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Kentucky Department of Education

Phonemic Awareness

Instructional Menu

PREFACE

This publication is one of five Instructional Menus developed for Reading First schools to help them forge forward in their goal of reading excellence. These menus are intended to provide a compilation of Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBRR) instructional activities found in a variety of professional development materials/sessions experienced throughout the tenure of Reading First. The list is not a mandated list, but includes options for use during the instructional day.

To obtain copies of the Reading First Instructional Menus, contact the Kentucky Department of Education Reading First, Co-Directors: Linda Holbrook or Sharla Six at (502) 564-2106 or visit the Kentucky Department of Education Reading First Website at:
http://education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Literacy/Kentucky+Reading+First/Kentucky+Reading+First+Resources.htm

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Phonemic Awareness

What does the research say about 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 more aware of how the sounds in words work. They must understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest parts of sound in a spoken word that makes a difference in a word's meaning. Early readers can show they have phonemic awareness in several ways, including recognizing which words in a set of words begin with the same sound, isolating and saying the first or last sound in a word, combining or blending the separate sounds in a word to say the word, and breaking or segmenting a word into its separate sounds.

Although phonemic awareness is a widely used term in reading, it is often misunderstood. For example, phonemic awareness and phonics are not the same thing. Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of **spoken** language work together to make words. Phonics is the understanding that there is a predictable relationship between phonemes and graphemes, the letters that represent those sounds in **written** language.

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

Here are some key findings of the highlights from the evidence-based research on **phonemic awareness instruction:**

- **Phonemic awareness can be taught and learned.** Effective phonemic awareness instruction teaches children to notice, think about, and work with (manipulate) sounds in spoken language.

- **Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read.** It improves the ability to read words and comprehend what is read.

- **Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to spell.** Direct instruction in phonemic awareness, especially in how to segment words into phonemes, helps children relate the sounds to letters as they spell words.

- **Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate phonemes by using the letters of the alphabet.** Such instruction makes a stronger contribution to the improvement of reading and spelling when children are taught to use letters as they manipulate phonemes rather than when instruction is limited to phonemes alone.

- **Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when it focuses on only one or two types of phoneme manipulation, rather than several types at a time.** A focus on teaching children to blend and segment phonemes in words, especially, is likely to produce greater benefits to reading ability than teaching several types of manipulation.

- **Phonemic awareness instruction can help all types of students learn to read, including preschoolers, kindergartners, first graders who are just starting to read, and older, or struggling readers.**

- **Approximately 20 hours of class time over the school year should suffice for phonemic awareness instruction for most students.**

In general, small group instruction is more effective when helping students acquire phonemic awareness and learn to read, compared to individual or whole class instruction (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000).

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1.) What is phonemic awareness?
Phonemic awareness, the most complex part of a phonological awareness continuum that includes rhyming and segmenting words and sentences, is the ability to identify the phonemes (smallest identifiable units of sound) of spoken language, and how they can be separated (pulled apart or segmented), blended (put back together), and manipulated (added, deleted, and substituted).

2.) Why should I teach phonemic awareness?
Children who begin school with little phonological awareness have trouble acquiring alphabetic coding skill and thus have difficulty recognizing words (Stanovich, 2000, p. 393). More than 52 peer-reviewed experimental studies reveal that there are significant positive benefits from explicit instruction in phonemic awareness especially when combined with instruction in letter names (National Reading Panel [NRP], 2000).

Effective phonemic awareness instruction teaches children to **notice, think about, and work with (manipulate) sounds** in spoken language. Teachers use many activities to build phonemic awareness, including:

Phoneme isolation

Children recognize individual sounds in a word.

> Teacher: What is the first sound in ***van?***
> Children: The first sound in ***van*** is /v/.

Phoneme identity

Children recognize the same sounds in different words.

> Teacher: What sound is the same in ***fix, fall,*** and ***fun?***
> Children: The first sound, /f/, is the same.

Phoneme categorization

Children recognize the word in a set of three or four words that has the "odd" sound.

> Teacher: Which word doesn't belong? ***bus, bun, rug.*** Children: ***Rug*** does not belong. It doesn't begin with /b/.

