

Letters and Sounds – Phase 1

Below are some activities you can do at home to help children develop their pre-reading and writing skills. You can pick and choose – they don't need to be done in any particular order. Most importantly, have fun with it!

Aspect 1: General sound discrimination – environmental sounds

Main purpose: To develop children's listening skills and awareness of sounds in the environment

- **Listening walks**

This is a listening activity that can take place indoors or outdoors. Remind the children about the things that good listeners do (e.g. keep quiet, have ears and eyes ready). Encourage the children to listen attentively to the sounds around them. Talk about the different sounds they can hear. The children could use 'cupped ears' or make big ears on headbands to wear as they go on the listening walk. Afterwards make a list of all the sounds they can remember. The list can be in words or pictures and prompted by replaying sounds recorded on the walk.

- **Drum outdoors**

Give each child a beater or make drumsticks, for example from short pieces of dowel or even wooden spoons. Encourage the children to explore outdoors and discover how different sounds are made by tapping or stroking, with their beaters, a wooden door, a wire fence, a metal slide, and a few items such as pipes and upturned pots you have 'planted'. Ask each child to choose their favourite sound. The sound could be recorded and/or photographed. Ask each child to take up position ready to make their favourite sound. The conductor raises a beater high in the air to signal the children to play loudly and lowers it to signal playing softly.

- **Mrs Browning has a box**

Turn a box on its side with the opening facing away from the children. One by one place between four and six familiar noisy items (e.g. a set of keys, crisp packet, squeaky toy) into the box, pausing to name them and demonstrate the sound each one makes. Sing to the tune of 'Old MacDonald' but using your own name or one of the children's:

"Mrs ...has a box ee i ee i o

And in that box she has a..."

Stop. Gesture and ask the children to listen. Handle one of the objects in the box, out of sight, to make a noise. The children guess what is making the sound.

- **Enlivening stories**

Involve the children in songs and stories, enlivened by role-play, props and repeated sounds, for example acting out:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall (bump, crash, bang!)

All the King's horses and all the King's men (gallop, gallop, gallop)

Couldn't put Humpty together again (boo, hoo, boo, hoo, boo, hoo).

Aspect 2: General sound discrimination – instrumental sounds

Main purpose: To experience and develop awareness of sounds made with instruments and noise makers

- **Which instrument?**

Explore and play with a set of instruments (bought or homemade). Introduce the sounds each instrument makes and name them all. Then hide behind a screen and choose one instrument to play. Can your child identify which instrument has been played? Take turns to be "Teacher"

Develop the activity by playing a simple rhythm or by adding a song to accompany the instrument (e.g. There is a music man. Clap your hands) while the hidden instrument is played. This time the listening child(ren) have to concentrate very carefully, discriminating between the singing and the instrument being played.

- **Adjust the volume**

Sit opposite each other with similar instruments. Copy each other making loud sounds and quiet sounds, fast sounds and slow sounds. Use picture or object cues to represent loud or quiet (e.g. a microphone, puppet or picture of a lion/mouse, a finger on the lips)

- **Grandmother's footsteps**

'Grandmother' has a range of instruments and together decide what movement goes with which sound (e.g. shakers for running on tip-toe, triangle for fairy steps). First an adult will need to model being Grandmother. Then a child takes the role. Grandmother stands with her back to the others and plays an instrument. The child(ren) move towards Grandmother in the manner of the instrument while it is playing. They stop when it stops. The first person to reach Grandmother takes over that role and the game starts again.

- **Musical show and tell**

Invite children to perform short instrumental music for others. The audience (could be siblings, family members, virtual audience or a selection of cuddly toys) are asked to say what they liked about the music. (They will need a selection of instruments or sound makers and some rehearsal time.)

- **Animal sounds**

Provide a variety of animal puppets or toys and a range of instruments. Encourage the children to play with the instruments and the animals. Discuss matching sounds to the animals. Give a choice of two instruments to represent a child's chosen animal and ask the children to choose which sound is the better fit: Which one do you think sounds most like the mouse?

Aspect 3: General sound discrimination – body percussion

Main purpose: To develop awareness of sounds and rhythms

- **Action songs**

Singing songs and action rhymes is a vital part of Phase One activities and should be an everyday event. Children need to develop a wide repertoire of songs and rhymes. Be sure to include multi-sensory experiences such as action songs in which the children have to add claps, knee pats and foot stamps or move in a particular way. Add body percussion sounds to nursery rhymes, performing the sounds in time to the beat. Change the body sound with each musical phrase or sentence. Encourage the children to be attentive and to know when to add sounds, when to move, and when to be still.

- **Roly poly**

Rehearse the rhyme with the actions (rotating hand over hand as in the song 'Wind the bobbin up').

Ro ... ly ... po ... ly ... ever ... so ... slowly Ro ... ly ... poly faster. (Increase the speed of the action as you increase the speed of the rhyme.) Now add in new verses, such as: Stamp ... your ... feet ... ever ... so ... slowly Stamp ... your feet faster. Ask the children to suggest sounds and movements to be incorporated into the song. Say hello ever so quietly Say HELLO LOUDER!

