Phonological Awareness Activities

**The Listening Game**

Objective: To bring attention to sound and noises

Great activity during time to unwind. Lie down or sit quietly for five to ten minutes, and listen for sounds. Stay perfectly still and become “sound spotters.” Use your ears, not your eyes. The teacher helps the discussion about the sounds everyone hears. The key phrase is, “Who can spot a sound with their ears?”

**Moo-Moo, “Where Are You?”**

Objective: To listen closely for sound and location

All the children sit in a circle. One child lies down in the middle of the circle and covers his or her eyes. The teacher chooses another child to go somewhere in the room and pretend to be a cow by making a “moo-moo” sound. The child in the middle of the circle – with eyes still covered – points in the direction of the animal sound. This game is great because it gets children to listen closely for sounds and for where the sounds are coming from. It also prepares their ears to listen more closely to sounds in words. When the child in the middle correctly identifies the sound and direction, he or she gets to go next and make a different animal sound.

Variation: Have all children in the circle close their eyes and point to the direction of the sound. Just be sure the students are spread apart.

**Listening to Sound Sequences**

Objective: To develop the memory and attentional abilities for thinking about sequences of sounds and the language for discussing them

In this game, the children are challenged first to identify single sounds and then to identify each one of a sequence of sounds. Children cover their eyes with their hands while someone makes a familiar noise such as closing the door, sneezing, or playing a key on the piano. By listening carefully and without peeking, the children try to identify the noise.

Once the children have caught on to the game, make two noises, one after the other. Without peeking, children guess the two sounds in the sequence saying, "There were two sounds. First we heard a \_\_\_\_, and then we heard a \_\_\_\_."

After the children have become quite good with pairs of noises, produce a series of more than two for them to identify and report in sequence. Again, complete sentences should be encouraged.

Remember that, to give every child the opportunity to participate mentally in these games, it is important to discourage all children from calling out their answers until they are asked to do so.

### Variations

* With the children's eyes closed, make a series of sounds. Then repeat the sequence, but omit one of the sounds. The children must identify the sound that has been omitted from the second sequence.
* Invite the children to make sounds for their classmates to guess.
* These games also offer good opportunities to review, exercise, and evaluate children's use of ordinal terms, such as first, second, third, middle, last.
* Some sound ideas:
* banging on wall/table/lap blowing blowing a whistle  
  blowing nose clapping clicking with tongue  
  closing purse coloring hard on paper coughing  
  crumpling paper cutting with scissors dropping (various things)  
  drumming with fingers eating an apple folding paper  
  hammering hopping ` opening window or drawer  
  pouring liquid ringing a bell rubbing hands together  
  scratching sharpening a pencil slamming a book  
  smashing crackers snapping fingers stamping  
  stirring with teaspoon tearing paper turning on computer  
  walking whistling writing on board
* **Nonsense**
* Objective: To develop the ability to attend to differences between what they expect to hear and what they actually hear.

Invite children to sit down and close their eyes so that they can concentrate on what they will hear. Recite or read aloud a familiar story or poem to the children but, once in a while, change words or wording from sense to nonsense. The challenge is to detect changes whenever they occur. When they do, encourage students to explain what was wrong. As the game is replayed in more subtle variations across the year, it will also serve usefully to sharpen the children's awareness of the phonology, words, syntax, and semantics of language.

As illustrated in the following list, you can change any text in more or less subtle ways at a number of different levels including phonemes, words, grammar, and meaning.

Some ideas:

*Song a sing of sixpence* Reverse the words

*Baa baa purple sheep* Substitute words

*Twinkle, twinkle little car* Substitute words

*Humpty Dumpty wall on a sat* Swap word order

*One, two shuckle my boo* Swap word parts

*Goldilocks went inside and knocked on the door* Switch order of events

**Rhyming**

Rhyming helps children notice that sounds in our language have meaning and follow certain patterns. This is a precursor to seeing sound patterns later reproduced in print. The best way to introduce rhyming to your students is by reading lots of fun rhyming books, poems, and songs.

**In My Box**

Objective: To practice oral rhyming

Get a small box and place some pictures or items in it with pairs of familiar words that rhyme (like box/socks, cat/hat, or chair/bear). Use enough items so that everyone in your class has a turn. Sit in a circle with your students. Start with a child you know is strong in rhyming. Hold the box and choose a picture. If the picture shows a cat, say “In my box, there’s a cat”. Call on him or her to come up with a rhyming word. The child might say, “In my box, there’s a hat” (or some other rhyming word). After he or she answers with a rhyming word, hand him or her the box. Now he or she gets to choose a card and continue the play.

