

# PARENTS, DID YOU KNOW...?

Some of us were taught how to read 'the good old fashioned way.' We read *Dick and Jane* and did pages and pages of phonics, and... it worked for us. Some of us had the fortune (or misfortune) of coming through the *Whole Language* era at a time when whole language did not include the teaching of phonics. It was the swing of the teaching pendulum away from the traditional methods of teaching children to read, the belief that words and language needed to be learned as a whole rather than in parts. The term "*Whole*" *Language* sounded quite superior when, in fact, it wasn't whole at all.

Thankfully, the pendulum has stopped in the middle and teachers of reading now use methods which incorporate both phonics and whole language. Following are excerpts from a small informative piece, used with permission, from *Family FUNdamentals for Summer Learning (2003)*. This piece gives a bit of background that supports the necessity of phonics in decoding print. After reading this you might think that asking your child to 'sound it out' every time he or she comes upon an unfamiliar word is the way to support your child's reading skill. However, it is important to remember that there is more to reading than decoding print. If the child decodes without understanding, he/she is not actually reading. Reading requires both – decoding and understanding. SEE NEXT PAGE FOR PROMPTS TO USE WITH YOUR CHILD.

## What does it take to become a reader?

### Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is the understanding that language we speak and hear is composed of units of sound called phonemes. These sounds may be a single syllable sound as in the word "full." Or they may be a single syllable sound in words with many syllables, like the word /but/-/ter/-/cup (3 units of sound). Phonemic awareness, a part of phonological awareness, is the understanding that these syllables are made up of even smaller sounds or phonemes. For example the word "pie" has two sounds; the word "stop" has four sounds.

Why does my child need this skill?

Children need to be able to hear the separate sounds that make up words before they try to read or write them. In fact, there are three kinds of phonological and phonemic awareness: Rhyming—Children need to hear and make rhymes so they can make new words from words they already know. For example: If a child knows the word "fun," then s/he can make the word "run."

Blending—Phoneme blending helps children connect sounds in words.

Segmentation—Segmentation helps children learn to separate sentences into words and words into sounds. This will help a child to write the words s/he hears.

### Phonics

Although related to phonological awareness, phonics is different. Phonics activities can help a child connect the sounds s/he hears to the printed words s/he sees. These activities include recognizing letters and the sounds they make; hearing and writing down the sounds buried within words; and developing strategies to "decode" unfamiliar words.

Why does my child need this skill?

Children need to be taught the sounds individual printed letters and groups of letters make. Knowing the relationships between letters and sounds helps children to recognize familiar words accurately and automatically, and "decode" new words.

### Comprehension

Comprehension strategies help children understand, remember and communicate what they read. They also help children to link what they are reading to what they already know.

Why does my child need this skill?

To become independent readers and thinkers, children need lots of practice at predicting what is coming next, and then checking to see if s/he was right. They need to think about ideas and information, ask questions, and solve problems. Children need to know the steps good readers use to make sure they understand text. Students who are in control of their own reading comprehension become more purposeful, active readers.

### Fluency

Reading fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. Several skills help children read fluently: paying attention to punctuation, grouping words into meaningful chunks, and using expression. Fluency also requires children to use strategies to figure out unfamiliar words and to know a lot of sight words that can't be "sounded out."

Why does my child need this skill?

Children who read words smoothly and accurately are more likely to enjoy reading and to understand what they read. When fluent readers read silently, they recognize words automatically. When fluent readers read aloud, they read effortlessly and with expression. Readers who are weak in fluency read slowly, word by word, focusing on decoding words instead of understanding the meaning of what they read.

### Vocabulary

Vocabulary development is learning to use and understand many words, and to use them correctly in sentences.

Why does my child need this skill?

Children will read and write better when they actively build and expand their knowledge of written and spoken words, what they mean and how they are used.

*Family FUNdamentals for Summer Learning (2003).*

Here is one example of prompts that teachers have posted in their classrooms to direct student thinking as they read. As a parent, you can be even more effective if you use similar prompts.

<p><b>LOOK</b></p>  <p>at the pictures</p>	<p>Get your <b>MOUTH</b></p>  <p>ready to make the first sound</p>	<p><b>SLIDE</b> through the whole word</p> 
<p><b>Spell</b> the word out loud</p> 	<p> <b>Reread</b> Does it <b>LOOK</b> right? Does it <b>SOUND</b> right? Does it <b>MAKE SENSE</b>?</p> <p>If not -  <b>STOP</b>, go back, and read it again!</p>	<p><b>Skip</b> hard words and then go back.</p>  ... <b>Read</b> ... ... <b>Skip</b> ... ... <b>Go back and read</b> ...
<p>Try a different <b>VOWEL</b> sound.</p> <p>a e i o u</p> 	<p>Think of a <b>RHYMING</b> word you do know.</p>  <p>"If I know c-a-t spells cat, then h-a-t must spell hat."</p> 	<p> <b>"Chunk it"</b> Look for smaller words <u>hiding</u> <u>inside</u>.</p>