

Phonemic Awareness Activities

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that a word is made up of a sequence of small units of sounds. These activities focus on *phonemes*, the smallest unit of speech that corresponds to one or more letters. Throughout, phonemes, or letter-sounds, are represented by letters between slash marks. For example, /b/ stands for the beginning sound in *boy* and /sh/ stands for the beginning sound in *shell*. These oral activities give practice identifying and manipulating phonemes without referring to the letters that stand for the sounds. Use these activities to strengthen children's skills, whether they need more support and practice or are ready for a challenge. Activities are appropriate for children in grades K–2.

I. Articulating Letter-Sounds

Purpose: Pronounce letter-sounds correctly

Materials: *Articulation Guide*, (optional) small mirrors

Use the Articulation Guide on pages 8–10 to review how to pronounce letter-sounds correctly. Pronounce a sound several times as you point out to children how you are using your tongue, lips, teeth, vocal box, and breath to form the sound. Then watch and listen as children make the sound and provide feedback. If possible, give children small mirrors so they can watch themselves make the sound or have them watch one another.

TIP: Pronouncing letter-sounds When modeling letter-sounds, be sure to say each sound precisely. Stretch out continuous sounds such as /m/, saying /m-m-m-m-m/. Stop sounds, such as /d/, can't be stretched out. Instead, repeat this sound quickly a few times, /d/, /d/, /d/. Be careful that you don't add "uh" to the end of a sound. The sound /d/ should be said crisply like the end of the word *sad*, not "duh."



2. Reinforcing Letter-Sounds

Purpose: *Identify and distinguish letter-sounds in spoken words*

Materials: *Pictures*

These activities reinforce letter-sounds children are learning.

- Say pairs of words, some beginning with the same letter-sound, such as *can*, *cook*, and some beginning with different letter-sounds, such as *call*, *sick*. Have children tell if the words begin with the same sound or different sounds.
- Say pairs of words that begin with the same letter-sound. Have children say what the beginning sound is.
- Say the target letter-sound and give a word that begins with that letter-sound, such as /k/, *Cass*. Have children name as many things as they can that begin with that letter-sound. For oral activities, it's okay if children suggest words in which the target letter-sound is spelled differently than the example word you give.
- Tell children the letter-sound you want them to listen for and give them an action to do if they hear a word that begins with that sound. For example, they could nod their heads to show yes, clap their hands, or do an action related to the letter-sound, such as wiggling for /w/. Then say words, some that begin with the target letter-sound and others that don't. Children should only respond if the word begins with the target letter-sound. You can show pictures to support the words you say.
- Say three words, two that begin with the target letter-sound and one that doesn't. Have children tell which word doesn't begin with the same sound as the other two words. You can also do this activity with pictures and picture names.
- Tell children you will say the first sound in a child's name and you want them to guess whose name it is. For names that begin with a continuous sound, such as *Lindsay*, stretch out the sound, saying /l-l-l-l/. For names that begin with a stop sound, such as *Tom*, repeat the sound a few times, saying /t/ /t/ /t/. Call on individuals to say the name or give a signal and have everyone respond. Repeat for categories of words, such as names of animals, sports, foods, and so on.

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- When children are learning about long-vowel sounds, give them practice distinguishing between short- and long-vowel sounds. Say a pair of single-syllable words, one with a short-vowel sound and one with the long sound of that vowel, such as *tap*, *tape* or *cup*, *cube*. Have children tell which word has the long-vowel sound. Say a single-syllable word and have children take a short step forward if they hear a short-vowel sound or take a long step forward if they hear a long-vowel sound.

TIP: Isolating letter-sounds It's easier for children to identify a word's initial letter-sound than its medial or final sound, so first give practice identifying beginning letter-sounds. Start with simple words that don't begin with consonant blends. For example, for /s/, use *sun* instead of *snake*. Then expand to include more challenging words. Once children can successfully identify initial sounds, give practice identifying medial and final letter-sounds. You can modify the Phonemic Awareness Activities in this section to provide practice identifying and manipulating medial or final letter-sounds. When asking children to identify vowel sounds, avoid using words where nearby consonants influence the sound of the vowel, such as *w*, *r*, *n* in *wash*, *girl*, *ant*.



