

# Teaching Children to Read

## Teaching Sounds--(Phonemic Awareness)

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Editor's Note: Orangevale Country Journal is pleased to provide this reading instructional plan—one of 60 Reading Champs Common Sense Mini Lessons written by Rita M. Wirtz and Donald E. Werve, Jr., which will begin open publishing through IVE Focus Text Publishers in October, 2008.

Reading research tells us that “Phonemic Awareness” is the ability to recognize basic speech sounds (units) in spoken words. New readers need to be able to manipulate speech sounds before they learn letters and letter-sound relationships (phonics). Budding readers of any age appreciate word play of varied types which helps them focus on sounds and develop an awareness of different sounds in words.

Especially important in this process are Reading Champs mini-lessons that offer experience in rhythm and rhyme, segmenting (syllabication) and synthesis, sound sequence, isolation, substitution, and blending. These interesting patterns are used in many well-known books which feature rhythm, rhyme, repetition, and predictable patterns. Gather pictures, photo and letter cards, cubes and tiles, games and a variety of music featuring various kinds of rhythms. Instruments (especially hand drums such as bongos and congas) are fun to use for accompaniment and to feel the beat.

Some teachers disagree as to whether phonemic awareness can, or should, be taught as a reading skill. Opponents contend that language learning is believed to be a natural process. At the other extreme are some educators who believe in testing progress in learning of the various elements. In any event, we believe it makes sense to offer as many opportunities to focus on individual elements of phonemic awareness in their own series of mini-lessons and to build overall linguistic skills on an integrated foundation.

### INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITY

“Why do I need to know this?”

Reading experts generally agree that phonemic awareness is one of the predictors for reading success. It is appropriate for classroom teachers (at school) and at-home teachers, parents, and tutors (Reading Champs coaches) to spend sufficient time on word play. Reading aloud and playing with the sounds of the language in a variety of ways are two important elements in any comprehensive reading skills instructional program.

### Phonics Vocabulary:

Isolation: Identifying individual sounds as in words such as pin: p-i-n; bin: b-i-n; din: d-i-n (which means a lot of noise); fin: f-i-n; or tin: t-i-n.

Sequence: Identifying the order the sounds are heard in the word such as at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of the word.

Substitution: Practicing the effect of changing sounds such as bat, cat, fat, hat, etc.

Blending: Combining individual letter sounds into words such as / m / a / n / to man.

### INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES AND GAMES

#### Teacher/Coach-directed activities:

See and Say: “What sound (note that this does not mean what letter) does your name start with?” or “What is another word that begins with that sound?” or hold up a sight-word flashcard and ask, “What is the first sound in this word?”

Hear and Move: “Nod your head, clap your hands, and wiggle your hips, etc., when you hear the first, middle, and last sound in this word.” Take a list of ten words and ask, “Which of these words begins with the same sound?” “What rhymes with house?” “Tap your foot when you hear the sound in the middle,” (you need to have a group of three-phoneme words for this one). “Find the letter that makes this sound.” “Tap your pencil when you hear a different sound.” Which sound comes last in this word?”

Look, Listen, and Feel: Place a tissue in front of your mouth, then when you model

sounds see which sounds move the tissue most (probably the “p”, followed closely by the sound for “th” and the sound for “sh.” Put your fingers on your throat and feel different sounds (voiced and unvoiced).

Rhyme or No Rhyme: Work with the student to make “Yes” and “No” index cards. Green (for “yes”) and Red (for “no”) construction paper and scrap paper with a happy-face and a sad-face will work as well (especially for younger children) but are not as durable. Slates or white boards will also work but would not work well for something you intend to use frequently. Then, when two rhyming words are heard hold up the “yes” card, or if the words do not rhyme, hold up the “no” card.

How Many Sounds Do You Hear? “Use your fingers to show how many sounds you hear in this word.”

Twitch the Tail: Use a string, or wiki-stix, to put a tail on a drawing of a cat or dog. Use this to represent the sound at the beginning or end of a word. The coach or another student holds up a word and makes a sound and the first student moves the tail.

“A switch in time ...” Make liberal use of reading-aloud (and even role playing) materials, nursery rhymes, tongue twisters, easy-sing songs, and chants. Remember that the purpose of these lessons is to learn phonic and word skills, not to commit the reading material to memory.

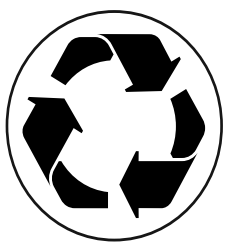
SUMMARY: I say again, and for the third time, that reading experts generally agree that phonemic awareness is one of the predictors for reading success. It is appropriate for classroom teachers (at school) and at-home teachers, parents, and tutors (Reading Champs coaches) to spend sufficient time on word play. Reading aloud and playing with the sounds of the language in a variety of ways are two important elements in any comprehensive reading skills instructional program.

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