Phoneme blending

Children listen to a sequence of separately spoken phonemes, and then combine the phonemes to form a word.

> Teacher: What word is /b/ /i/ /g/?
> Children: /b/ /i/ /g/ is ***big.***

Phoneme segmentation

Children break a word into its separate sounds, saying each sound as they tap or count it. Then they write and read the word.

> Teacher: How many sounds are in ***grab?***
> Children: /g/ /r/ /a/ /b/. Four sounds.
> Teacher: Now let's write the sounds in ***grab:*** /g/, write ***g;*** /r/, write ***r;*** /a/, write ***a;*** /b/, write ***b.***
> Teacher: (Writes ***grab*** on the board.) Now we're going to read the word ***grab.***

Phoneme deletion

Children recognize the word that remains when a phoneme is removed from another word.

> Teacher: What is ***smile*** without the /s/?
> Children: ***Smile*** without the /s/ is ***mile.***

Phoneme addition

Children make a new word by adding a phoneme to an existing word.

> Teacher: What word do you have if you add /s/ to the beginning of ***park?***
> Children: ***Spark.***

Phoneme substitution

Children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word.

> Teacher: The word is ***bug.*** Change /g/ to /n/. What's the new word?
> Children: ***Bun.***

Instructional Menu for Phonemic Awareness

Skill(s)	*Activity*	*Activity Description*
Phoneme Segmentation; Phoneme Blending	**Elkonin Boxes**	Elkonin boxes are drawn together in a horizontal line, like this:  They can be drawn on a piece of paper or on an index card. Tell students that words can be divided into sounds. Model the task by segmenting a word into phonemes and moving a chip into a box after you say each sound. For example, "The word is *go*. What are the sounds? /g/ (move a chip into the first box) "/o/" (move a chip into the second box. Have students segment several words with you. See that students move a chip with you. See that students move a chip into a box for each sound, and listen to determine that they say the right sounds. If a student makes a mistake, stop and have all the students watch you model. Then have them segment the word and move chips with you (continue with the task until they are successful). Tell the students a word. Have students segment it into phonemes (sounds) and respond as a group. Once students have mastered segmenting two-phoneme words, advance to three-, four-, and five-phoneme words.(Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Identity	**Guess What?**	Create a *Guess What?* box by placing items in a box that all have names beginning with or ending with the same phoneme. Students reach into the box and try to figure out what the items are without looking -- their only clue is what sound the item's name begins or ends with. Example: Put in some plastic grapes, some gum, a toy goat, etc. and tell them the object begins with a /g/ sound. Put in a doll, a nail, a wheel, etc. and tell them that it ends with an /l/ sound.(Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)

Skill(s)	*Activity*	*Activity Description*
Phoneme Identity	**I Spy**	Have children look for objects in their classroom or the playground that begin with certain sounds. Have students say the phrase "I spy with my little eye something that begins with ____," where the blank is the first sound in the word (e.g.... something that begins with /s/.). Other students have to try to figure out what object the first student has in mind. **Notes:** To make this activity more challenging, have students look for objects whose name ends with certain sounds (although be warned, students need to avoid plurals, or everything will end with /s/). Or have students look for objects that contain a certain vowel sound. You can also amend the rules to allow hints -- children can give the first and last sound, or children can give the first two sounds. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Identity	**What's That?**	Gather a set of three or four pictures of objects whose names start with a particular phoneme (e.g. fox, foot, feather). Do this for several phonemes. Use only pictures that have single consonants at the beginning. Have the children name each object depicted (to be sure the child's name for each picture starts with the phoneme /f/). After the names of all of the pictures in the set have been agreed upon, ask children to choose a picture from the set and name it. Then repeat the name, drawing out the initial consonant (e.g., f-f-f-f-ox). Then, ask all of the children to repeat the name in the same way . Tell students to notice and describe what they are doing with their mouths as they make the /f-f-f/ sound (and make sure they notice it is the same sound at the beginning of different words). Continue this process with the other picture cards and make sure that the children understand that all of the picture names start with the same phoneme (/f/). **Notes:** This activity can be extended by introducing onset consonant clusters (e.g. snail, school, store). Make sure that students can hear the /s/ sound separately from the consonant that follows it. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Segmentation; Phoneme Substitution	**Phoneme Awareness through Song**	Many songs allow students to practice phoneme manipulation or word segmentation. Examples include "Apples and Bananas," "Down by the Bay," and "The Name Game." In these songs (and others like them), students play with phonemes by substituting sounds to complete the lyrics as the class sings. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)