3. Sorting Pictures by Letter-Sounds

Purpose: *Distinguish among letter-sounds*

Materials: *Pictures*

Gather pictures whose names begin with the letter-sound you want to reinforce, such as *chick*, *chair*, *chalk*, *checkers*, *children* for /ch/. Include a few pictures whose names begin with other letter-sounds. Tell children the letter-sound you want them to listen for. (/ch/) Then show and name each picture. Tell children that if the picture name begins with the target letter-sound, they should place it faceup in one pile. If it doesn't begin with that sound, turn the picture facedown and move it off to the side. After the pictures have been sorted, review the names of the faceup pictures. Have children tell how the picture names are alike. (*They begin with /ch/.*)

Variation 1 Show two pictures, one for each letter-sound you want to reinforce, such as a *chick* for initial /ch/ and a *shell* for initial /sh/. Say the name of each picture and have children say its beginning sound. Put the two pictures faceup, far apart. These are the example pictures. Show children a mix of pictures whose names begin with one of the two letter-sounds. Help them name each picture. Have them place the picture near the example picture with the same beginning sound. Once the pictures have been sorted, review the names in each pile and tell how the pictures in that pile are alike.

Variation 2 For a greater challenge, have children sort for three or more initial letter-sounds.

Variation 3 Have children sort pictures by the position of a target letter-sound. For example, show pictures whose names include /t/ either at the beginning, middle, or end, such as *top*, *button*, *cat*. Have children sort the pictures into three groups.

4. Blending Letter-Sounds to Form Words

Purpose: Blend letter-sounds to form words

Materials: Pictures or objects, bag or box

Collect pictures or objects whose names you want children to say. Hide the items in a bag or box. Start with items whose names have two sounds, such as *pie*. Gradually include names with three sounds, such as *pan*, or four sounds, such as *lamp*. See examples below. Say the name of a hidden item using slow talk, saying the word slowly and deliberately, letter-sound by letter-sound. For example, show a picture of a pie and say /p/ /ī-ī-ī-ī/. Have children repeat your slow talk. Tell them to push the sounds together in their minds to figure out what the word is. (*pie*) Tell them to raise their hands when they think they know the word. To provide additional support, repeat the slow talk, but speak more quickly so the letter-sounds are closer. Have the group or an individual say the word at a normal speed. Show the item to confirm the answer. Repeat for other items.

Once children understand how to do the activity, have them blend sounds to form words without using hidden items. After they figure out the word you said in slow talk, use it in a context sentence to make sure they understand what the word means.



Two-Sound Words		Three-Sound Words		Four-Sound Words	
am	itch	bat	light	belt	last
an	knee	bone	map	bugs	mask
ape	no	cake	moon	cups	nest
bee	on	can	mop	crab	nuts
bow (/bō/)	pea	cat	nose	desk	plate
egg	pie	chin	nut	drum	press
go	shoe	dog	pan	flag	rest
hay	tie	fan	pig	frog	snake
hoe	toe	goat	rake	grape	spill
ice	two	hat	rug	help	tent
if	up	home	sun	hops	vans
in	us	kite	soap	jump	vest
is	zoo	leg	van	lamp	wigs

5. Adding Letter-Sounds to Form Words

Purpose: Manipulate letter-sounds to form new words

Tell children they can make new words by adding a sound to the beginning of a word they know. Say the word “an” and then model how to add /k/ to the front of *an*. Say the two parts with a brief pause between /k/ and /an/. Then say the new word, “can.” Then have children add sounds to form any of the words below. Say the short word and tell them the sound they should add to the beginning. Have them say the new word. Initially, you might have to help them blend the new letter-sound with the short word to figure out the new word. Challenge them to do the blending in their heads and say the new word. Define unfamiliar new words.

