



Playing With Sounds

Phonological awareness describes a broad skill that includes the ability to recognize and manipulate parts of spoken language, such as words, syllables, onsets and rimes. Phonemic awareness refers to the specific ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds, or phonemes, in spoken words.

Phonemes are the smallest units of sound in spoken language. There are 44 of them in English. For example, the word pat has three phonemes: /p/ /a/ /t/, as does the word thin: /th/ /i/ /n/.

Phonemic awareness is the foundation for spelling and recognizing words. It is one of the best predictors of how well young children will acquire reading skills during kindergarten and first grade. You can promote phonemic awareness through games and word play.

The "onset" is the initial phonological unit of any word (e.g., "c" in cat). The term "rime" refers to the string of letters that follow, usually a vowel and final consonants (e.g., "at" in cat).

Here are some easy ways to incorporate word play into your 21st CCLC program:

Rhyming and Word Families

Build phonological awareness by introducing children to the common elements in word families.

- Read literature with rhyming patterns, like *There's a Wocket in My Pocket* or other Dr. Seuss books. Ask students to recall some of the rhyming pairs.
- Build word family charts by creating word lists with the same rimes: /at/ = bat, cat, sat and rat.
- Odd Word Out: Provide three words, and ask students to eliminate the word that doesn't rhyme (e.g., coat, stick, and boat).
- Watch this video from the Florida Center for Reading Research: [Onset/Rhyme Game](#).

Word, Syllable and Phoneme Counting

Ask students to count the number of sounds in a word, syllables in a word or words in a sentence.

- The word shut has three sounds: /sh/ /u/ /t/.
- The word banana has three syllables: /ba/ /nan/ /a/.
- The sentence "I ate cereal for breakfast" has five words.

Sound Synthesis

Provide students with a selection of phonemes that, when put together, make a familiar word:

- It starts with /m/ and ends with /an/, put it together and it says...(man).
- Put these sounds together to make a word: /gr/ /a/ /b/ = grab.

Sound-to-Word Matching

Ask students to either pull sounds from words or confirm that a certain sound is present in a word:

- Is there a /b/ in ball? Is there a /g/ in rug?
- What is the first sound you hear in the word fish? (/f/)



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Where is the Sound?

Recite a word to students, and ask them to identify the location of a particular sound: either the beginning, middle or end of the word:

- Where do you hear the /b/ in bat? (At the beginning)
- Where do you hear /g/ in bug? (At the end)
- Where do you hear /a/ in cat? (in the middle)

Sound Segmentation

Students can do this activity orally or using tools, such as Elkonin boxes, to break a word apart into sounds:

- What sounds do you hear in the word sit? (/s/ /i/ /t/)
- What sounds do you hear in the word chip? (/ch/ /i/ /p/)

Word Manipulation Through Phoneme Deletion

As students become good at phonemic awareness activities, increase the demand by challenging them to remove a phoneme from a word or divide compound words:

- Say hot dog without the word dog. (hot)
- If I said blast without the /b/, I'd have...(last). If I said stink without the /t/, I'd have...(sink).
- What sound do you hear in meat that is missing in eat? (/m/)

Letter-Sound Association

Ask students to identify the letter that makes the sound in a particular position in a spoken word:

- What letter goes with the first sound in this word: dog? (/d/)
- What letter goes with the last sound in this word: kite? (/t/)