

PHONEMIC AWARENESS

In this chapter, I'll share: 1) why phonemic awareness is important, 2) many fun ways you can help your children build their awareness of phonemes, and 3) how these skills will impact reading and spelling success.

I want you to know that demonstrating an awareness of sounds in words can be a little tricky. If you find that you're not quite hearing all of the sounds in words, don't be concerned. Phonemic awareness is not necessarily a prerequisite for learning to read and spell, but it is a very strong predictor of reading and writing achievement.

The English language is code-based. For us, that simply means that we have symbols (alphabet letters) that represent sounds (phonemes). We won't be addressing letter names, in these first lessons. We're just going to think about and *play with* sounds in words. Understand that when students can hear, repeat, and manipulate sounds in words, they are setting up for reading and spelling success and thereby strong academic achievement.

As you begin to heighten your children's awareness of sounds in words, through playful, foundation-building interactions, your soon-to-be-readers will be better equipped to connect those sounds with letters. That's what we call phonics. Again, since we're focusing on the sounds, without addressing letter names, we're presently working on building phonemic awareness.

I will be providing several different Building Block activities, that will equip your children to become successful readers, and YOU will be in the front seat to watch the magic. I would love for you to do all of the Building Block activities for each lesson, over a couple of days to a week or more. Each activity in this section will serve to promote phonemic awareness. Each of the *Building Blocks* will help to build a solid foundation for literacy.

Here are some suggestions for success across every lesson:

- Schedule your Building Block activity time when your children will receive it best. Make it a date! (Asking kids to come in from playing with friends or to turn off the video game to "get this stuff done" isn't inspiring.)
- Smile a lot. Laugh. Give words of encouragement, but keep it real. (Kids know when we're faking!)
- Avoid saying, "You're so smart." If children hear these words when they do something well, they may be less inclined to take risks the next time because they don't want to lose their "smart" status.
- Avoid saying, "No." If your children do something incorrectly, recognize that you understand why they thought that (if it's true), then provide the correct response, and give a quick tip so they can get it the next time. (Ask someone to watch you to be sure you're not furrowing your brow or shaking your head – no – when you're working with your children. Sometimes we don't even know that our very demeanor appears negative.)
- If your children don't *get it*, spend some time modeling correct responses. Remember, we're teaching not quizzing.
- Continually monitor your children's levels of engagement. Quit *before* they lose interest. Leave them eager to begin again the next time. Do not set a timer or make bribes. This time should feel like it is the reward. It should not require one.
- You may, certainly, repeat lessons if additional practice is needed. Keep coming back to the tricky ones.
- Share your successes! Have your children show off their new skills with others. Genuine praise is pure glory!

BUILDING BLOCK #1: Rhyming Words

One fun way to build your children's phonemic awareness is to read books with strong rhyming patterns. Words that rhyme are words that have the same sounds from the final vowel (a, e, i, o, and u), on. Actually, those are considered *perfect* rhymes. If you listen to music in most any genre, you recognize that many lyricists also use *imperfect* rhymes, where the words are "close" to rhyming, but the sounds aren't exactly the same.

In this lesson, we're going to think about, *perfect* rhymes.

There are lots of games for you to play throughout the upcoming days to promote your children's sense of rhyme. I suggest that you read at least one rhyming book a day.

Also, Dr. Seuss (and others) uses crazy, made-up words to make rhymes, and you can, too! We don't want all of the words to be nonsense words, but certainly some of them can be. It's fun!

Make it your diligent aim to engage in one of these Building Block Activities, each day:

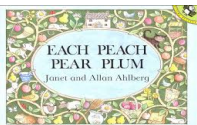
BUILDING BLOCK #1a: Fill in the correct Rhyming Words

To begin, read a book with a strong rhyming pattern. You may wish to choose one of these:

[Bear Wants More](#)



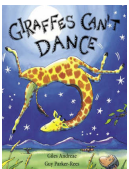
[Each Peach Pear Plum](#)



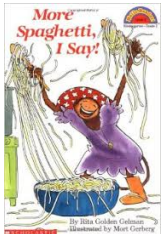
[Little Blue Truck](#)



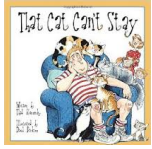
[Giraffes Can't Dance](#)



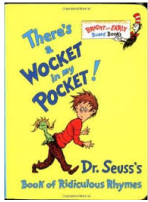
[More Spaghetti I Say](#)



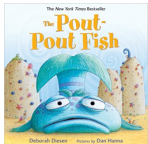
That Cat Can't Stay



There's a Wocket in My Pocket



The Pout Pout Fish



Get started reading and enjoying many books' rhythm and rhyme. Stop, on occasion, to see if your children can fill in the second word that completes the rhyme that you strategically omit. For example, in the Little Blue Truck by Alice Schertle, you might say,

“Neigh,” said the horse.
 “Quack,” said the duck.
 “Beep,” said the friend-ly
 little blue tr_____.

You do want to include all of the sounds before the final vowel, as I've demonstrated with tr_____. Our kids only need to fill in the ending part of the rhyme. Otherwise, it's a guessing game. We definitely want our kids to *know* the missing ending sound. We don't want them to *guess* what rhyming word it *could* be.

For further practice of this type-
 Sing:

“I'm a little tea pot
 short and stout.
 Here is my handle,
 here is my sp_____.”

or, you could sing, *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, but instead of singing all of the words, you could say,

“... Up above the world so high,
 Like a diamond in the sk_____.”

Can your children fill in the correct word endings? If they can, that can indicate that they have a good sense of rhyme.

BUILDING BLOCK #1b: Recognizing the Rhyming Words

Here's a movement activity that my students love. I ask them to stand up and to march in place as I say lots of rhyming words, keeping the marching beat. You might say a word, for example, on each right-footed step. Then, when the kids hear a word that does NOT rhyme with the others, they are to plop down on the floor right away. I might begin like this:

rub, tub, stub, flub, club, sub, dub, cub, rub, chub, feather, grub, hub . . .

Hopefully, the kids plop down when they hear *feather*. If they don't, read the words again, and YOU plop down. Explain that the word *feather* doesn't sound like the other words. All of the words end with /ub/, but the word feather has a *different* ending. Tell them that they, too, are to listen for words that don't follow the rhyming pattern, and that when they hear a word that doesn't have an ending sound like the others, they should plop down.

You will be reminded, below, that we cannot depend on spellings to determine whether words rhyme. Though your children won't *see* the words as they're playing this game with you, you can make note of this fact with your kids, today or another day. By the way, we will have explicit lessons teaching the varied ways to spell sounds in upcoming lessons. (Don't worry. It'll be fun!)

Remember to say these words fairly slowly and to speak very clearly.