**Wolf and Chickens**

Objective: To practice oral rhyming

One student is the wolf at the front of the room. The rest of the class are chickens. The teacher shows the wolf a picture card or item. The wolf calls on the chickens to provide a rhyming word for the item or risk being the wolf’s dinner.

**Ping Pong**

Objective: To practice oral rhyming

The teacher provides a pair of students a word. Students must take turns naming a rhyming word back and forth until no other words can be identified.

**Going on a Lion Hunt**

Objective: To practice oral rhyming

“We’re going on a lion hunt and we’re taking a …” pet, net, jet, etc.

Start with one student and continue with words provided by each student until no more can be found. Start over with a new word.

**I Spy**

Objective: To practice oral rhyming

“I spy with my little eye something in this room that rhymes with rock.” Continue in this manner.

**Syllables**

Working with and noticing syllables within words is important. It helps students become aware of how words can be split up into smaller parts, according to sounds. The ultimate goal is to work on individual phonemes (vowels or consonants), but children must first learn the concept of “parts of words.” It’s easier for young children to start with larger parts of words and work their way down to the smaller, discrete individual sounds of phonemes.

## **Clapping Names**

### Objective: To introduce the children to the nature of syllables by leading them to clap and count the syllables in their own names

When you first introduce this activity, model it by using several names of contrasting lengths. Pronounce the first name of one of the children in the classroom syllable by syllable while clapping it out before inviting the children to say and clap the name along with you. After each name has been clapped, ask "How many syllables did you hear?"

Once children have caught on, ask each child to clap and count the syllables in his or her own name. Don't forget last names, too!

### Variations

* Ask the children to clap and count the syllables of their first and last names together.
* After determining the number of syllables in a name, ask the children to hold two fingers horizontally under their chins, so they can feel the chin drop for each syllable. To maximize this effect, encourage the children to elongate or stretch each syllable.

**Bippity Boppity Bumble Bee**

Objective: To practice listening to syllables

You can start with clapping out names, first. As students get used to the game, you can start using words with more syllables.

Sit in a circle with your students. Use a little stuffed bee or a printed bumble bee. The teacher begins the chant and walks around to a child.

Teacher: “Bippity Boppity Bumble Bee, Will You Say Your Name For Me?”

The child responds, “Jennifer.”

Teacher: “Let’s all say it.” And the class says her name out loud, while clapping once for each syllable.

Teacher: “Let’s all whisper it.” And the class whispers her name, while quiet-clapping the syllables again, once per syllable.

Teacher: “Silent” and the class mouths her name, while quiet-clapping the syllables again, once per syllable.

Teacher and class: “Bippity Boppity Bumble Bee, Thank You For Saying Your Name For Me!”

Repeat with another student and his/her name. As students become familiar with the game, you can allow students to take on the “teacher” role.

**Old MacDonald**

Objective: To practice listening to syllables

The teacher begins by telling the students they are going to learn a new game – it’s a different version of *Old MacDonald*, and it’s kind of a silly version. The teacher begins singing, “Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O. And on that farm he had a /ti/ /ger/, E-I-E-I-O”.

Without being told, students have mentally combined the syllables /ti/ and /ger/ to identify the animal. Show the children a picture of a tiger. Repeat with other types of animals.

**What's in the bag?**

Objective: To practice listening to syllables

Instead of describing what is in the bag, the teacher says the word syllable-by-syllable or sound-by-sound and the children guess the word. A correct response is confirmed when the teacher brings the object out of the bag.

**Elevator**

Objective: To practice listening to syllables

Students crouch down. The teacher provides a word and claps the syllables. Students go up the elevator by rising up with each syllable until arms are in the air and they are on their tiptoes.

INITIAL AND FINAL PHONEMES

## **Finding Things: Initial phonemes**

### Objective: To extend awareness of initial phonemes by comparing, contrasting, and identifying the initial sounds in a variety of words.

Spread a few pictures out in the middle of the circle. Ask children to find those pictures whose names start with a chosen initial sound. As each picture is found, the child should say its name and initial phoneme (e.g., *f-f-f-f-ish*, */f-f-f-f/, fish*).

