
- (iii) develop ways of working together to help them acquire these important skills.



Understanding Phonics

Phonemes

When we speak, we make sounds. These sounds form words and phrases. The sounds that make up spoken language are referred to as '**phonemes**'. Take the sound 'shhh'. (Make it by putting your finger on your lips as if you were telling someone to be quiet!) This is a **phoneme** because it forms part of the words 'ship', 'shark', 'flash', 'nation', 'ambition' and many others. By contrast the sound you make when clapping your hands is not a phoneme as this sound is not one that we use in spoken language. A hand-clap sound is not part of any words!

Teachers often refer to phonemes as sounds, as this is what they are! All phonemes *are* sounds. But it is as well to remember that not all sounds are phonemes - a knock on the table or a hand-clap are not phonemes!

How many phonemes?

There are generally reckoned to be around 44 different phonemes or sounds that make up spoken English. This will vary from area to area as different accents use different sounds. For example, a person born in the north of England will very likely not use the sound that southern English people use in the middle of the word 'bus'. A northerner may pronounce 'bus' to rhyme with 'puss', giving it a different sound in the middle.

Single letters making one sound:

*ten - /t/ /e/ /n/
jam - /j/ /a/ /m/
cup - /c/ /u/ /p/*

Words with a pair of letters making one sound:

*check - /ch/ /e/ /ck/
shack - /sh/ /a/ /ck/*

What about letters?

Letters are **graphemes**. This means that they are ways of writing down the sounds that come out of our mouth! We use the term 'grapheme' rather than letter because many sounds are written using two or more letters.

That sound we heard earlier, 'shh' is often written using the letters 'sh'. We say that the **grapheme** representing this sound is 'sh'. But sometimes this same sound is written 'ti' as in 'nation'. In this case, the **grapheme** representing this sound is 'ti'. It is important to realise that one sound can be written using two (or more) letters.

j	gg	tt	pp
v	dd	aw	zz
x	mm	ow	ay
y	ss	bb	rr
z	ff	ore	nn
qu	ll	or	ee

Learning Phonics

A phonics programme is the sequence of activities that teachers use to help children learn two things:

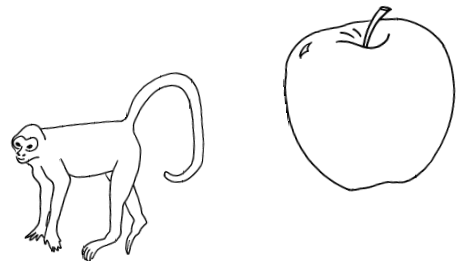
- (i) The words that we SAY can be broken up into identifiable single sounds (phonemes).
- (ii) Written script is a code - we need to learn how to write down each of the sounds we hear in a word. When we read, one of the things we do is to 'decode' the words.
- (iii) Any one sound can be written in more than one way!

This last point is very important. English is a wonderful complex and rich language. It has been formed from the fusion of many languages and different 'language families'.

One sound may commonly be written in several ways.

When we write the sound /ee/ (as in the word 'sleep') it may be written

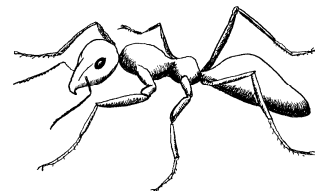
- simple 'e' - as in 'me' or 'he' or 'she'
- double 'ee' - as in 'sleep' or 'weed'
- 'i' before 'e' or 'ie' - as in 'piece' or 'field'
- 'ea' - as in 'peace' or 'leap'
- 'y' - as in 'mummy' or 'daddy'
- 'ey' - as in 'key' or 'monkey'
- 'ei' as in 'seize'



One letter may represent several sounds.

When we read the letter 'a', it may be representing the sounds..

- /a/ - as in 'apple' or 'ant'
- /ay/ - as in 'apron' or 'Amy'
- /ar/ - as in 'father' or 'rather'
- /o/ - as in 'was' or 'want' or 'what'
- /uh/ is - as in 'about' or 'among'



Learning our sounds

It really helps children in both reading and writing if they can identify the sounds in words. Follow these simple 'one, two, three' steps to help them do this.

1. *Initial sounds* - The easiest sound to identify in a word is the first sound, e.g. the /sh/ sound at the start of 'ship' or 'shark' or the /d/ sound at the start of 'dog'. Help children to spot words that begin with the same sound as their name. Amy can spot 'apron' and 'April' but not 'apple'! (They may also recognise the letter, but get them to listen out for the sound.)

ch ch ch

2. *Sound actions* - It helps children to identify and distinguish different sounds if they have an action to associate with it. Thus /sh/ and /ch/ can often be identified by putting a finger on our lips for /sh/ and making steam train piston arm movements for /ch/ /ch/ /ch/ etc. (see below for ideas).



3. *Rhyming games* - To help children listen out for middle and end sounds in words, encourage them to spot and create rhymes. Best, guest, west, VEST ... can be part of a game where you take turns to say a rhyming word. The words do not have to be 'real' - ants, lants, fants, PANTS... can cause great giggles!

ant

lants

fants



pants

Distinguishing letters and sounds

As your child gets older, it really helps if they make a distinction between letters and sounds. Letters allow us to write sounds down. So Cecily's letter is C, but her sound is /ssss/. Cecily will need to become aware that her sound is usually written 's', but is sometimes written in other ways, like at the start of her name.