Here are some lists of rhyming words along with one non-rhyming word to use as you play the marching game:

rot, bought, caught, tot, lot, thought, not, dot, spot, fought, camera, pot, got . . .

hip, sip, trip, flip, ship, rip, drip, snip, grip, lip, rooster, slip, zip. . .

week, peek, freak, bleak, flipping, beak, sneak. . .

lend, bend, tend, mend, pool, send, blend . . .

start, chart, dart, cart, smart, game, tart, art . . .

blue, chew, glue, new, stew, shoe, boo, crew, do, goo, who, clue, dog, through, true . . .

bat, cat, that, spat, mat, chat, horse, sat, flat . . .

cab, flab, tab, paper, slab, grab. . .

core, snore, door, store, more, chore, oar, pour, shore, adore, four, ignore, man, roar, war. . .

sock, chalk, dock, flock, mock, talk, shock, man, crock, block. . .

car, star, bar, wind, far, jar

ice, mice, twice, dice, nice, dirt, rice, vice. . .

goat, float, boat, smote, note, wrote, coat, vote, moat, gloat, throat, kind, bloat, tote. . .

trees, fleas, bees, knees, wheeze, please, glove, he's, seize

sun, done, nun, stun, won, pun, ton, shun, gun, fun, whack, bun, run. . .

bit, knit, fit, smile, hit, split. . .

BUILDING BLOCK #1c: Do These Words Rhyme?

Ask: "Do these words rhyme?"

Say a word (e.g. shot), and then, another word (e.g. caught).

Your children respond saying either yes or no.

If they respond incorrectly, repeat the words landing on the final sounds a little harder. Make the final sounds in both words and say, "Yes, they *do* rhyme. I can tell because..." or "They *don't* rhyme. I can tell because... Now, you try the next one. Listen carefully to the ending sounds in each word."

Below is a word list, for your convenience. For non-rhyming words, simply mix two non-paired words like *had* and *egg*.

Word List:

had-bad	hope-nope	feet-sweet	show-snow	toy-joy
egg-leg	cute-suit	high-try	horse, course	pal-Hal
slip-trip	map-flap	go-snow	claw-straw	small-tall
shop-plop	head, red	true-flew	fur-stir	hug-tug
sun-won	bin, chin	hook-book	sing-thing	win-thin
day-stay	hot-shot	snoop-goop	wink-pink	slush-hush
flea-tree	sun-fun	cart-smart	mall-hall	cloud-plowed
wise-guys	stay-tray	how-now	pal-shall	mower-slower

BUILDING BLOCK #1d: Fill in the Blank With a Rhyming Word

- Finish this rhyme. red/bed- blue/(e.g. glue)

In this game, you say two rhyming words to offer some support, and then you say another word (that's easily matched for rhyming) and encourage your children to fill in any rhyming word.

- clap, clap (clap hands together) snow - slap, slap (slap hands on legs) grow

This game has some action, so it may be more engaging. Also, the more senses we involve the more likely it is to stick with our kids. Clap your hands together twice, and say a word. Then slap your hands on your legs, twice, and have your children fill in a rhyming word. Try to keep it going without breaking the beat! It might help to have a list of easy rhyming words, nearby. I have provided one below. Don't worry. I'm not trying to insult your *mad* rhyming skills! I can tell you, from experience, that sometimes it's difficult to think of words on the fly.

Of course, your kids will not have to name the provided rhyming words. Any rhyming words will do.

fly-try	band-stand	whip-sip	nickel-pickle	hot-pot
trick-stick	star-car	tie-buy	ball-tall	win-tin
shape-cape	gym-him	blue-shoe	truck-stuck	light-right
hop-flop	jet-net	grow-no	fan-man	take-cake
might-white	rough-tough	place-face	egg-leg	seat-wheat
black-track	good-would	sock-clock	sip-tip	tug-bug
fellow-Jello	best-rest	neck-deck	food-rude	time-slime
hat-cat	bow-cow	shirt-dirt	boy-toy	tea-bee

- What rhymes with miss and starts with /k/? Miss-k(iss).

This game is a fun one, too. You want to try to keep it going— to keep a steady beat. Again, that rhyming word list above will be helpful. Of course, you can certainly make up your own.

You simply say the first word, then you make the first sound of the second word, and the kids fill in the rime (That's how it's spelled.), or the part of the word that makes it rhyme with the first word you said.

e.g. You say: What rhymes with *fly* and starts with *tr*? (That *tr* is called the onset. It's the part of the word that comes before the rime, which is the rhyming part of the word.) The child says *try*.

My friend's daughter *still* talks about her mom posing this one:

What rhymes with art and starts with /f/?

Whatever it takes to captivate your child, right? ☺

- (action) if these words rhyme.

For the next game, you simply name an action, “(e.g. Smile) if these words rhyme. (e.g. love/glove)

My students love this one! You can think of your own actions, depending on where you are. If you're outside, you could come up with many other things to do! If you are doing this at home, your child could even be in the bathtub! (e.g. If these words rhyme, wash your toes!)

Action Ideas- smile, wink, high five, tap your head, jump, blow a kiss, touch your toes, rub your belly, clap one time, clap two times, wave, give a thumbs up, stand on one leg, wiggle your nose, snort like a pig, spin in a circle, etc. (You may use the word list from lessons 1c &/or 1d.)

BUILDING BLOCK #1e: Rhyming Word Videos

If you search for videos on the web that feature rhyming words, may I suggest that you choose those that do not show the word spellings and that do provide the correct definition of rhymes? The top video in my most recent Google search was not one I would recommend so don't lean on popularity to make your choices. But, I liked the second one. It provided an accurate definition of rhymes, it focused only on the sounds- not the spellings, and it was not terribly annoying. That sure helps!

[Rhyming Word Video on YouTube](#) Try this one!

I hope you'll enjoy playing with words along side your soon-to-be readers. Remember, as you play these games together, you are adding building blocks to your children's literacy foundations.

Now, we've spent a lot of time learning about rhyming words. It's time to move on to another foundational skill. Remember to keep coming back, as needed or desired, to practice rhyming words.

BUILDING BLOCK #2: Words Beginning With the Same Sounds & Words Ending With the Same Sounds

Remember, the English language is a code-based language. For us, that simply means that we have symbols, or letters, that represent sounds, or phonemes. Now, we're just going to focus on and play with beginning and ending sounds in words (not, necessarily, including the vowel). As you work to heighten your children's awareness of beginning and ending sounds through playful, foundation-building interactions, your soon-to-be-readers will become better equipped to connect those sounds with letters. That's phonics. Today, we're focusing on sounds without addressing letter names. In other words, we're continuing our work on building phonemic awareness.

BUILDING BLOCK #2a- Listening to Beginning Sounds in Words

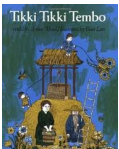
For this lesson, you may wish to have some flavored lip balm, a handheld mirror, and a tissue. It sounds crazy, maybe, but you'll soon see why . . .