- **Noisy neighbour**

Tell a simple story about a noisy neighbour and invite the children to join in. Begin with: "Early one morning, the children were all fast asleep..." - (ask the children to close their eyes and pretend to sleep) - when all of a sudden they heard a sound from the house next door. At this point make a sound (e.g. snoring, brushing teeth, munching cornflakes, yawning, stamping feet, washing).

"Wake up children. What's that noise?"

The child(ren) identify the sound and then everyone joins in with: "Noisy neighbour, please be quiet. We are trying to sleep!"

Repeat the simple story line with another sound

- **Words about sounds**

It is important that adults talk to children about sounds and introduce vocabulary that helps them to describe sounds, for example: slow, fast; quiet, loud; long, short; type of sound (click, stamp, etc.); type of movement (rock, march, skip, etc.). Start with simple opposites that are obviously different (e.g. loud, quiet). Listen to what the children have to say about the sounds they hear and then build on and expand their contributions and ideas.

Aspect 4: Rhythm and rhyme

Main purpose: To experience and appreciate rhythm and rhyme and to develop awareness of rhythm and rhyme in speech. To begin to identify and talk about rhyming words.

- **Rhyming books**

Regularly read rhyming books using plenty of intonation and expression so that children tune into the rhythm of the language and the rhyming words. Encourage children to join in with repetitive phrases such as "Run, run, as fast as you can, You can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man" Use books with predictable rhymes that children are familiar with and then stop as you come to the final word in the rhyme. Invite children to complete it.

- **Listen to the beat**

Use a variety of percussion instruments to play different rhythms. Remind the children to use their listening ears and to move in time to the beat - fast, slow, skipping, marching, etc. Keep the beat simple at first (e.g. suitable for marching) then move on to more complex rhythms for the children to skip or gallop to.

- **Our favourite rhymes**

Help your child to compile a book of their favourite rhymes and songs. They could represent the rhymes in any way they choose. The book can be used to make choices about which rhyme to say. Children may choose to act as teacher selecting rhymes for others to perform. Try collecting some objects (or pictures/symbols) in a bag or box which represent their favourite rhymes (e.g. a toy spider to represent 'Incy Wincy Spider', a toy bus for 'The Wheels on the Bus') and invite children to close their eyes and pick one out.

- **Rhyming soup**

Lay out a selection of rhyming objects (e.g. rat, hat, cat/fox, box, socks/van, can, pan, man/ coat, boat, goat). Use a bowl/saucepan and spoon to act out the song. Invite the children to choose an object to put into the soup and place it in the bowl. After each turn, stir the soup and sing the following song to recite the growing list of things that end up in the soup. Sing the first part of the song (to the tune of 'Pop Goes the Weasel'):

*I'm making lots of silly soup
I'm making soup that's silly
I'm going to cook it in the fridge
To make it nice and chilly
In goes... a fox... a box... some socks..."*

- **Rhyming pairs**

In a pairs game, use pictures of objects with names that rhyme. Take it in turns to turn two cards over and keep them if the pictures are a rhyming pair. If they are not a rhyming pair, the cards are turned face down again and the other person has a turn. Start with a small core set of words that can then be extended.

Children need to be familiar with the rhyming words before they can use them in a game - spend time looking at the pictures and talking about the pairs.

- **Odd one out**

Put out three objects or pictures, two with names that rhyme and one with a name that doesn't. Ask the child to identify the 'odd one out'. Start with a small set of words that can then be extended.

Aspect 5: Alliteration

Main purpose: To develop understanding of alliteration and start to identify beginning sounds in words

- **I spy names**

Start the game by saying "I spy someone whose name begins with..." and give the sound of the first letter, for example 's' for Satish. Then ask: *Who can it be?* You could use family members, pictures of friends or cuddly toys for this. If the children find separating out the first sound too hard in the early stages, the adult can continue to be the caller until they get the hang of it. Once they get the hang of it you could include lots of different objects, or play in nature when out for a walk.

- **Our sound box/bag**

Make collections of objects with names beginning with the same sound. Create a song, such as 'What have we got in our sound box today?' and then show the objects one at a time. Emphasise the initial sound (e.g. s-s-s-snake, s-s-s-sock, s-s-s-sausage). These objects could also be used for other games such as hidden in sand, round the house or use them to make up an alliterative story.

- **Name play**

Make up a fun sentence starting with the child's name (e.g. Ben has a big, bouncy ball, Kulvinder keeps kippers in the kitchen, Tim has ten, tickly toes, Fiona found a fine, fat frog). Ask the children to think up similar sentences for their own names and others.

- **Silly soup**

As above for "Rhyming soup", this time using a selection of items that begin with the same sound (e.g. a banana, bumble bee and bug). Make the pattern clear by emphasising the initial sound.

