

## Developing Phonics Skills

### Foundations of Reading

To learn to read well, children need to know how to recognize and pronounce words (**decoding**), what words mean (**vocabulary**) and how to understand the meaning of a group of words or connected text (**comprehension**). To build these foundations of reading, teachers use a balanced approach and focus on the goal of reading for meaning. Parents play a vital role in supporting this work at home.

### What is phonics instruction?

Phonics instruction is a way of teaching reading that stresses learning how letters match sounds and how to use this knowledge in reading and spelling.

### What role do phonics play in reading?

In the early grades, elementary phonics are introduced and letter/sound associations are stressed to help prepare children for reading and writing. By the second grade, most phonics instruction is completed and children have the basic skills they need to move on to more interpretive reading skills, such as drawing conclusions, making inferences and finding the main ideas. Some children may need continued reinforcement of phonics learning.

*“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”*

– Joseph Addison

### How can I help to build my child’s phonics’ skills at home?

There are several things you can do to support your child’s progress with phonics.

**Read books that emphasize rhyming and/or word play.** Read rhyming stories and stop before the rhyming word, so the child can guess the word.

Dr. Seuss books, such as *Hop on Pop* and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* are great fun to read and help children apply phonic skills.

**Alliteration** is the repetition of a beginning consonant sound across several words. The books *Oh Say Can You Say?* by Dr. Seuss and *World’s Toughest Tongue Twisters* by Joseph Rosenbloom offer a fun way to work with initial sounds.

Place **magnetic letters** on the refrigerator for your children to use to practice letter names and sounds, form words and/or create messages.

**Trace letters** in or on multi-sensory surfaces like cloth or sand. Practice sounds and letter formation.

**Construct letters** using various materials, such as macaroni, clay and pipe cleaners.

**Change letters to show changes in sounds.** When we take a word and change one of the letters, we are able to create a new word.

*b*it → *ba*t  
*b*at → *ca*t  
*ca*t → *cab*  
*cab* → *car*

After each change, the last word in the pair becomes the first word in the next pair. This helps children see that different letters make different sounds, and that the different sounds create a different meaning.