Today, we are working to heighten kids' awareness of sounds and what our mouths are actually *doing* when we produce those sounds. Often, I use my pointer fingers, pointing to my mouth, to draw attention to the sound I want kids to hear. There are quite a few letters and letter combinations that sound similar, and we want to help our kids *distinguish* those sounds. Recognizing what our mouths are doing as we make sounds can be helpful in distinguishing letter sounds and even in promoting accurate speech, which absolutely can impact spelling skills. (e.g. twuck vs truck)

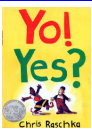
As I will often do, I encourage you to find a book to kick off this lesson featuring alliteration, or words that begin with the same sounds. If you already have some, wonderful! If not, here are some that you can pick up at your library or local bookstore, or you can order them online. Note that these book titles are directly linked to Amazon.com for your convenience.

Here are some suggestions:

[Tikki Tikki Tembo](#)



[Yo! Yes?](#)



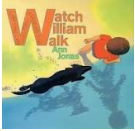
[Click, Clack, Quackity-Quack](#)



[Six Sick Sheep](#)



[Watch William Walk](#)



As you're reading these books or others like them, stop on occasion and ask, "What words, in this sentence (or on these pages), begin with the same sounds?" Read the sentence(s) to the children. Do not have them look at the pages. We don't want them to rely on finding the same beginning letters on the pages. That is an unreliable approach. We want our kids to hear the sounds, to notice when sounds are the same, and to notice when they differ. After the lesson, you can show the kids the words that have different beginnings (like *Hey!* and *Who?* in *Yo! Yes?*) and teach them that some sounds are spelled in a variety of ways, so we cannot rely, solely, on the first letter to determine whether words begin with the same sounds.

BUILDING BLOCK #2b- What is My/Your Mouth Doing?

Materials you may choose to use:

Lip balm

Hand mirror

Tissue

To play the first game, point one pointer finger to your mouth when you make the first sound of a word. Move it away from your mouth as you make the rest of the sounds in the word. Then, point the other pointer finger to your mouth when you make the first sound of another word, and move it away from your mouth as you make the rest of the sounds. You just want to highlight what your mouth is doing at the beginnings of both words, so your children can more readily note the similarities or differences as you produce the sounds.

I do this, in the beginning, because sometimes kids don't quite *get* what I mean when I say, "What sound comes at the beginning of the word." It may be a little abstract for young ones, at first.

You can ask, "What were my lips doing at the beginning of the first word? What were they doing at the beginning of the second word? Are they the same sounds, or are they different sounds? (By the way, it is possible that your lips look like they're doing the same things, but the sound produced is different. Think about /p/ & /b/, /t/ & /d/, /k/ & /g/, /f/ & /v/, and /s/ & /z/. Did you realize that?) We'll avoid having our kids relying on what our mouths are doing with these sounds.

There are some really tricky words with beginning sounds that may require the use of a tissue. For example, when we say *ship* and *chip*, our mouths are doing nearly the same things for the beginning sounds. The primary difference is the way the air is pushed *through* our mouths. You may use a tissue, held in front of your mouth, to demonstrate the difference. Another example where a tissue may be necessary is with the words *thin* and *that*. They do begin with exactly the same letters, but they make slightly different sounds. I refer to the two sounds for t-h as either a *puff* (as in *thin*) because we're puffing air out, or a *buzz* (as in *that*) because the teeth are buzzing on our tongues.

As you're working together through the activities below, you may notice that some children have some speech considerations. For example, the words *finger* and *think* do not have the same beginning sounds, but, many

young learners say *think* like this: /fink/. Many kids confuse those sounds. If one of your children does this, be matter-of-fact about it. No drama. Explain that you could practice saying the sound correctly, if you'd both like to. Then, let it go. Move on. Remember to avoid saying, "No." Instead, try saying, "That's the tricky one. We'll get it. Remember, (e.g. /th/) this is the one where you stick out your tongue. I think *you* put your teeth on your bottom lip. Watch me. Do you see my tongue? That's what we do when we make the /th/ (puff) or /th/ (buzz) sounds." Invite your learners to use a hand mirror to observe their own mouths as they produce sounds.

I tell my students that sticking out our tongues is NOT ALLOWED (stern face), *UNLESS* we're making a puff or buzz sound (for t-h words). ☺

Words beginning with an /l/ as in *like* and a /y/ as in *yawn* actually have very similar mouth formations, but the tongue is doing something different. If needed, TALK about what your mouths are doing. It sounds crazy, but you can help your children move forward by risking a little CrAzY.

BUILDING BLOCK #2c- Do These Words Begin With the Same Sounds?

Now, to play the first game ask:

Do these words begin with the same sounds?

Have your children say the words before they tell you if they have the same beginning sounds or not. Again, you may encourage them to use a hand mirror to enhance the talk about what your mouths are doing as you produce the initial or beginning sounds.

Ask:

Do these words begin with the same sounds?

win & whisker	(yes, /w/)	(mouth looks like a smooch)
bowl & blocks	(yes, /b/)	(lips closed and puff air between lips)
diaper & love	(no, /d/ & /l/)	(puff air between tongue and roof of mouth & no puff)
night & pie	(no, /n/ & /p/)	(tip of tongue in front on roof of mouth & puff closed lips)
cats & kite	(yes, /k/)	(back of tongue on roof of mouth, mouth open)
ship & chuck	(no, /sh/ & /ch/)	(tissue test- sh puffs tissue out, ch puffs air downward)
zap & zoo	(yes, /z/)	(squeeze air out with tongue on top, behind teeth)
finger & think	(no, /f/ & /th/)	(top teeth on lower lip & top teeth on tongue, both puffing air)
gingerbread & jump	(yes, /j/)	(lips open, teeth closed, quick puff of air out)
wrist & right	(yes, /r/)	(lips and teeth slightly apart, air in throat)
gone & him	(no, /g/ & /h/)	(quick air puff in throat with tongue in back & open air throat)
monster & mug	(yes, /m/)	(lips closed, nose buzzes and makes sound)
wrong & rug	(yes, /r/)	(looks like smooch & lips and teeth slightly apart, air in throat)
slug & touch	(no, /s/ & /t/)	(tongue behind teeth & puff air between tongue and roof of mouth)
like & yawn	(no, /v/ & /y/)	(tongue on roof of mouth & tongue down with chin dropping)

BUILDING BLOCK #2d- Comparing Ending Sounds in Words

To play the next game, cover your mouth with one flat hand. Move it down and away from your mouth as you make the last sound in the first word. Then, cover your mouth with the other hand. Move it away to reveal your

mouth as you make the last sound in the second word. You just want to highlight what your mouth is doing at the *ends* of both words, so you're highlighting the similarities or differences in the final sounds.

You can even ask, "What were my lips doing at the end of the first word? What were they doing at the end of the second word? Are they the same sounds, or are they different sounds at the ends of these two words?"