Even if your child's name starts with a sound written in a common way, e.g. Timmy, where the letter 'T' is used to write the sound /t/, it is still important that they realise that this might not always be the case. When Timmy meets the word 'this', he sees that 'his letter' does not make the /t/ sound here - it is part of a grapheme, 'the' which makes a different sound, /th/.

Sounding out to read and write

As they progress in reading, children need to develop the skills of sounding out simple words. 'This', 'that', 'thing', 'then' are best read by sounding each phoneme: /th/ - /a/ - /t/. This process is especially useful in helping children to recognise and read the small common words such as 'in', 'an', 'on', 'at', 'it', 'is', 'up', 'us', 'we', etc.

my name starts
with mmm



(Mary)

Tricky words

These are words which are not phonetic. This means that there is no easy way of sounding them out. Often they are also commonly occurring words, such as 'once', 'one', 'was', 'because', etc. When there is no easy way of sounding out a word, and we know that children will often meet this word in their reading, we ask them to memorise it. Your child will need to memorise a short list of key words as they start learning to read (see list below).

Minimise the risk of

There is evidence that it can be damaging if children rely too heavily on memorising words, and are not encouraged from the start to realise that writing is a 'code' and that words can be 'decoded'. If a word can be sounded out, then we should encourage children to do this. This keeps to a minimum the number of 'key words' which they need to memorise. It also reinforces constantly the idea that we can 'decode' any word, even one we have not met before, if we just recognise the sounds that the graphemes (letters) represent.



Table of English Phonemes

This is a list of Standard English phonemes as they appear in Code-Breakers (Hamilton Phonics Programme). There will be regional variations in the pronunciation of some of the example words.

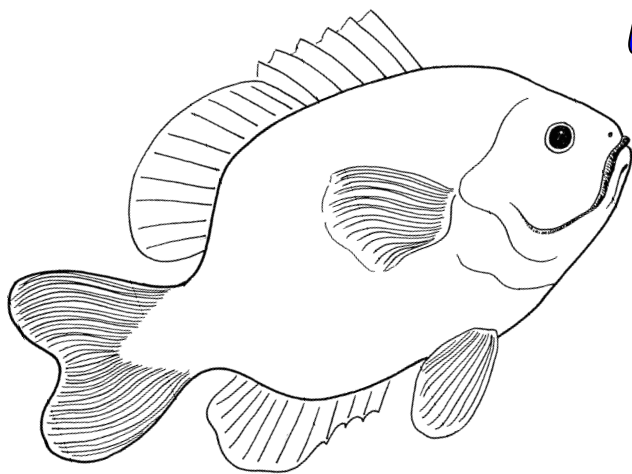
Phoneme	Example Words
/i/	pig, myth, pretty, build
/a/	cat
/e/	peg, bread, said, friend, any
/u/	but, touch, some, blood, won, does
/o/	log, want, cough
/oo/	look, put, would, wolf
/ooh/	moon, flew, do, blue, rule, you, fruit, truth, two, shoe
/ar/	park, rather, calm, heart, laugh, aunt
/or/	port, claw, more, door, roar, caught, call, walk, water, four
/ee/	deep, happy, me, meat, chief, money, these, ceiling
/ue/	tune, cue, pupil, pew, view, beauty
/er/	kerb, shirt, fur, learn, were, word, purr
/ay/	day, pain, fame, steak, they, eight, station, table, reign
/ie/	I, kite, pie, wild, night, buy, fly, bye, guide, type, rifle
/oy/	toy, soil
/ou/	house, cow, plough
/oa/	boat, go, grow, note, toe, most, though, sew, noble
/air/	hair, there, square, bear, their
/p/	pet, apple
/t/	tin, kittens, debt, pterodactyl, looked, liked
/c/	cup, kite, duck, Christmas, antique, quay, occur

/b/	bat, rabbit
/d/	dog, sudden, filled
/g/	gap, digger, ghost, guard
/f/	fish, stuff, phone, tough,
/th/	thing
/tthh/	that
/s/	sun, miss, centre, circle, voice, science, castle, sword
/sh/	ship, sugar, machine, station, special, ocean
/h/	hit, whole
/v/	van, give
/z/	zebra, easy, is, dogs, xylophone, drizzle, freeze, please
/zh/	treasure, vision, collage
/m/	man, summer, comb, autumn
/n/	nut, dinner, knee, gnat, pneumonia
/ng/	long, think
/ch/	church, match
/j/	jug, giant, gentle, bridge, region, hinge
/r/	rat, carry, write, rhino
/l/	lip, full, cradle
/w/	wonder, when
/y/	yes
/cs/*	fox
/cw/*	quick

* These are really two phonemes but are dealt with together in our Code-Breaker scheme as they are represented by a single grapheme.

List of common 'little' words to be decoded (sounded out)

am an as at and add	each end ending	if ill in is it	odd of off often old on or our out	under unless up upon us
be begin but can did down	far for from get got has had he him his how	just lot may me much need next not says see she still	that the them then thing this	way we went well will with



/f/ /i/ /sh/

List of tricky key words

a after again all always also any are	even	I into	once one only oh onto other	undo
because before beginning by could	do done does go going goes have her here	many more my no none our	said shall should so some their there they though to two very	want was were what when where which who why would you your

/sh/ /ar/ /k/

