

phonics lessons

The Research Base

This document describes features and components of *Phonics Lessons: Letters, Words, and How They Work*, Grades K, 1, and 2 (Heinemann, 2003) that address the five essential elements identified by The National Reading Panel as critical to successful reading instruction:

- (1) **phonemic awareness instruction**
- (2) **phonics instruction**
- (3) **fluency instruction**
- (4) **vocabulary instruction**
- (5) **comprehension instruction**

These five elements are the building blocks of *Reading First* and the national *Leave No Child Behind Act*.

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The **basic framework** of *Phonics Lessons: Letters, Words, and How They Work* is designed to satisfy the five critical elements through the use of the following:

- ◆ **direct teaching lessons (10 to 15 minutes)**, each dedicated to a specific principle
- ◆ **principles** that are organized along a continuum (sequence) that ranges from easier to harder concepts
- ◆ **application activities** in each lesson for children to practice using and exploring the principle
- ◆ **shared culmination activities** in each lesson reinforcing understanding and application of the principle.

This systematic approach to literacy instruction is based on principles and practices validated by scientifically-based reading research, as defined by the National Reading Panel (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2001a and 2001b). In addition, the effectiveness of implementation of these research-based practices is monitored through collection of assessment data to document children's progress in classrooms.

(1) Phonemic Awareness Instruction

"Phonemic awareness is the ability to hear, identify, and manipulate the individual sounds—phonemes—in spoken words." (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, p. 4) *Phonics Lessons* provides explicit instruction in both phonological awareness (providing a strong foundation for hearing and using sounds) and phonemic awareness (helping children learn to identify and manipulate sounds) through the use of the following:

- ◆ short, concise, and direct lessons (see topics on the following page)
- ◆ several lessons for each topic to reinforce the principles involved
- ◆ assessment of children's present levels of competence
- ◆ a lesson selection tool to provide the amount of training children need in this area.

“In the NRP analysis, studies that spent between 5 and 18 hours teaching PA yielded very large effects on the acquisition of phonemic awareness. Studies that spent longer or less time than this also yielded significant effect sizes, but effects were moderate and only half as large. Transfer to reading was greatest for studies lasting less than 20 hours. In fact effect sizes were more than twice as large for shorter programs than for the longest-lasting programs.”(NICHD, 2001a, pp. 2-42)

Lesson topics are listed below for kindergarten and grade 1.

	Kindergarten Lesson Topics	Grade One Lesson Topics
Phonological Awareness Instruction	Hearing Rhymes Making Rhymes Hearing, Saying, and Clapping Syllables Blending Syllables Hearing and Blending Onsets and Rimes Identifying and Blending Onsets and Rimes	Recognizing and Making Rhymes Identifying Onsets and Rimes Hearing and Blending Onsets and Rimes Saying Words Slowly to Predict Letter Sequence Exploring Syllables Hearing Sounds in Sequence
Phonemic Awareness Training	Saying Words Slowly to Hear Sounds Hearing Beginning Sounds Hearing Ending Sounds Hearing Middle Sounds Hearing Sounds in Sequence Hearing and Substituting Sounds Blending and Segmenting Sounds in Words Hearing, Saying, and Deleting Beginning Sounds Hearing Long Vowel Sounds in the Middle of Words	Hearing Sounds in Sequence Hearing and Identifying Beginning Sounds Hearing and Identifying Ending Sounds Hearing Middle Sounds Blending Sounds Hearing and Changing Ending Sounds Hearing and Changing Beginning and Ending Sounds

Children engage in a variety of application activities that include:

- ◆ sorting and matching picture cards for beginning and ending sounds, rhymes, and word patterns
- ◆ segmenting and blending sounds of objects in pictures
- ◆ oral games that involve segmenting, blending, deleting, and adding phonemes
- ◆ identifying word parts by clapping and segmenting them
- ◆ making connections among words with similar beginning, middle, and ending sounds.

In addition, a rich collection of children’s literature provides a foundation for phonological awareness through daily reading of rhyming stories, poems, and songs using language that draws attention to the nature of words.

Phonological awareness and phonemic awareness training have been found to be effective, but the panel warns that “In the rush to teach phonemic awareness, it is important not to overlook the need to teach letters as well. The NRP analysis has shown that PA instruction was more effective when it was taught with letters.” (NICHD, 2001b, pp. 2-33) *Phonics Lessons* provides specific lesson and application activities related to learning letters—their names and features. In kindergarten and grade one, children explore the shapes of letters through working with name puzzles, alphabet charts, and magnetic letters. They match and sort letters, noticing the features. They learn to use a verbal path to describe directionality in forming letters; handwriting lessons provide further practice.

(2) Phonics Instruction

“Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between the letters (graphemes) of written language and the individual sounds (phonemes) of spoken language.”(Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, p. 12) The goal is to help children learn and use the alphabetic principle—the understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between written letters and spoken words. *Phonics Lessons* includes explicit lessons on letter-sound relationships along with application activities. Lessons are ordered along a continuum of difficulty across the year.