You don't have to keep your hands going throughout the entire game. Try *not* using them, and see if your kids can *still* differentiate the sounds.

Ask:

Do these words end with the same sounds?

ax & sauce (yes, /s/)
dad & read (yes, /d/)
purple & slurp (no, /l/ & /p/)
pot & strut (yes, /t/)
paper & run (no, /r/ & /n/)
type & hop (yes, /p/)
dog & dot (no, /g/ & /t/)
slam & math (no, /m/ & /th/)
crunch & pitch (yes, /ch/)
scab & poke (no, /b/ & /k/)
hum & stream (yes, /m/)
hello & no (yes, /o/)
frog & hug (yes, /g/)

blue & tutu (yes, /oo/)
stop & drum (no, /p/ & /m/)
coffee & me (yes, /ee/)
love & drive (yes, /v/)
terrific & block (yes, /k/)
chair & carpet (no, /r/ & /t/)
bunny & we (yes, /ee/)
van & ocean (yes, /n/)
crib & bathtub (yes, /b/)
tough & fat (no, /f/ & /t/)
pumpkin & ran (yes, /n/)
cool & temple (yes, /l/)
pause & fizz (yes, /z/)

BUILDING BLOCK #3: Listening Closely to Spoken Words (focus)


As we work with kids on phonemic awareness, it's important to recognize just how much concentration is required of your children. We need kids to hear the sounds in words, but we also need to teach them to really *tune* in with laser focus. Today, strive to engage fully with your children so that the hard work is genuinely rewarding for everyone involved. Giggle, hug, and have some fun. The first game is always a hit with my young scholars, so I believe it will be a great way to begin your time together.


BUILDING BLOCK #3a- Listen Well and Catch My Mistake.

Following, you'll find some common songs, refrains, or items in categories, and your children will try to figure out what doesn't belong. In my classes, when I tried to fit all of these phonemic awareness lessons into one hour (Oh my . . .), I saved this one for when the kids were getting worn out. It always got their waning attention right back on track. Today, you'll be *beginning* with the fun! See if your children can listen closely and identify what doesn't belong with the others. Also, and this is important, have them explain what's wrong with the imposter. Why doesn't "shoe" fit in with A-B-C-D-E-F-shoe-H-I-J-K . . .? We really want kids to be able to justify their responses. It's a fun and effective way to stretch kids and to encourage deeper thinking.

Additionally, do not feel you have to do all of these in one sitting. Sprinkle them throughout the day or over a couple of days. Do them in the bathtub, on the swing set, while climbing a tree, or riding in the car. Find anyplace that will add to the fun but will promote focused energy for short stretches of time.

Say or sing the following phrases with a somewhat slower pace than normal speech. Don't be boring, but be deliberately clear. Enunciate your speech just a bit more than usual

Say or  sing the following:

 A-B-C-D-E-F-shoe-H-I-J-K . . .


(Justification example- Shoe isn't a letter of the alphabet. It's a thing you wear on your foot.)

red, green, blue, yellow, black, motorcycle, pink, . . .

(Justification example- Motorcycle isn't a color. It's a vehicle.)

June, September, July, October, May, hotdog, January . . .

(Justification example- Hotdog isn't a month. It's a food.)

 Happy birthday to you. Happy foxday to you . . .


(Justification example- It should say, Happy *birthday* to you. Foxday isn't a word.)

Jack and Jill went up the pickle to fetch a pail of water . . .

(Justification example- The poem says, Jack and Jill went up the *hill*. They can't go up a pickle.)

1, 2, 3, 4, flower, 6, 7, 8 . . .


(Justification example- Flower isn't a number. It's a plant.)

 Twinkle, twinkle little boat. How I wonder . . .

(Justification example- The song says, . . . little star.)

square, circle, triangle, diamond, shark, rectangle . . .

(Justification example- A shark isn't a shape. It's an animal.)

 Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle chair the way . . .

(Justification example- The song says, Jingle all the way.)

car, truck, motorcycle, van, popsicle, go cart . . .

(Justification example- Popsicle isn't a vehicle. It's a treat.)

puppy, kitten, hamster, goldfish, bread, parrot . . .

(Justification example- Bread isn't a pet. It's a food.)

football, soccer, basketball, baseball, princess, hockey . . .

(Justification example- Princess isn't a sport. It's a person of royalty.) –Yeah. Like a kid would say that. ☺

 Old MacDonald sneezed a farm, e-i-e-i-o . . .

(Justification example- The song says, "Old MacDonald had a farm.)

M&Ms, Reese's Cups, Skittles, spinach, Hershey bars . . .

(Justification example- Spinach isn't a candy. It's a vegetable.)

run, dance, play, swing, potato chips, sing . . .

(Justification example- Potato chips are a snack. We can't potato chips.)

grass, frogs, alligators, lettuce, root beer, broccoli . . . (*Tricky!*)

(Justification example- Root beer isn't green. It's brown.)

brother, grandma, cousin, dad, sister, rollercoaster, mom . . .

(Justification example- Rollercoasters aren't people in our families. They are rides.)

mittens, boots, coats, scarves, ear muffs, pizza, gloves

(Justification example- Pizza is not something we wear in the cold. It's food.)

♪ The itsy bitsy spider went up the waterspout. Down came the bubblegum and washed the spider out.

(Justification example- The song says, "Down came the rain and washed the spider out.")

eagle, goose, owl, duck, hawk, watermelon, woodpecker, robin

(Justification example- Watermelon is not a bird. It's a fruit.)

BUILDING BLOCK #3b- Listen For and Follow Directions in Songs

Here's one more idea to reinforce good listening.

Turn on some music videos, and have kids listen to the lyrics and follow the directions in the songs. Here are some suggestions for you:

Dan Zane's [All Around the Kitchen on YouTube](#)

[The Hokey Pokey](#)

(To differentiate the left and right hands, draw with a washable marker, or place two strips of tape, to make an uppercase L on the left hand with the pointer finger and the thumb sticking out. Or, if your students write with their right hands, have them hold a crayon in that hand to remember that their *write* hands are their *right* hands.)



[Hokey Pokey Song on YouTube](#)

Following Directions With Exercise, by Mark D. Pencil

[Follow Directions with Exercise on YouTube](#)

Move and Freeze, Kids Songs by The Learning Station

[Move and Freeze on YouTube](#)

BUILDING BLOCK #4- Sliding Sounds Together to Make Words

We will slowly *s-t-r-e-t-c-h o-u-t* words, sound by sound, while stretching a Slinky-type toy or another stretchy

item. The children are challenged to slide the sounds back together more quickly, and to recognize each word they say.

To be clear, you will verbally stretch out the word, while stretching something stretchy between your hands. The kids will be stretching their own items with you, while facing you. Then they will quickly slide those sounds (as well as the stretchy tool you're using) back together, saying the word as one would normally say it.

Note: This practice can help kids *hold* sounds in their working memories, which is an important skill in learning to read.