Aspect 6: Voice sounds

Main purpose: To distinguish between the differences in vocal sounds, to make and talk about different voice sounds

- **Mouth movements/mirror play**

Explore different mouth movements with children - blowing, sucking, tongue stretching and wiggling. Practising these movements regularly to music can be fun and helps children with their articulation. Try this in front of a mirror. Play at making faces and copying movements of the lips and tongue. Introduce sound making in the mirror and discuss the way lips move, for example, when sounding out 'p' and 'b', the way that tongues poke out for 'th', the way teeth and lips touch for 'f' and the way lips shape the sounds 'sh' and 'm'.

- **Voice sounds**

Show children how they can make sounds with their voices, for example: Make your voice go down a slide - wheee! Make your voice bounce like a ball - boing, boing! Sound really disappointed - oh! Hiss like a snake - ssssss! Keep everyone quiet - shshshsh. Gently moo like a cow - mmmoooo. Look astonished - oooooo! Be a steam train - chchchchch... Buzz like a bumble bee - zzzzzzz. Be a clock - tick tock. This can be extended by joining single speech sounds into pairs (e.g. ee-aw like a donkey).

- **Making trumpets**

Make amplifiers (trumpet shapes) from simple cones of paper or lightweight card and experiment by making different noises through the cones. Model sounds for the children: the up and down wail of a siren, the honk of a fog horn, a peep, peep, peep of a bird. Contrast loud and soft sounds. Invite the children to share their favourite sound for you to copy.

- **Whose voice?**

Record someone familiar talking and play the recording back. Can the children identify the voice?

- **Sound story time**

Discuss how we can use our voices to add sound effects to stories such as *Bear Hunt*, *Chicken Licken* or *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Repeat favourite rhymes and poems or tell stories in different voices together (e.g. whispering, growling, shouting, squeaking) and discuss the differences.

- **Animal noises**

Provide/make simple animal masks, and tails if possible, to encourage the children to dramatise animal movements and sounds.

Aspect 7: Oral blending and segmenting

Main purpose: To develop oral blending and segmenting of sounds in simple words

- **Oral blending**

It is important that the children have plenty of experience of listening to adults sounding out words verbally before they can learn to read or write words for themselves. For example, when giving instructions or asking questions the adult can break up the last word into separate sounds and then immediately blend the sounds together to say the word (e.g. It's time to get your c-oo-t, coat! or Touch your t-oe-s, toes! Who can touch their f-ee-t, feet?) Use only short (single-syllable) words for this. *The more familiar children become with this kind of talk, the easier they will find it when they start to read and write in Reception.*

Oral blending can also be modelled from time to time when books are being shared, where there is a short, familiar word such as "Cat" or "Big", but not with every word as this will interrupt the fun of the story!

- **Metal Mike**

Introduce Metal Mike (a picture, puppet or toy robot). Have ready a selection of pictures or objects (e.g. cat, dog, mug, sock). Hold each one up and tell the children that Metal Mike is a computer and so he talks with a robot voice. Name each object and then demonstrate it for them in a robotic voice (e.g. 'c-a-t', cat). Feed the object or picture to Metal Mike and encourage the child first to listen to you and then join in as you say the word exaggerating each sound, followed by blending sounds to make the word.

The robot then sound-talks a word, leaving a short gap between each sound. Encourage the children to say the word and identify the object. To make this easier/more difficult reduce or increase the number of objects or pictures for them to choose between. Once the children are familiar with this take turns to be Metal Mike. Do you think you could try robot talk? Say ch-ee-se: (the children repeat 'ch-ee-se'). What else would you like? Be careful to think of items with only single syllables (e.g. fish, cake, pie, soup).

- **I spy**

Place on the floor or on a table a selection of objects with names containing two or three phonemes (e.g. zip, hat, comb, cup, chain, boat, tap, ball). Check that all the children know the names of the objects. The toy says I spy with my little eye a z-i-p. Then invite children to say the name of the object and hold it up. The children can then say the individual sounds and blend them together 'z-i-p, zip'. When the children have become familiar with this game use objects with names that start with the same sound (e.g. cat, cap, cup, cot, comb, kite). This will really encourage the children to listen and then blend right through the word, rather than relying on the initial sound.

- **Say the sounds (segmenting)**

When the children are used to hearing the robot say words in sound-talk and blending the individual sounds to make words, you may be able to ask them to see whether they can speak in sound-talk. Choose some objects with three-phoneme names that you are sure they know and hide them in a box or bag. Then ask them to pick one and try to say the separate sounds, just like the robot does (e.g. d-u-ck). You then blend the sounds together to guess the word. The child can then reveal the object to show whether you are right.

Want to know more?

Phase 1 Phonics course access

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<https://bit.ly/2WA4BNK>

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- Step 1: Type in your email address
- Step 2: Enter a password. You're signing up for an account so should enter a password of your choice.
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