Skill(s)	*Activity*	*Activity Description*
Phoneme Blending	**Phoneme Ball**	You will need a beanbag or soft ball for this activity. Have your students gather in a circle. Pronounce a word phoneme by phoneme and have the child respond by putting the phonemes together. Example: If the word is "kite," you would say out loud / k / / ī / / t / (be sure to pause between each phoneme). Throw a beanbag to a student. The student catches the bag and responds with "kite" while throwing the bag back to you. Use words with easily pronounced phonemes (e.g. avoid phonemes like /g/ because they can not be pronounced without adding a vowel sound, as in /guh/). **Notes:** You can make the activity more complicated by adding words with clusters (such as school, mask, stamp, etc). And you can reverse the process -- you say the word as a whole, toss the beanbag to a student, and the student segments the word into its phonemes. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Isolation; Phoneme Deletion	**Phoneme Counting**	Tell children you are going to play a listening game with them. Give students three objects like beads that can be used for counting phonemes. Say a three-phoneme word such as "pot" and ask the children to repeat it. Then show the children how you can divide the word "pot" into three parts: /p/, /o/, and /t/. Tell them each bead can be used to "stand for" each part. Show them that you need all three beads to represent the word "pot". Next, explain that a new word can be made by taking away the last bead (the /t/ part). Have everyone take away the last bead and ask what the remaining beads "say" (namely the word "paw"—it is spelled differently, but is pronounced the same, and children at this age are likely unaware of the spelling of words). Then ask what would happen if the last bead was put back on (you would get the word "pot" again). Repeat this activity with a variety of three and four phoneme words removing the first (e.g. cat, pill, man). **Notes:** These activities work better if the beads are different colors, and if the children actively move the phonemes around as they say each word. **Extension:** Words can be said in reverse rearranged the beads to turn "pot"

		into “top”.
Skill(s)	***Activity***	***Activity Description***
Phoneme Identity	**SNAP**	Play the game "SNAP" using shared sounds. The teacher begins by saying two words aloud to the students. If the words share a sound, other players "snap" their fingers. If the two words don't share a sound, everyone is quiet. Begin with first sounds; proceed to middle and final sounds when the children can do the first sound well. **Notes:** You can keep score by giving students points for being the first to snap, or you can make it a game of elimination. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Segmentation	**Spider Web**	Gather students in a circle on the floor. Holding onto the end of a ball of yarn, say a short word and toss the ball to a student. Whoever catches the ball says the first phoneme in the word. That student holds on to the yarn and tosses the yarn ball to another student in the circle who names the second phoneme in the word. As students continue the activity, a yarn "spider web" is taking form. **Notes:** As a variation, begin with a word (e.g. "cat") and toss the ball. The next student thinks of a word that starts with the same phoneme that the last word ended with (e.g. "tap") and tosses the ball to the next student who has to think of a new word that starts with the same phoneme that the last word ended with (e.g. "pill"), etc. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Identity	**Thumbs Up**	Give children a smiley sticker to place on the end of their thumb. Tell them to stick their thumb up each time you say a word that begins with a certain phoneme. Say words out loud, one at a time, and monitor student's responses (children who do not understand the concept will be inclined to imitate other children). **Notes:** For a variation, this activity can be used with middle sounds and final sounds, or you could ask students to give a thumbs up every time they hear a word with a certain number of phonemes (e.g. Give a thumbs up every time I say a word with 5 sounds in it, such as BLAST, SIMPLE, STUDY, etc..) (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)