BUILDING BLOCK #4a- I Say it Slowly, You Say it Quickly

Word Lists for Stretching

Words With Two Sounds:

You Stretch and Say:

Slide the Sounds Together & say:

/u-p/	up
/e-g/	egg
/m-e/	me
/sh-oo/	shoe
/a-z/	as
/i-f/	if
/w-e/	we
/u-s/	us
/o-ff/	off
/a-t/	at

Words With Three Sounds:

/l-u-v/	love
/c-a-t/	cat
/h-u-g/	hug
/sh-r-t/	shirt
/k-i-ss/	kiss
/sh-i-p/	ship
/n-e-ck/	neck
/ch-o-p/	chop
/b-a-th/	bath
/f-ee-d/	feed

Words With Four Sounds:

/t-r-u-ck/	truck
/s-o-f-t /	soft
/t-ur-t-l/	turtle
/t-a-f-ee/	taffy
/p-u-p-ee/	puppy
/t-i-ck-l/	tickle

/s-u-ck-er/	sucker
/p-l-u-g/	plug
/s-w-i-m/	swim
/b-e-ll-y/	belly

Words With Five Sounds:

/r-a-bb-i-t/	rabbit
/c-r-u-mb-s/	crumbs
/c-a-n-d-ee/	candy
/s-p-e-n-d/	spend
/d-a-n-s-r/	dancer
/d-i-sh-e-z/	dishes
/S-a-n-t-uh/	Santa
/b-l-o-ck-s/	blocks
/k-i-tt-e-n/	kitten
/s-t-i-ck-er/	sticker

NOTE-

We won't need to go beyond words with four and five sounds, because eventually students will spell, making the sounds for each **syllable** in words. For example, when spelling the word *caterpillar*, the kids will first say the word, dividing it into syllables. They'll say and spell cat, then they'll say and spell er, then they'll say and spell pil, and finally they'll say and spell lar. (We'll teach them, eventually, that **every syllable has a vowel**, so even when the vowel is being *bossed* by an r (we don't hear the vowel), the kids will know that there is a vowel there.)

To differentiate *syllables* (groups of sounds, each containing one vowel sound) from *phonemes* (individual sounds), we will be teaching kids to **clap** for each syllable (which is bigger), rather than **tap**, as we do when **making each individual sound, or phoneme (which is smaller)**.

As I share each phonics rule (of thumb), beginning in chapter two, you will come to understand that those rules actually apply to each **syllable**, not just whole words. Remember, syllables always contain a vowel sound and often, a consonant precedes or follows the vowel sound. (There are the rare exceptions including "words" that are actually just sounds that convey meaning. Think: Sh! or Psst.)

Some syllables can consist of only a vowel sound. Think of the word **open**. Say it like this: o – pen (two claps). Notice that the *o* stands alone. It's *open*, as a syllable. Notice, too, that *pen* makes up the second and final syllable. The *e* makes a short sound because it is enclosed within two consonants. If we divided it like this: op – en, the word would be pronounced differently. Explain that **most of the time, when we have really short words (and syllables) that have vowels at the ends, the vowels say their names**. We call those open vowels.

Open vowel word examples: A, be, he, me, she, the*, we, hi, I, go, no, so

Now think of the word **di-no-saur**. Kids will be better equipped to spell this word when they know the rule about open vowels. The word couldn't be divided like this: din-os-aur because the d-i-n would say /din/, and the o-s would say /os/. Make sense?

I have an easy way to teach this coming up. I call it **Any Vowel Can Jump. (It doesn't always, but it can.)** For example, in the word *open*, think about the magic e jumping over the p to make the o say its name. In the word *dinosaur*, think about the o jumping over the n to make the i say its name and the letter a jumping over the

s to make the i say its name. It's not a hard-fast rule, but it works a LOT of the time, and it's easy for kids to understand once they learn about the magic e.

Don't worry. I'll share more about that, soon.

As you practice **I Say It Slowly, You Say It Quickly**, remember that this skill is important because we are going to teach your children to decode words. When kids decode, they observe the letters, make the sounds those letters represent, one-by-one, across the words, from left to right. Then they quickly slide the sounds together to determine what word is written.

Soon, when our children see, for example, the word *log*, we will direct them to place a pointer finger under the first letter of the word, make the associated sound, /l/, then move to the next letter, produce that sound, /o/, and move on to the final letter and make *that* sound, /g/. We need the children to be able to *hold those sounds* in their minds and to recognize, when they slide the sounds together, that those sounds make a word they know. This game, *I Say it Slowly-You Say it Quickly* is a fantastic way to get kids ready to decode words.

If your children struggle with this practice, just keep at it, for only a few minutes each time, throughout the day. To build energy, praise -in big ways- every approximation. Remember to say things like, "You almost got it!" rather than "No. That's not right." Remember to smile, be encouraging about what your kids are doing well, and make it fun. Avoid even shaking your head "No". Resist becoming frustrated and frowning your brow.

Also, avoid saying things like, "You're so smart!" (Which might imply that we are smart when we get it right and, therefore, dumb, when we don't. This kind of thinking can discourage risk-taking. Our aim is to encourage kids to take chances with their thinking. Right does not equal smart. Working hard, even when we're wrong a lot, leads to growth.)

Remind yourself of when these young children began walking. We encouraged everything even close to the right moves. It's the same with these reading and spelling skills. Smiles, encouraging voices, genuine praises . . . Those are the things that keep kids working at it.

By the way, this IS work. We don't refrain from calling it work. Anything worth doing usually entails at least *some* work. What we need to do is to make it so kids don't *mind* the work so much, because it's just so darn rewarding to grow! `

Again, it's okay that this is not easy. (And resist saying that this *is* easy.) Genuine satisfaction comes from doing work that's hard and, finally, though it began as a struggle, succeeding. *Please note that it is equally troubling when we say that things are very hard and they are not difficult at all.

Again, you must constantly remind kids of the many ways they are continually *improving*!

Focus on words with two to three sounds until the kids gain some skill and confidence. Take a break when words get a bit challenging. Then, after the kids have moved on to more challenging words, say, "Remember when this was difficult work? Now you can recognize words with four sounds! Whoa. That's incredible. Your hard work is really paying off!"

Next, I'll be sharing some ways for you to encourage your children to *really tune-in* to the sounds they hear in spoken words.

BUILDING BLOCK #5- Elision of Sounds in Words

When children are able to manipulate sounds in words they are better equipped to read and spell well. In the next couple of lessons, we'll take off the first sound and determine what word remains, and then we'll take off the final sound and determine what word remains. Again, children will practice holding sounds in their working memories. These exercises help to prepare your children to become readers.

BUILDING BLOCK #5a- What Would it Say if We Got Rid of the Initial (or first) Sound?

In this game, you are going to stretch some words out again, but THIS time, you're going to challenge your kids to figure out what the word would be if we eliminate the initial, or first, sound.