an: /f/ (*fan*), /m/ (*man*), /p/ (*pan*), /r/ (*ran*), /t/ (*tan*), /v/ (*van*)

and: /b/ (*band*), /h/ (*hand*), /l/ (*land*), /s/ (*sand*)

at: /b/ (*bat*), /k/ (*cat*), /f/ (*fat*), /h/ (*hat*), /m/ (*mat*), /p/ (*pat*), /r/ (*rat*), /s/ (*sat*)

am: /h/ (*ham*), /j/ (*jam*), /r/ (*ram*), /y/ (*yam*)

it: /b/ (*bit*), /f/ (*fit*), /h/ (*hit*), /k/ (*kit*), /l/ (*lit*), /p/ (*pit*), /s/ (*sit*)

in: /b/ (*bin*), /f/ (*fin*), /p/ (*pin*), /t/ (*tin*), /w/ (*win*)

ill: /b/ (*bill*), /d/ (*dill*), /f/ (*fill*), /g/ (*gill*), /h/ (*hill*), /p/ (*pill*), /w/ (*will*)

ate: /d/ (*date*), /g/ (*gate*), /h/ (*hate*), /l/ (*late*)

eat: /b/ (*beat*), /h/ (*heat*), /m/ (*meat*), /n/ (*neat*), /s/ (*seat*)

ear: /f/ (*fear*), /h/ (*hear*), /n/ (*near*), /r/ (*rear*), /t/ (*tear*), /y/ (*year*)

ice: /m/ (*mice*), /n/ (*nice*), /r/ (*rice*)

As children become more adept at manipulating sounds in words, have them add two or more consonant sounds to form new words, such as adding /st/ to *and* to make *stand*.

Variation Have children add onsets to rimes. (An *onset* is the letter or letters before the vowel in a one-syllable word, such as *b* in *back* or *bl* in *black*. The *rime* is the vowel and the rest of the word, such as *-ack* in *back* and *black*.) For example, ask children what word they would get if they added /b/ to the beginning of /ak/. (*back*) Then continue for other words in the word family, such as *sack*, *tack*, *rack*, *black*, *track*, *stack*. Here are high-frequency rimes that produce a lot of primary-grade words:

-ack	-ank	-est	-ink	-ot
-ail	-ap	-ick	-ip	-uck
-ain	-ash	-ide	-ock	-ug
-ake	-aw	-ight	-oke	-ump
-ale	-ay	-ine	-op	-unk
-ame	-ell	-ing	-ore	

Articulation Guide

These explanations will help you teach children how letter-sounds are made. Most don't need this instruction. For those who do, use the information in explicit, two- or three-minute discussions. Before instructing children, have them identify the parts of their body that help them talk (*lips, teeth, tongue, voice box, gums*), explaining any terms, if necessary. It also helps to give them small individual mirrors at the beginning of the year so they can see how the sounds are made. If children need more help, refer them to a speech/language pathologist.

Stop Sounds (cannot be held or stretched)

Stop sounds should be said precisely and crisply. Be sure you and the children in your class don't add "uh" to the end of a sound. For example, the sound /g/ should be said like the end of *big*, not "guh." You don't want children reading the words *big pig* to say "big-uh pig-uh."

Cc, Kk, ck/k/—This is a fast sound made at the back of the throat. Have children say /k/. Ask if their tongue touches their teeth when they make this sound. (*no*) Point out that the back of their tongue, not the tip, is high in their mouth when they say /k/. Explain that the back of their tongue acts like a wall that holds back the air. Their tongue makes a scraping sound when it lets the air pass. Ask if their lips move when making this sound. (*only a little*)

Gg/g/—This is a scraping sound made in the throat. Tell children that the back of their tongue is high and touches the top of their throat when they say /g/. Explain that air is stopped by the tongue at the back of the mouth and the air rushes out as the tongue is lowered. Have children place a hand on their throat to feel their vocal cords make this sound.

