

Phonemic Awareness Activities

Quick listening games that help children hear, blend and change the sounds in words.

A five-minute daily routine

- 1 min** Rhyme warm-up: say two words, children show thumbs up if they rhyme.
- 1 min** Clap the syllables in three names or words.
- 2 min** Blend and segment five words (games 4 and 5).
- 1 min** One sound swap or take-away (games 8 to 10). Move on when most children answer quickly.

- 1 Rhyme or not? RHYMING**
Say two words. Thumbs up if they rhyme, thumbs down if not. Later, say one word and ask for a rhyme. Silly words count.
Try: cat, hat · sun, dog · bee, tree · fish, cake
- 2 Clap it SYLLABLES**
Say a word and clap each part together. Ask how many claps. Names work well: Ma-ri-a has three.
Try: apple, banana, dog, el-e-phant
- 3 Split and join ONSET AND RIME**
Say the first sound, pause, then the rest: /m/ ... op. Children say the whole word. Then reverse it: you say mop, they say /m/ ... op.
Try: /s/ ... un, /f/ ... ish, /st/ ... ar
- 4 Robot talk BLENDING**
Talk like a robot, one sound at a time: /k/ /a/ /t/. Children say the word in their normal voice.
Try: /d/ /o/ /g/, /sh/ /i/ /p/, /f/ /r/ /o/ /g/
- 5 Stretch it SEGMENTING**
Say a word. Children stretch it out and hold up one finger for each sound, then say the word fast.
Try: sun (3), bee (2), frog (4)
- 6 First sound hunt FIRST SOUND**
Name an object in the room. Children say only its first sound. Then play I spy: "I spy something that starts with /b/."
Try: book /b/, pen /p/, door /d/
- 7 Where is the sound? FIRST, MIDDLE, LAST**
Hold up three fingers for the three sounds of a word. Say a sound; children point to the finger where they hear it.
Try: /t/ in cat (last), /s/ in sun (first), /a/ in hat (middle)
- 8 Sound swap CHANGE A SOUND**
Say a word, then change one sound: "Say cat. Change /k/ to /h/." Make a chain and let each new word lead to the next.
Try: cat → hat → hot → hop → mop → map
- 9 Add a sound ADD A SOUND**
Say a word and add a sound at the start or end: "Say rain. Add /t/ at the start."
Try: rain → train, lock → clock, ten → tent
- 10 Take it away TAKE AWAY A SOUND**
Say a word, then say it without one part: "Say sunflower without sun." Start with syllables, then single sounds.
Try: cupcake – cup, star – /s/, clap – /k/

Word Lists for the Games

Say the sounds, not the letter names. Short words with clear sounds work best.

Rhyming pairs

cat, hat · dog, log · bee, tree · cake,
snake · goat, boat · moon, spoon · bear,
chair · bell, shell · car, star · bed, sled ·
box, fox · duck, truck · pen, ten · house,
mouse · rain, train

Syllables

1 clap: dog, sun, fish, frog, star
2 claps: apple, rabbit, monkey, pencil,
tiger
3 claps: banana, elephant, dinosaur,
octopus, umbrella
4 claps: watermelon, caterpillar,
helicopter

Onset and rime

/k/ ... at, /p/ ... ig, /s/ ... un, /b/ ... ed,
/m/ ... op, /d/ ... og
Two sounds first: /st/ ... ar, /tr/ ... ee,
/fr/ ... og, /sn/ ... ake, /kl/ ... ock

Two sounds (blend and segment)

bee /b/ /ē/, key /k/ /ē/, shoe /sh/ /oo/,
pie /p/ /ī/, egg /e/ /g/, up /u/ /p/, at
/a/ /t/, in /i/ /n/

Three sounds

cat /k/ /a/ /t/, sun /s/ /u/ /n/, dog /d/
/o/ /g/, fish /f/ /i/ /sh/, bed /b/ /e/ /d/,
pig /p/ /i/ /g/, moon /m/ /oo/ /n/, goat
/g/ /ō/ /t/, ship /sh/ /i/ /p/, cake /k/
/ā/ /k/

Four sounds

frog /f/ /r/ /o/ /g/, drum /d/ /r/ /u/
/m/, tent /t/ /e/ /n/ /t/, crab /k/ /r/ /a/
/b/, spoon /s/ /p/ /oo/ /n/, nest /n/ /e/
/s/ /t/, jump /j/ /u/ /m/ /p/, milk /m/
/i/ /l/ /k/

Sound swap chains

First sound: cat → hat → bat → mat →
sat
Last sound: bed → bell → beg
Middle sound: hat → hit → hot → hut
Mixed: sit → sat → mat → map → mop →
top

Add or take away a sound

rain ↔ train, lock ↔ clock, eye ↔ pie,
egg ↔ leg, ten ↔ tent, ear ↔ deer, at ↔
hat, an ↔ fan, it ↔ sit

Tips

Model each game first, then do it
together, then let children try alone. Say
sounds short and clean: /b/, not “buh”.
Use hand motions: clap syllables, tap
fingers for sounds, slide a hand from
shoulder to wrist to blend. Keep it quick
and playful, and stop while children still
want more.