Like we did in an earlier game, it may help if you use your hand to cover your mouth when you're making the first sounds in these words.

Ask:

What part of your body is in the word *farm*, without the first sound? (arm)

What do you have two of that is in the word *tears*, without the first sound? (ears)

What do you do at dinnertime that is in the word *feet*, without the first sound? (eat)

What might you eat for breakfast that is in the word *legs*, without the first sound? (eggs)

What color is in the word *bread*, without the first sound? (red)

What did I do with the ball that comes from the name *Scott*, without the first sound? (caught)

What do I do when I'm in a hurry that comes from the word *brush*, without the first sound? (rush)

What do we breathe that comes from the word *care*, without the first sound? (air)

What do you see with that comes from the word *shy*, without the first sound? (eye)

With whom might you play soccer that comes from the word *steam*, without the first sound? (team)

What did I do to the paper that comes from the word *store*, without the first sound? (tore)

What is a huge body of water that comes from the word *flake*, without the first sound? (lake)

BUILDING BLOCK #5b- What Would it Say if We Got Rid of the Final Sound?

In this second game, you are going to stretch some words out again, but THIS time, you're going to challenge your kids to figure out what the word would be when they eliminate the last sound.

Again, it may help if you use your hand to cover your mouth with your hand when you're making the final sounds in the words.

Say:

Think of the word *hair*.

What do horses eat that comes from the word *hair* without the final sound? (hay)

Think of the word *goat*.

What is something that you do in a car that comes from the word *goat* without the final sound? (go)

Think of the word *plate*.

What is something that you do outside that comes from the word *plate* without the final sound? (play)

Think of the word *toast*.

What is something that you can touch that comes from the word *toast* without the final sound? (toes)

Think of the word *fork*.

What is a number that comes from the word *fork* without the final sound? (four)

Think of the word *type*.

What might you do to your shoes, that comes from the word *type* without the final sound? (tie)

Think of the word *boat*.

What might you tie with shoe laces that comes from the word *boat* without the final sound? (bow)

Think of the word *belly*.

What rings that comes from the word *belly* without the final sound? (bell)

Think of the word *treat*.

What grows very tall that comes from the word *treat* without the final sound? (tree)

Think of the word *keep*.

What might you use for a lock that comes from the word *keep* without the final sound? (key)

Think of the word *next*.

What do we all have that comes from the word *next* without the final sound? (necks)

Think of the word *shoot*.

What do you wear on your foot that comes from the word *shoot* without the final sound? (shoe)

In the next two games, your children will stretch out the sounds and demonstrate the *number* of sounds (or phonemes) in words. This skill will be tremendously important as kids begin writing. They'll need to be able to represent each sound, with letters, as they record their thoughts onto paper.

BUILDING BLOCK #6- Stretching Out Words to Hear Each Sound

Now, we are going to say words without stretching them out at all. We will simply clearly say a word. The children will then be challenged to slowly stretch the words out, enunciating each individual sound or phoneme.

Note: This practice will help kids to determine which sounds are in words, in order. This is an important skill in learning to spell.

BUILDING BLOCK #6a- I Say It Quickly, You Say It Slowly



For this game, you'll need those slinky-type toys (or another stretchy item). This time, rather than stretching out the sounds together, you will hold the slinky-type toy between your two hands. Keeping it compact, you will say a word in your regular speaking voice. You won't be slowing it down, but you may be very carefully enunciating to be sure your words are very clear. So, you might say, "dog". Your children will repeat the word, and you'll verify that it is correct. Then, *invite the kids to stretch out the word*, pulling the Slinky-type toy, bit-by-bit, to show each sound in the word, dog. Then, have them quickly slide the sounds back together and say the whole word.

You'll want to be sure kids don't put two or more sounds together. They should be able to demonstrate each and every sound, stretching across the word. It should look like this:

-----	-----	-----
dog	d - o - g	dog
	not right- do - g	
	not right- d - og	

*If this is a challenge, don't worry. I am including so many ways to practice that you may want to move on and then circle back after a couple of days.

Word List for Stretching

You say: Your children say:

Words With Two Sounds:

as	/a-z/	it	/i-t/
egg	/e-g/	up	/u-p/
we	/w-e/	us	/u-s/
if	/i-f/	on	/o-n/
at	/a-t/	ought	/o-t/

Words With Three Sounds:

s			
ip	/s-i-p/	lawn	/l-o-n/
net	/n-e-t/	bit	/b-i-t/
mug	/m-u-g/	cash	/c-a-sh/
church	/ch-ur-ch/	moth	/m-o-th/
rope	/r-oa-p/	chat	/ch-a-t/

Words With Four Sounds:

snack	/s-n-a-k/	winner	/w-i-n-r/
stack	/s-t-a-ck/	lucky	/l-u-ck-ee/
smell	/s-m-e-l/	stop	/s-t-o-p/
fist	/f-i-s-t/	flag	/f-l-a-g/
teacher	/t-ea-ch-r/	jelly	/j-e-ll-ee/

Words With Five Sounds:

peanut	/p-ea-n-u-t/	chicken	/ch-i-ck-e-n/
sandy	/s-a-n-d-ee/	kisses	/k-i-ss-e-s/
tracks	/t-r-a-k-s/	camper	/c-a-m-p-er/
muffin	/m-u-ff-i-n/	plant	/p-l-a-n-t/
dandy	/d-a-n-d-ee/	mitten	/m-i-tt-e-n/

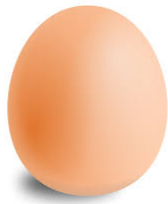
BUILDING BLOCK #6b- Tap the Sounds in Words

For this game, you will need a “tapping wand” of some sort. You could use a small mallet from a xylophone, or a pencil with a decorative eraser, or even a Dum Dum sucker would work.

You’ll also need some picture cards. You may simply print the following quick print tool and cut apart the pictures to make game cards. There are plenty, so you may play the game quite a few times. Note the number of phonemes for each picture is included below. If your children say a different word (if they say feet rather than toes) you may use what they say and determine the number of sounds on your own, or you may say, “I certainly see why you said _____. That’s what I thought, too. But the author wants us to try the word _____. How many sounds are in *that* word?”

*I did some copying and pasting from Google Images to create the picture cards, below.

QUICK PRINT TOOL-







frog-4	flag-4	purse-3	ant-3	bag-3
egg-2	sock-3	bottle-4	sheep-3	shovel-4
hat-3	boots-4	apple-3	duck-3	box-4 /b/-/o/-/k/-/s/
glove-4	hand-4	worm-3	shirt-3	hammer-4
ball-3	tree-3	lips-4	fish-3	horse-3
tent-4,	foot-3	bat-3	pot-3	fence-4
cat-3	leaf-3	nest-4	truck-4	ship or boat-3
dog-3	bird-3	grass-4	bed-3	carrot-5
spoon-4	pig-3	nose-3	lemon-5,	
leg-3	toes-3	cup-3	peppers-5	

To begin, the children will withdraw a card from a pile. Then they will tap one of your fingers, with their tappers, one time for each sound in the word. They will count the fingers tapped to determine the total number of sounds in each word.