Phonics Lessons also includes a systematic and organized approach to learning common spelling patterns or phonograms (for example, *-at*, *-it*, *-ake*, *-ame*). Work with these patterns helps children notice and understand larger units in words. Lessons are organized to present groups of phonograms, and knowledge is periodically summarized. Children apply knowledge through building words, sorting words, and a variety of games designed to help them notice word patterns. The goal of this work is to help them become pattern seekers. Children also work with the CVC, CVCe, and CVVC word structures.

(3) Fluency Instruction

“Fluency is the ability to read a text accurately and quickly.” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 22) Fluent readers recognize words automatically and group words to gain meaning. Oral reading sounds effortless and expressive. The National Reading Panel has described fluency as a “bridge” between word recognition and comprehension and suggests that “repeated and monitored oral reading improves reading fluency and overall reading achievement.” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 24)

Phonics Lessons provides one component of a comprehensive reading program that includes daily reading of continuous text, where fluency is a priority. In addition to extensive work on decoding in word study activities, students in grades K, 1, and 2:

- ◆ work with word parts to increase quick word solving
- ◆ practice high-frequency word recognition to increase rapid word solving.

(4) Vocabulary Instruction

“Vocabulary refers to the words we must know to communicate effectively.” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 34) In general, vocabulary can be described as speaking, listening, reading or writing. Vocabulary instruction refers to both the *indirect* and *direct* teaching that we provide for children. *Phonics Lessons* includes specific, explicit lessons on word meanings, which include concept words that primary children often meet while reading and/or that are used to organize primary texts. Concept words include: colors, numbers, days of the week and months of the year, weather words, ordinal words, etc. Children learn to categorize words by meaning through lessons and sorting words. In grade two, lesson topics cover simple antonyms, synonyms, and homophones.

(5) Comprehension Instruction

“Using their experiences and knowledge of the world, their knowledge of vocabulary and language structure, and their knowledge of reading strategies (or plans), good readers make sense of the text and know how to get the most out of it.” (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2001, p. 48) A comprehensive literacy program includes lessons on comprehension, both through read-aloud sessions and through small group reading instruction. *Phonics Lessons* is designed to contribute to comprehension in the following ways; it:

- ◆ helps children develop rapid, flexible word solving so attention is given to comprehension
- ◆ works with words and word parts to increase quick word solving
- ◆ requires children to practice high-frequency recognition to increase rapid word solving
- ◆ builds a large repertoire of words that are known or can be solved rapidly, freeing attention for the meaning of the text
- ◆ works with words in categories of meaning to expand vocabulary.

Summary

The relationship between *Phonics Lessons* and the research base for the national literacy effort is summarized below:

Essential Elements Identified by Research	<i>Phonics Lessons</i>		
	Direct Lessons	Application	Extension
Phonemic Awareness Instruction	Rhymes Onsets and rimes Beginning & ending consonant sounds Vowel sounds Syllables Blending sounds Identifying (segmenting) sounds Substituting sounds Deleting sounds	Making words Matching pictures Sorting pictures Clapping and tapping syllables Saying words slowly	Read aloud rhymes, songs, and rich language texts to build phonological awareness Prompt children to notice mismatches while reading Prompt children to say words slowly while trying to write them
Phonics Instruction	Letter names Consonants in beginning, medial, and ending position Consonant clusters (blends/digraphs) Short and long vowels Vowels with <i>r</i> and with silent <i>e</i> Double consonants Vowel combinations	Sorting words Making words Matching words Games: Lotto, Follow the Path, Crazy Eights, etc. Word Study Notebook	Read aloud books that emphasize beginning, medial, and ending sounds Prompt children to use skills to monitor and correct reading Use word work in guided reading to build rapid decoding and attention to words
Fluency Instruction	Decoding practice High-frequency word recognition	Practice with games—overlearning the use of word parts Word searches for problem solving and flexibility	Read aloud books to develop fluent, phrased reading Prompt for fluent reading during reading instruction Demonstrate reading words rapidly (high frequency) and taking words apart
Vocabulary Instruction	Word meanings—concept words Word connections Synonyms Antonyms Homophones and homographs	Making word connections Word webs and charts Matching synonyms, antonyms, and homophones Problem-solving homophones and homographs	Read aloud books that expand vocabulary knowledge Read aloud books that demonstrate synonyms, antonyms, and homophones
Comprehension Instruction	Decoding practice Word meanings	Sorting and matching words by meaning Working with homophones and homographs to determine meaning	Read aloud books that offer literary elements to discuss Build children's decoding and comprehending skills through large amounts of reading texts that are matched to readers

References:

- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. 2001a. *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read—An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction. Reports of the Subgroups*. Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health.
- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. 2001b. *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read—An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institutes of Health.
- Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., & Osborn, J. 2001. *Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read—Kindergarten through Grade 3*. Jessup, MD: National Institute for Literacy.