Skill(s)	*Activity*	*Activity Description*
Phoneme Isolation	**Tap**	The teacher and students will tap their index fingers for the beginning sound, middle fingers for the middles sound and ring fingers for the ending sound. The teacher says the word **cap**. The children are to tap their index, middle and ring ringers to their thumbs, for every phoneme in the word. The teacher may ask how many phonemes in the word **cap.** **Extension:** The teacher asks, "What is the beginning sound in the word cap?" As she taps her index finger with her thumb. OR "What is the middle sound sound in the word cap?" as she taps her middle finger with her thumb. OR "What is the ending sound in the word cap?" (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Identity	**Snap Game**	The teacher will say two words having one phoneme in common. The first student to snap their fingers will tell the group what phoneme the two words have in common. Examples: The teacher says mouse and how. The first student to snap would say /ou/. The teacher says catch and watch. The first student to snap would say /ch/. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Categorization	**Block Lists**	The teacher will choose 3 or 4 pictures of objects beginning with different Consonant-Vowel combinations such as "bug", "bag", "bowl" and "bait". Lay the pictures across the table. He/She will give the students 5 blocks each. As the students take turns listening, the teacher says a word that begins with one of those sound combinations, example "bun". The teacher then asks the student to put the block under the picture of the word that begins with the same sound combination as "bun". The student should place their block under the picture of the "bug".(Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Skill(s)	*Activity*	*Activity Description*
Phoneme Blending	**Blending Sounds**	Give students several blank counters. Say a word, stretching each sound in the word. Students repeat the sounds slowly and move a counter for each sound. Then they say each sound faster, moving their fingers below the counters as they say the word. Teacher: "/fffaaannn/." Now say it again slowly and move one counter for each sound in the word." Students: "fffaaannn." (They move one counter each for /f/, /a/, and /n/

		sounds." Teacher: "Now let's say each sound faster this time. Point to each letter. Move your finger quickly. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Segmentation	**What Am I Thinking Of?**	Tell the class you are thinking of an object (may want to stick to objects in a category) and ask them to guess what the object is. As a clue, give the separate sounds in the word. For example, if you're thinking of a fish, say, "The object I am thinking of is a /f/ /i/ /sh/." Your students must then blend the sounds together to discover the object you are thinking of. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Segmentation	**Tell Me the Sound You Hear**	The teacher is to give the students a word (VC, CV, CVC, CCVC, or CVCC; depending on the skill levels of the students). The first student around the table is to give the beginning phoneme, the 2nd student gives the second phoneme, and the 3rd student gives the third phoneme. The activity begins again with a new word. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)

Skill(s)	*Activity*	*Activity Description*
Phoneme Segmentation	**White Board Activity**	In the case of a CVC word, the teacher is to draw three lines on a white board.  The teacher says a CVC word and the student taps his/her finger on a line as he or she says the individual phonemes in the word. Two lines would be drawn for VC or CV words and four lines for CCVC or CVCC words. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Deletion	**Take Off Cinderella**	Play "Take Off Cinderella" after reading and discussing the story. It can be played after reading and discussing words from any story. The teacher, using words from the story, gives the students a word such as "**midnight**". She asks the students to tell her what the word will be without one of the sounds or phonemes. The students respond. Teacher: Take off the /m/ (Use the sound /m/ instead of the letter **m**.) in **midnight**. What is left? Students: "**idnight**". **Note:** If children have difficulty leaving off the beginning sound in a two-syllable word, then select a one-syllable word form the story. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Phoneme Addition	**Nonsense Word-Play**	The teacher will give the child a word such as **mart.** She/He will ask the child, "What word will you have if you add a /s/ to beginning of the word?" The teacher may also have the students to make nonsense words. Example: "What word will you have if you add a /t/ to the end of **has**?" The student will respond, "**hast**". (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)
Skill(s)	*Activity*	*Activity Description*
Phoneme Substitution	**Phoneme Manipulation Game**	The teacher will give the students a word such as "**cart**" and ask the students to substitute one phoneme for another.

		Example: Teacher would say: "What word will you have if you change the /t/ sound to a /d/ sound in the word "**cart**"?" Students: **"card".** Teacher: "Now substitute the /o/ sound for the /a/ sound. What word do you have now?" Students: **"cord"**. The game continues with the new words. (Reading First Summer Institute Binder 2004)

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