### Variations

* As the children become more comfortable with the game, spread out pictures from two different sets, asking the children to identify the name and initial phoneme of each picture and to sort them into two piles accordingly.
* Pass pictures out to the children; each must identify the initial phoneme of her or his picture and put it in the corresponding pile. This game works well with small groups.
* Sound-traition: Pass pictures of objects or animals to the children, naming each picture and placing it face down on the table or carpet. Children take turns flipping pairs of pictures right side up and deciding if the initial sounds of the pictures' names are the same. If the initial sounds match, the child selects another pair; otherwise, another child takes a turn. This game works well with small groups.
* **Pass the Parcel**
* Objective: To practice identifying initial or ending phonemes
* Use a small container or box with a mystery item or picture card inside. Pass the parcel around the group to music or a rhyme similar to musical chairs. When the music stops the student must identify the beginning sound.
* Variations: identify the ending sound or a rhyming word
* **Fly Swatter**
* To practice identifying initial or ending phonemes
* Students are shown a picture card or item. A group of picture cards or items are spread out on the ground. Using a fly swatter, a student must swat the pictures of items that start with the same sound as the given picture or item as fast as they can.
* Variations: This game could be played as a relay. Ending sounds could also be used.
* **Hot Potato**
* Objective: To practice identifying initial or ending phonemes
* Students sit in a circle with a ball. Whoever has the ball starts. The teacher shows the students a picture card or item. The student must say the initial sound and then roll the ball quickly to another player. Repeat with another picture or item.
* Variations: Play using ending sounds or rhyming words.
* **Shopping List**
* Objective: To practice identifying initial phonemes
* Students take turns adding to their shopping cart items that start with a given sound.
* Player 1: In my cart I have some butter.
* Player 2: In my cart I have some butter and beans.
* Player 3: In my cart I have some butter, beans, and bacon.

## **Word Pairs: Take a sound away**

### Objective: To help the children to separate the sounds of words from their meanings.

By showing the children that if the initial phoneme of a word is removed a totally different word may result, this activity further helps children to separate the sounds of words from their meanings.

With the children seated in a circle, explain that sometimes when you take a sound away from a word, you end up with a totally different word.

To give the children an example, say "*f-f-f-ear*," elongating the initial consonant, and have the children repeat. Then say "*ear*," and have the children repeat. Ask the children if they can determine which sound has been taken away and repeat the words for them (i.e., *f-f-f-f-ear – ear – f-f-f-f-ear – ear*).

In this way, the children are challenged to attend to the initial phonemes of words even as they come to realize that the presence or absence of the initial phoneme results in two different words.

*Note:* Most children can identify the "hidden word" but have a great deal of difficulty in identifying what is taken away. Children may also be inclined to produce rhyming words rather than to focus on initial sounds. With this in mind, take care not to flip back and forth between the activities involving rhyming and initial sounds.

### Variations

* Call the children to line up by naming their first names without the initial sound (e.g., *[J]-onathon*). The children have to figure out whose name has been called and what sound is missing.

## **Word Pairs: Add a Sound**

### Objective: To introduce children to the challenge of synthesizing words from their separate phonemes

Seat the children in a circle, and begin by explaining that sometimes a new word can be made by adding a sound to a word. As an example, say "*ox*," and have the children repeat it. Then ask what will happen if they add a new sound to the beginning of the word such as f-f-f-f-f: "*f-f-f-f-f…ox, f-f-f-f…ox, f-f-f-f-ox*." The children say, "*fox!*" You should then explain, "We put a new sound on the beginning, and we have a new word!"

Until the children catch on, you should provide solid guidance, asking the children to say the word parts with you in unison (e.g., "ice…m–,–,–,…ice…m-m-m-ice…mice").

### Variations

* Invite the children to use each word of a pair in a sentence to emphasize the difference in their meanings.

## **Troll Talk**

Objective: To reinforce students' ability to synthesize words from their separate phonemes

Everyone sits in a circle, and the teacher tells a tale:

*Once upon a time, there was a kind, little troll who loved to give people presents. The only catch was that the troll always wanted people to know what their present was before giving it to them. The problem was that the little troll had a very strange way of talking. If he was going to tell a child that the present was a bike, he would say "b–i–k." Not until the child has guessed what the present was would he be completely happy. Now I will pretend to be the troll. I will name a surprise for one of you. When you figure out what it is, it will be your turn.*

Choose one child and pronounce the name of the present, phoneme by phoneme. When the child guesses the word, she or he is to name a present for somebody else. Work up from short (two- and three-sound) words to longer ones as the children become more adept at hearing the sounds. It is best to limit the game to only four or five children on any given day or it becomes a bit long. Examples of gifts include the following:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ape bean book bow bread brick broom | cheese desk dog dress eel glass ice | moose pan pea pen phone shoe skate | soap stool stump tie train truck |

*Note:* If the students are not familiar with trolls, then substitute another person or creature from folklore such as a leprechaun, unicorn, or elf.

