

Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum

By Marilyn Adams Ph.D., Barbara Foorman "Ph.D. M.A.T", Ingvar Lundberg Ph.D., Terri Beeler Ed.D.

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- One of the most popular programs available — more than 250,000 copies sold
- Easy and fun activities that take only 15-20 minutes a day
- Includes a flexible assessment test that allows group screening
- Meets new federal requirements for scientifically based reading research
- Developed by leading experts in reading instruction

Phonemic Awareness in Young Children complements any prereading program. From simple listening games to more advanced exercises in rhyming, alliteration, and segmentation, this best-selling curriculum helps boost young learners' preliteracy skills in just 15-20 minutes a day. Specifically targeting phonemic awareness — now known to be an important step to a child's early reading acquisition — this research-based program helps young children learn to distinguish individual sounds that make up words and affect their meanings.

With a developmental sequence of activities that follows a school year calendar, teachers can choose from a range of activities for their preschool, kindergarten, and first-grade classrooms. Plus, the curriculum includes an easy-to-use assessment test for screening up to 15 children at a time. This assessment not only helps to objectively estimate the general skill level of the class and identify children who may need additional testing but may also be repeated every 1-2 months to monitor progress. All children benefit because the curriculum accommodates individualized learning and teaching styles.

Here is everything a teacher needs:

- Teaching objectives
- Lesson plans and sample scripts
- Activity adaptations
- Troubleshooting guidelines
- Suggested kindergarten and first-grade schedules
- Informal, group screening


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Ed.D.**

Editorial Review

Review

"The directions are easy to understand and the lessons follow a developmental sequence beginning with the easiest and most basic activities. . . . This book could be used with any reading program. . . . The games are user-friendly and do not require a large amount of preparation time. . . . Excellent resource book."

About the Author

Marilyn Jager Adams, Ph.D., is a cognitive and developmental psychologist who has devoted her career to research and applied work in the area of cognition and education. Dr. Adams' scholarly contributions include the book *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning About Print* (MIT Press, 1994). Among honors, she has received the American Educational Research Association's Sylvia Scribner Award and The International Dyslexia Association's Samuel Torrey Orton Award.

Dr. Adams chaired the planning committee for the National Academy of Sciences (1998) report *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* and has served since 1992 on the planning or steering committees for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading. She also developed a vocabulary assessment for the 2014 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and was on the development team for the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy.

Dr. Adams has authored a number of empirically validated classroom resources, including *Odyssey: A Curriculum for Thinking* (Charlesbridge Publishing, 1986), which was originally developed for barrio students in Venezuela; *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum* (Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 1998) on language and literacy basics for emergent readers and students with special needs; Open Court's 1995 edition of *Collection for Young Scholars*, a program for reading, writing, and literacy development for elementary school students; and *Scholastic's System 44* (2009) and *iRead* (2013), technology-based programs for building literacy foundations. She has also served on the advisory board for several of the Public Broadcasting System's educational programs including *Sesame Street* and *Between the Lions*, for which she was Senior Literacy Advisor.

Dr. Adams spent most of her career with the think tank Bolt Beranek & Newman (BBN Technologies-"Where Wizards Stay up Late") in Cambridge, Massachusetts. From 2000 to 2007, she was Chief Scientist at Soliloquy Learning, which she cofounded with the goal of harnessing automatic speech recognition for helping students learn to read and read to learn. She is currently a visiting scholar in the Cognitive, Linguistic, and Psychological Sciences Department at Brown University. She has two children: John, who is working toward a Ph.D. in social psychology, and Jocie, who is striving to be a musician. Her husband, Milton, is a rocket scientist at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Charles Stark Draper Labs.

Barbara R. Foorman, Ph.D., earned her doctorate at the University of California-Berkeley. She is Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Center for Academic and Reading Skills at the University of Texas-Houston

Medical School and Principal Investigator of the grant funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), Early Interventions for Children with Reading Problems. In addition to many chapters and journal articles on topics related to language and reading development, she is the editor of *Reading Acquisition: Cultural Constraints and Cognitive Universals* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986). She is on the editorial board of *Journal of Learning Disabilities* and has guest edited special issues of *Scientific Studies of Reading, Linguistics and Education* and *Journal of Learning Disabilities*. Dr. Foorman has been actively involved in outreach to the schools and to the general public, having chaired Houston Independent School District's Committee on a Balanced Approach to Reading and having testified before the California and Texas legislatures and the Texas Board of Education Long-Range Planning Committee. Dr. Foorman is also a member of the National Academy of Sciences' Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children, the board of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading, the Consortium on Reading Excellence (CORE), and several local reading efforts.