See also the Phoneme Pronunciation Guide for grades K–1 on the teacher portal at www.superkidsreading.com.

Jj/j/—This is a big air sound. Explain that air is pushed from their mouth when they make this sound. Tell children that their lips are fat when they say /j/. Let children use small mirrors to compare how they make the sounds /j/ and /s/. Point out that /j/ is a noisy sound. Have children put a hand on their throat to feel how their vocal cords move as they say it.

Pp/p/—This is a short sound. Tell children that when they say /p/, their lips start together and then pop open as a puff of air comes out. Have them put a hand in front of their mouth so they can feel the puff of air when they say /p/.

Tt/t/—This is another short sound. Tell children to pay attention to their tongue when they say /t/. Explain that the tip of their tongue should tap behind their upper teeth. Have children say /t/ again. Ask if their tongue hits their teeth. (*no*) Ask if they feel a lot of air coming out of their mouth when they say /t/. (*yes*) Have them try to say /t/ with closed lips. Point out that they cannot say /t/ with closed lips.

Dd/d/—Tell children that the sounds /d/ and /t/ are made the same way, except that when they say /d/, they use their vocal chords. Have them put a hand on their throat to feel their vocal cords vibrate when they say /d/. Encourage them to say /d/ and /t/ several times to compare how they make the two sounds. Point out that their mouth is slightly open and that air comes out of their mouth as they say /d/ and /t/. Explain that their tongue starts high in their mouth and then moves down as they make the sound /d/.

Bb/b/—This is a short sound. Have children put a hand on their throat to feel their vocal cords vibrate when they say /b/. Explain that when they make this sound, their lips start pressing together and then open as a puff of air comes out. Tell children to hold their hands over their ears as they say /p/ and /b/, so they can compare sounds. Ask which sound is louder. (/b/)

Qu, qu/kw/—Tell children the sound heard at the beginning of *queen* and *quit* blends the sounds for /k/ and /w/ together. Point out that when children say /kw/, their lips pucker, as if they are ready to give a kiss.

Continuous Sounds (can be held or stretched)

Lip Biters

Ff/f/—This sound is a lip biter. Tell children that the sound /f/ is made by lightly placing their upper teeth on their bottom lip and forcing out air. Explain that the air is pushed lightly and smoothly through the teeth. Point out that /f/ is a quiet sound.

Vv/v/—This is another lip biter. Tell children that they make the sound /v/ the same way they make the sound /f/, except they use their vocal cords when they say /v/. Tell children they can feel their bottom lip vibrate when they make the sound /v/.

Hissers and Buzzers

Ss/s/—This is a small sound. It is a hisser. Tell children that when they say /s/, the tip of their tongue does not touch their teeth and they are pushing air through partly closed teeth. Point out that the sides of their tongue are touching their teeth and that their teeth are slightly apart. Many children are unable to make this sound correctly until they are about eight years old.

Zz/z/—This sound is a buzzer. Tell children that they make the sounds /z/ and /s/ in the same way, except they use their vocal cords to say /z/. Point out that /z/ is noisier than /s/. Explain that when they say /z/, they push a small stream of air out of slightly closed teeth. Have children place a hand on their throat so they can feel their vocal cords vibrate when they make this sound. Like the sound /s/, /z/ is one of the last sounds children are able to make correctly.

Hummers

Mm/m/—This is a nose air sound. Tell children that when they make the sound /m/, they are pressing their lips together. Have them hold a hand under their nose when making this sound. Ask if they can feel air coming out of their nose when they say /m/. (yes) Have children hold their nose and try to say /m/ again. Point out that when they block their nose, they cannot make the sound. Let children look in a mirror to see how their lips are placed when they say /m/. (They're together.) Ask where their tongue is in their mouth when they say /m/. (It is lifted or floating.) Point out that the tongue does not help make this sound and that they can wiggle their tongue while they say /m/.