### Variation

* Each child gets from one to three "secret" pictures. They may now give the things in the pictures as "presents," one thing at a time, to another child by sounding out the word. The child who receives the present has to guess what it is before she or he can have the picture.
* **Robot Talk**

Objective: To put phonemes together into words

* Have students talk like a robot put phonemes together into words. /b/ /a/ /t/
* **"If You're Happy and You Know It, Clap Your Hands"**
* Objective: To put phonemes together into words
* *If you think you know this word, shout it out!   
  If you think you know this word, shout it out!   
  If you think you know this word,   
  Then tell me what you've heard,   
  If you think you know this word, shout it out!*
* The teacher says a segmented word such as /k/-/a/-/t/, and the children respond by saying the blended word.
* Variation: Add a second verse with “then show me what you heard” and have students act the word out.

### **Sound-to-Word Matching**

### Objective: To put phonemes together into words

Awareness of the initial sound in a word can be done by showing the children a picture (dog) and asking the children to identify the correct word out of three: "Is this a /mmm/-og, a /d/d/d/-og, or a /sss/-og?"

A variation is to ask if the word has a particular sound: "Is there a /d/ in dog?" This can then be switched to "Which sound does dog start with — /d/, /sh/, or /l/?" This sequence encourages the children to try out the three onsets with the rime to see which one is correct.

**Old MacDonald Had a Farm**

Objective: To identify the initial phoneme

*What's the sound that starts these words?*Turtle*,* time*, and* teeth*.  
(Wait for a response from the children.)  
/t/ is the sound that starts these words:*Turtle*,* time*, and* teeth*.  
With a /t/, /t/ here, and a /t/, /t/ there,  
Here a /t/, there a /t/, everywhere a /t/, /t/.  
/t/ is the sound that starts these words:*Turtle*,* time*, and* teeth*!*

## COMPOUND PHONEMIC AWARENESS

## Requires holding a given sound in memory while performing a second operation such as determining whether two words begin with the same sound or in a word-to-word matching task.

**Dominoes**

Objective: To hold a given phoneme in memory while performing a second operation with the phoneme

Make a set of dominoes that have two pictured objects on each card. The children are required to join cards sharing beginning (or ending) sounds.

**Snap**

Objective: To hold a given phoneme in memory while performing a second operation with the phoneme

Uses cards having one picture. The children take turns drawing a card from a face-down pile and placing it in a face-up pile. When a newly drawn card has the same beginning (or end) sound as the top card in the face-up pile, the first child to identify the match by saying "snap" collects the pile.

**Sound Bingo**

Objective: To hold a given phoneme in memory while performing a second operation with the phoneme

Uses bingo cards with pictures that children mark if one of their pictures has the same beginning (or end) sound as the word said by the caller.

### USING LITERATURE

A natural and spontaneous way of providing children with exposure to phonemes is to focus on literature that deals playfully with speech sounds through rhymes. Simple rhyme patterns are easily recalled after repeated exposure, and children will get the idea of creating new rhymes.

http://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-now-brown-cow-phoneme-awareness-activities

There's a Wocket in My Pocket (Seuss, 1974), initial sounds of everyday objects are substituted as a child talks about the strange creatures around the house, such as the "zamp in the lamp." Children can make up their own strange creatures in the classroom such as the "zuk in my book."

Alliteration is the repetition of an initial consonant sound across several words, such as presented in the alphabet book Faint Frogs Feeling Feverish and Other Terrifically Tantalizing Tongue Twisters (Obligato, 1983).

Assonance, the repetition of vowel sounds within words, is often combined with rhyme, as in "It rains and hails and shakes the sails" from Sheep on a Ship (Shaw, 1989) or in humorous ways such as "The tooter tries to tutor two tooters to toot" in Moses Supposes His Toeses Are Roses (Patz, 1983).

Some books include music to go with the rhymes, such as Down by the Bay (Raffi, 1987), in which two children try to outdo one another in making up questions that rhyme, such as "Did you ever see a goose kissing a moose?"

<http://www.ashland.k12.or.us/Files/Children%27s%20books%20Phonemic%20Awareness.pdf> This website provides a good list of books including phonemic awareness skills.

Sources:

<http://w>ww.earlychildhoodteacher.org/blog/5-quick-easy-and-fun-phonemic-awareness-activities/

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/phonemic-activities-preschool-or-elementary-classroom>