For example, they might choose a picture of a foot. Say the word *foot*. You can stretch it out, saying it slowly, together. You might want to grab those Slinky-type toys or the large rubber bands that we used earlier to begin. Then, say the word again, but this time, ask your children to tap one of your fingers with the “tapping wand” as they make each sound. You can help by, first, holding out the pointer finger (/f/), then the middle finger (/oo/), then the ring finger (/t/). So, you’re kind of guiding the sound-stretching by holding out your fingers, one at a time, as you make the sounds, together. Then, hold your fingers upright and show and say how many sounds were in the word.

/f/ + /oo/ + /t/ = 3 sounds

Later, when you feel like they’re ready, you can have the children tap their own fingers to determine how many sounds are in some words. In this way, you’re providing less support as the kids grow more capable.

When they’ve caught on, the kids can go tapping around the room, stretching out words, determining how many sounds they hear. (e.g. r-u-g: 3 sounds, c-a-t: 3 sounds, d-e-s-k: 4 sounds, b-r-u-sh: 4 sounds, o-v-e-n: 4 sounds, sh-e-l-f: 4 sounds)

I need to note here that some words are really tricky. For example, the word *fox* has three letters, but it has four sounds: /f/-/o/-/k/-/s/

The letter q (like the letter x) represents two sounds: /k/-/w/, and q is always followed by a silent u. So the word *quest* has five letters and five sounds: /k/-/w/-/e/-/s/-/t/. I teach that **q-u says /k/-/w/**.

(When teaching handwriting, I always teach q and u, together. In English, you will not see a q on its own, so we don’t practice writing just a q. (Okay, so some scrabble words don’t have the u, like qat, an Arabian shrub, but that hardly counts, right? ☺))

There are tricky words like *coin* which would say /k/-/o/-/ee/-/n/. The o and i, together, make two sounds, but they don’t exactly match the individual letters. We will talk about these kinds of words soon. You can just avoid them for now. You’ll notice that I do not include these kinds of words in our practice yet.

One more thing, before we move on: Please do NOT label your home with word cards. I have heard school district literacy leaders recommend this practice, and I need to say that it can do far more harm than good. We do not want our kids trying to recall many words by sight. Eventually, they *will* do some memorizing, but that will be reserved for words that cannot be decoded ONLY.

Also, most every parent has heard of *sight words*. They may be called star words, snap words, or something else, but we know what they are. Early childhood classrooms feature from 25 to more than 100 words students must know *on sight* or *in a snap* by the end of the school year. That's not a problem—the quick, automatic reading of words. The problem can be in how those words are taught. **We do NOT want our kids to work at remembering the way a word looks.**

Do you have older children, say in second, third or fourth grades, who, when reading say *the* when the word is actually *and*? Do they say *and* for the word *said*? In my first and second grade classrooms, at the beginning of the year, this happened quite frequently. I call it the “Guess and Go” syndrome. I believe this kind of reading error is a result of children being taught sight words. They are taught to recall how words **look**. They are not taught to make the sounds they see, moving from left to right, across the word. If they had been taught to make the sounds they see, children would not say *see* when they come to the word *look*.

Teachers often post the students' sight words on the walls of their classrooms. The class frequently reviews, together, each word. The children are asked to practice using the words in various ways, perhaps, across a whole week. Eventually the word is supposed to *stick* in the memories of the students. If it doesn't stick quickly enough, parents are asked to make flashcards for the words to review them with their children.

Here's the problem: When taught to rely on their memories of how words *look*, children are prone to make a lot of errors in their reading.

Following are the kindergarten sight words in many schools, however most of these words are decodable. These words follow general, easy to learn phonics guidelines and, therefore, should NOT be taught as sight words:

a, I, go, no, so, he, me, we, [the- depending on pronunciation] (open vowel- When you have a really short word and the vowel is at the end, the vowel usually says its name.)

am, an, and, in, is, it, up, can (vowel/consonant -vc- words, vowel/consonant/consonant -vcc, & consonant/vowel/consonant -cvc- words- The vowel makes its short sound.)

like, see, look (consonant/vowel/consonant/e -cvce-, two vowels together -vv- & 2 sounds for oo- Magic e makes a vowel say its name. When you have two vowels together, the first one says its name. Two o's say /oo/ as in tooth or /oo/ as in book.)

These words do not follow general phonics guidelines:

do, to, you, the (my* - unless you've taught the rule) {*I teach do, to, and who, together.}

So what do I recommend?

I believe that we must return to the sound-by-sound approach (left to right, across the words, making the sounds we see) and that we should reserve the sight word approach (memorizing words, letter by letter or by their shapes) for the words that do not follow phonics guidelines. Even the words, here, that I'm calling “true sight words” have the expected *initial* sounds. We should be teaching that!

An intervention specialist in my building, a while back, was working with a student who was behind. She became frustrated with his slow rate of sound-by-sound reading and reverted to practicing sight words with him. What he needed was additional practice sliding sounds together to promote fluency. The fluent blending of sounds promotes fluent reading. It just takes some practice. There are thousands and thousands of words. How could one possibly memorize the pronunciations of all of them and have immediate access to them, in an instant?

Consider, now, that there are only **forty** some sounds in the English language and that there are fewer than eighty ways to spell those sounds. The best part? I can teach almost every single one of them in about twenty fun-focused weeks. (We'll get there!)

Let's get back to phonemic awareness. Soon we'll begin those phonics lessons. By the way, the phonics Building Block lessons are **much** more fun than these phonemic awareness Building Block lessons. ☺

BUILDING BLOCK #6c- Make the Sounds Racetrack

Another way to encourage your kids to notice the individual sounds that make up words is to place stickers* in a line on a 24" long strip of cardstock that is 3" wide** and use it as a game board/racetrack. You'll also need about 15 picture cards. You may use the pictures I added, above, or you may simply draw 15 pictures on small, sticky note-sized papers or you may collect pictures from magazines or print them from online images. Be sure to choose pictures with items that have only 2-4 sounds. I'm including a list of easy-to-draw items as well as the number of phonemes, for your convenience. I even added some extras just in case some of these don't actually seem easy for *you* to draw. ☺

frog-4	boots-4	nest-4
egg-2	hand-4	grass-4
hat-3	tree-3	cup-3
glove-4	foot-3	ant-3
ball-3	leaf-3	baby-4
tent-4	bird-3	duck-3
cat-3	pig-3	shirt-3
dog-3	purse-3	fish-3
house-4	bottle-4	pot-3
spoon-4	apple-3	truck-4
leg-3	worm-3	bed-3
flag-4	lips-4	truck-4
sock-3	bat-3	sock-3
cat-3	toes-3	candle-5

You'll play *with* your children, so you'll each need a mover. Take turns pulling pictures from a pile, one at a time. The number of spaces you move your mover down the track will be determined by the number of sounds in the word on your picture card. If my card has a bat on it, I'll move three spaces. As I land on each space, I'll make each sound, like this: /b/-/a/-/t/. If one of my children pulls a picture of a tent, he'll move four spaces, saying, "/t/-/e/-/n/-/t/" as he moves. See who gets to the end first!

