

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about and work with the individual sounds in spoken words.

Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how the sounds in words work. They need to understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes.

Children can show us that they have phonemic awareness in several ways, including:

- > recognizing which words in a set of words begin with the same sound (ball, baby, and bat)
- > isolating and saying the first or last sound in a word
- > combining or blending the separate sounds in a word to say the word (/d/, /o/, /g/ -- dog)
- > breaking or segmenting a word into its separate sounds (cat -- /c/, /a/, /t/)

Children who have phonemic awareness skills are likely to have an easier time learning to read and spell than children who do not.

Phonemic awareness is **not** phonics. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together and make words. Phonics is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between the letters that represent those sounds in **written** language. In order for children to benefit from phonics instruction, they need phonemic awareness.

Children who cannot hear and work with the sounds of spoken words will have a difficult time learning how to relate these sounds to the letters when they see them in written words.

Effective phonemic awareness instruction teaches children to notice, think about, and manipulate sounds in spoken language.

PHONEMIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Phoneme isolation – children recognize individual sounds in a word (what is the first sound in **mat**?)

Phoneme identity – children recognize the same sounds in different words (**web, word, water**)

Phoneme categorization – children recognize the word in a set of three or four words that has the “odd” sound (**bat, bun, rug**)

Phoneme blending – children listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes, and then combine them to form a word. They can then write and read the word. (/c/ /a/ /t/ -- **cat**)

Phoneme segmentation – children break a word into its separate sounds, saying each sound. They can then write and read the word. (**cat** - /c/ /a/ /t/)

Phoneme deletion – children recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed. (What is **hair** without the /h/? **air**, What is **cup** without the /c/? **up**)

Phoneme addition – Children make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word (What word do you have if you add /p/ to **it**? **pit**, What word do you have if you add /s/ to **at**? **sat**)

Phoneme substitution – children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word (The word is **bug**. Change the /b/ to /h/. What’s the new word? **hug**)

Teaching sounds along with the letters of the alphabet is important because it helps children to see how phonemic awareness relates to their reading and writing. If children do not know letter names and shapes, they need to be taught them along with phonemic awareness.

ADDITIONAL PHONEMIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES

Listening to Sequences of Sounds: To develop the memory and attentional abilities for thinking about sequences of sounds and the language for discussing them.

Whispering Game: To exercise the children's ability to overcome distractions while listening to language.

Do You Remember? To exercise children's ability to remember and execute actions in sequential steps and to develop the kind of attentive listening that is necessary for understanding and following verbal instructions.

Poetry, Songs, and Jingles: To use poems and chants in ways that enhance children's awareness of the sound patterns of speech. (Nursery Rhymes, Dr. Suess)

Rhyme Stories: To teach children to use meaning and meter to notice and predict rhyming words.

Word Rhyming: To evoke the realization that almost any word can be rhymed, not just those in other people's poems. (teacher produces a word to be rhymed – accept nonsense words) **book–look, mouse-house, rose-hose**, etc.

Can You Rhyme? To teach children to depend more strongly on phonological cues to generate rhymes. (read “Down by the Bay” for introduction) Challenge children to complete each rhyme aloud. Did you ever see a **cat** wearing a **hat**? I saw a **mouse** that lived in a **house**. I saw a **moose** with a tooth that was **loose**. That little **bug** crawled under the **rug**.

Introducing the Idea of Sentences: To introduce the children to the notion of sentences. Explain that a sentence is like a very short story. It has to tell something and has to name who or what it is telling about. Give examples. Repeat that each example is a sentence because it tells who and what. Give examples of non-sentences. Tell why they are not sentences, what is missing, and what it needs to make it a sentence. Ask students to develop sentences about a picture shown. Ask children to judge your statements as sentences or nonsentences by “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.”

Hearing Words in Sentences: To strengthen the children’s awareness of words by challenging them to represent each with a separate block. Give each child six or seven ordinary blocks, cubes, or squares of paper. Model the required thought process, showing them how to repeat your sentences to themselves word by word with clear pauses between each. Have children repeat your sentence, pointing to each block while pronouncing the word it represents. Start with short sentences. Use monosyllabic words until after students have learned about syllables.

Exercises with Short and Long Words: To refine the children’s awareness of words, more specifically, to help them realize that words are defined by meaning and that they can be long or short independently of their meaning. (The play of this game requires children to decide which of two words is phonologically longer. Knowing that a ladybug is smaller than a cow, for example, they may resist agreeing that the word ladybug is longer than the word cow. The game is designed in recognition of this tendency. Independently of their lengths, one of the

words refers to a familiar object that is significantly larger than the other. This design forces the children to dissociate form from meaning in judging the words' lengths. Say the two words and ask the children which word they think is longer. When the children have answered, show them the words in print so they can see if their judgments were correct. Remember, the objective is for children to learn to hear the differences in the lengths of the words. The print should not be displayed until the children have judged "longer" or "shorter" through listening.

Clapping Names: To introduce the children to the nature of syllables by leading them to clap and count the syllables in their own names. Model this activity by using several names of contrasting lengths. Pronounce the first name syllable by syllable while clapping it out before inviting the children to say and clap the name along with you. After each name has been clapped, ask "How many syllables did you hear?" Once they have caught on, ask each child to clap and count the syllables in his own name. When doing the activity for the first time, model each child's name by pronouncing it, clapping it, and then having all of the children clap it together.

Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read and to spell. It also aids reading comprehension through its influence on word reading. In order for children to understand what they read, they must be able to read words rapidly and accurately. This fluency frees them to focus on the meaning of what they read.