Nn/n/—This is also a nose air sound. Tell children that the sound /n/ is made by pressing their tongue above the inside of their upper teeth. Have them hold a hand under their nose when they make this sound. Ask if they can feel air coming out their nose when they say /n/. (yes) Have children hold their nose and try to say /n/ again. Point out that when they plug their nose, they cannot make the sound. Let children look in a mirror to see how their lips are placed when they say /n/. (They are apart.) Encourage them to notice how they hold their tongue differently when making the sounds /m/ and /n/. Explain that they need to use their tongue when they say /n/.

Ll/l/—Tell children that when they make the sound /l/, they press the tip of their tongue above the top of their upper teeth and use their vocal cords. Have children put a hand to their throat so they can feel their vocal chords vibrate as they say /l/. Let children look in a mirror to see how their tongue lifts when they make the sound. Some children will not be able to make this sound correctly until they are about eight years old.

Rr/r/—Tell children when they say /r/, they make their lips round and use their vocal cords to make a growling sound. Point out that their tongue is pulled back and the tip of their tongue is lifted from the bottom of their mouth. Let children use a mirror to see their lips are rounded when they say /r/. When their mouths are in the correct position to make the sound, ask them to breathe in. They should feel cool air under the tip of their tongue. Some children won't be able to make this sound correctly until they are about eight years old.

Softies

Ww/w/—This is a soft, windy sound. Tell children when they say /w/, their lips are rounded, almost like they are ready to give a kiss. Point out that their teeth should be slightly apart. Have children hold a hand in front of their mouth to feel the air softly coming out as they make the sound.

Hh/h/—This is a soft, windy breath sound. Tell children that when they say /h/, their mouth is open and their tongue is low in their mouth, allowing air from the lungs to pass. Have children put a hand in front of their mouth so they can feel the air come out as they say /h/. Point out that they should hear only a breath sound.

Yy/y/—Tell children that when they say /y/, their teeth are slightly apart and the sides of their tongue are against their teeth.

Singers (short vowels)

The sounds for the short vowels (*a, e, i, o, u*) are difficult to distinguish from one another. These sounds are made in the throat with the mouth open and the tongue in the same place.

Aa/a/—Tell children this sound is made with the mouth open. Point out that the corners of the mouth pull up slightly. Let children use a small mirror to see that when they say /a/, it almost looks like they are smiling.

Ee/e/—Tell children this sound is made like the sound /a/ without pulling up the corners of the mouth. The corners of their mouth should be relaxed.

Ii/i/—Tell children this sound is made with the mouth only slightly open.

Oo/o/—Tell children this sound is made with the mouth wide open, like an *O*.

Uu/u/—Tell children when they make the sound /u/, their mouth should be closed more than when they make the sound /o/ or /a/. Point out that the corners of their mouth should be relaxed.

Consonant digraphs

sh/sh/—Tell children /sh/ is the sound they make when they want someone to be quiet. Point out that when they say /sh/, their lips are rounded and pursed. Explain that the mouth is only slightly open and the sides of the tongue are between the teeth. When they say /sh/, their mouth is open wider than when they say /s/.

ch, tch/ch/—Tell children this sound is made by rounding the lips and pushing out a puff of air. Explain that their tongue blocks the air and then releases it to make the /ch/ sound. Point out that it is not possible to make this sound without moving the tongue. This sound is similar to /j/, except the vocal cords are used when saying /j/.

th/th/—Tell children to stick their tongue lightly between their teeth and breathe out. Point out that when they say /th/, their tongue is flat. Explain there are two sounds for *th*—the voiceless sound, as in *with*, and the voiced sound, as in *the*. When they say *with*, /th/ is quiet. When they say *the*, the sound is louder because they use their vocal cords. Many children will not be able to make this sound correctly until they are about eight years old.

Other

Xx/ks/—Introduce this sound as a final sound, because that is the position in which it usually occurs. Tell children this sound is made of the two sounds /k/ and /s/ blended together.