*I use the multi-colored circle stickers from the dollar store.



[Multi-Colored Circle Stickers](#)

**I use bulletin board border, with straight edges on both sides, cut in half, from office/teacher supply stores.



[Bulletin Board Boarder](#)

BUILDING BLOCK #6d- Sound Mat Sliding Game

For the next game, we'll need an 8 ½" x 11" piece of paper that is divided into eight boxes, four across and two high.

Here's a video to show you, exactly, what I mean. [YouTube Video- How to Fold a Paper Into Eights](#)

You will lay the paper, so that it's wide, not tall, in front of you. In the top four boxes, you'll draw four 2" (or so) horizontal lines, centered, one in each box.



We will call these papers *sound mats*.

You will need four coins, fruit snacks, game movers, checkers, or some other similar items. Finally, you'll need those picture cards, again. You can simply draw pictures on sticky-note-sized papers, or you can collect simple pictures from magazines.

To begin this game, place your four *movers* (cereal pieces, coins, or other) in the empty bottom boxes that have no lines. Draw a picture card from the pile of cards. Stretch out the sounds, sliding one mover up for each sound in the word, beginning on the left side. Some words will need only two movers to slide up into a box with the line, while other words require that all of the movers be moved up.

(To make magnetic sound mats/boards, you can use a cookie sheet, some washi tape- to make the dividing lines, and four magnets. You could even make *parking spaces* and move up one car/mover for each sound.)

Eventually, you could use magnetic letters to replace the movers, to represent the sounds on each line. You should

only use words where each sound is represented by a single letter, to start. (e.g. frog, cat, dog, flag, hand, pig, lips, bat, leg, nest)

BUILDING BLOCK #6e- Tap Light Sounds

For this lesson, you'll need to purchase four inexpensive tap lights. I have the kind pictured, below. They were only a dollar a piece at our local dollar store, but I did have to buy a couple of AA batteries for each one of them. I feel the novelty and excitement that they add to the practice of recognizing the sounds in words makes them a great deal! My students just *light up* when they get to use them. 😊



[Tap Lights](#)



[AA Batteries](#)

The first time you do this lesson, you will use either three or four tap lights to help your children demonstrate their recognition of the sounds in words. To begin, I say a word and then I tap one light for each sound in the word. I move from left to right, across the tap lights. The highlighted 0, below, indicates a glowing light. The remaining light(s) are not on because they weren't tapped since there aren't that many sounds in the given word.

Following are some examples:

at

0	0	0	0
/a/	/t/	-	-

tap

0	0	0	0
/t/	/a/	/p/	-

crush

0	0	0	0
/c/	/r/	/u/	/sh/

To extend the learning, a little later on, you can even have kids write, with a dry erase marker, directly onto the tap lights, the letters that are represented by each shining light. Neat, huh?



[Washable Dry Erase Markers](#)

BUILDING BLOCK #6f- Magnetic Sound Slide

Another fun building block activity makes use of magnetic wands and metallic edged chips to slide sounds in words together.



[Magnetic Wand with Metal Trimmed Discs](#)

There are the magnetic wands with bingo chips that some diehard bingo players use. There are also magnetic wands and chips marketed for educational purposes. Either set is about \$7-\$8, and they can be ordered online. Most sets have LOTS of chips, but only one wand. I've used magnetic sticks made for pulling canning jar lids out of hot water, and they work well, too. Mine was about \$0.99 from Big Lots, so I bought quite a few. Here are some from amazon.com.



[Magnetic Stick](#)

Now, you will use your sound mat from building block #7b, the **Sound Mat Sliding Game**, place one magnetic chip in each of the four boxes on the lower half of the mat. Pull a picture from the stack, name the picture, and slide one chip up for each sound in that word. Then, one-by-one, gather the chips up with your wand, moving left to right across the chips. This activity provides a satisfying *clink* for each sound. How cool is that?!

I hope you enjoy playing with words along side your soon-to-be reader. Remember, as you play these games together, you are adding more and more building blocks to your child's Literacy Foundation.



Phonemic Awareness

Phonemes are the smallest units of sounds in speech. We want our kids to recognize, discriminate, and manipulate sounds in words. Phonemic Awareness skills are good predictors of reading success.

Games to Play in the Car

- Do these words rhyme?
- Finish this rhyme. red/bed- blue/_____, etc.
- clap, clap (hands) red. slap, slap (legs) _____
- What rhymes with ____ and starts with ____? E.g. car,/f/
- __(action)__ if these words rhyme.

(smile, wink, high five, tap your head, blow a kiss, touch your toes, wiggle a foot, etc.)

- Do these words begin with the same sound?
- Do these words end with the same sound?
- What is your mouth doing when you say /___/?
- I'll say it slowly, & you say it quickly. (/b/-/e/-/d/)-_____
- You say it slowly, stretching-it-out (with a rubber band or a Slinky-type toy) and then snap it back together, saying the word quickly.
- How many sounds are in the word ____? (tiger-4)

**Remember, we are not focusing on syllables, but phonemes, individual sounds.*

If your kids are struggling . . .

There is a program known as LiPS that was specifically designed to assist children who demonstrate weak phonemic awareness. I attended the LiPS workshop and it really got to the task of discriminating the identity, number, and order of sounds within words by teaching students to discover and label the mouth movements for each sound. The increased awareness of oral-motor movements can be helpful for kids who have difficulty *hearing* the sounds in words. The instruction really focuses on what the mouth is doing when producing the sounds we hear in words.

If your children are struggling to complete the tasks I have provided, with the goal of strengthening phonemic awareness, I would recommend the LiPS program as an option for intervention. There are some parts of the program that I do not wholly embrace, as I do believe they overcomplicate some basic phonics guidelines or “rules”. But when it comes to helping kids recognize what their mouths are doing (or *should* be doing) to produce certain sounds, the LiPS program might be very helpful. For more information, please check out the LiPS website. Find the link below.

[Lindamoodbell](#)

Finally, I want to let you know that what we’re teaching, presently, is for basic 3-4 letter words. As we progress, we’ll observe the same *rules* at work in each individual **syllable** of more complex words. We will not be dividing words into syllables until our kids have had a lot of experience with phonemes/individual sounds in words. We don’t want to confuse our kids with the various ways we can divide words (phonemes, graphemes, morphemes, etc.)