Ingvar Lundberg, Ph.D., was first trained as a school teacher and served in inner-city schools in Stockholm, Sweden. Later, he entered an academic career and became Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Ume. He has published a dozen books, primarily in Scandinavian languages and a large number of scientific articles, particularly in the field of reading and language development. He served on the steering committee of the largest survey of reading achievement in the world, including more than 30 countries. He is a fellow of several academies and learned societies and serves on the editorial board of a number of scientific journals. He is currently affiliated with the Department of Psychology at Göteborg, Sweden, where he directs a research program on communication disabilities.

Terri Beeler, Ed.D., has more than 20 years of experience in education, in both teaching and administration. Dr. Beeler is Assistant Professor in the Department of Urban Education at the University of Houston's downtown campus. Within the responsibilities of that position, she is one of the coordinators of a totally field-based teacher education program, which allows her to work with both preservice and in-service teachers and also continue to be in classrooms with children. In addition, she does a great deal of staff development and consultant work in the area of early literacy development, specifically phonemic awareness and guided reading. She is also a co-editor of the *State of Reading*, the journal of the Texas State Reading Association, and author of *I Can Read, I can Write: Creating a Print-Rich Environment* (Creative Teaching Press, 1993).

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Excerpted from chapter 1 of **Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: A Classroom Curriculum**, by Marilyn Jager Adams, Ph.D., Barbara R. Foorman, Ph.D., Ingvar Lundberg, Ph.D., & Terri Beeler, Ed.D.

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The Nature and Importance of Phonemic Awareness

Before children can make any sense of the alphabetic principle, they must understand that those sounds that are paired with the letters are one and the same as the sounds of speech. For those of us who already know how to read and write, this realization seems very basic, almost transparent. Nevertheless, research shows

that the very notion that spoken language is made up of sequences of these little sounds does not come naturally or easily to human beings.

The small units of speech that correspond to letters of an alphabetic writing system are called *phonemes*. Thus, the awareness that language is composed of these small sounds is termed *phonemic awareness*. Research indicates that, without direct instructional support, phonemic awareness eludes roughly 25% of middle-class first graders and substantially more of those who come from less literacy-rich backgrounds. Furthermore, these children evidence serious difficulty in learning to read and write (see Adams, 1990, for a review).

Why is awareness of phonemes so difficult? The problem, in large measure, is that people do not attend to the sounds of phonemes as they produce or listen to speech. Instead, they process the phonemes automatically, directing their active attention to the meaning and force of the utterance as a whole. The challenge, therefore, is to find ways to get children to notice the phonemes, to discover their existence and separability. Fortunately, many of the activities involving rhyme, rhythm, listening, and sounds that have long been enjoyed with preschool-age children are ideally suited for this purpose. In fact, with this goal in mind, all such activities can be used effectively toward helping children to develop phonemic awareness.

The purpose of this book is to provide concrete activities that stimulate the development of phonemic awareness in the preschool or elementary classroom. It is based on a program originally developed and validated by Lundberg, Frost, and Petersen (1988) in Sweden and Denmark. After translating and adapting it for U.S. classrooms, we field-tested it with kindergarten students and teachers in two schools receiving Title I funds. We, too, found that kindergartners developed the ability to analyze words into sounds significantly more quickly than kindergartners who did not have this program (Foorman, Francis, Beeler, & Fletcher, 1997). This ability to analyze words into sounds is exactly the skill that promotes successful reading in first grade (Wagner, Torgesen, & Rashotte, 1994).

About the Structure of Language

In order to build phonemic awareness in all children, classroom teachers should know a little about the structure of language, especially phonology. *Phonology* is the study of the unconscious rules governing speech-sound production. In contrast, *phonetics* is the study of the way in which speech sounds are articulated, and *phonics* is the system by which symbols represent sounds in an alphabetic writing system.

Phonological rules constrain speech-sound production for biological and environmental reasons. Biological constraints are due to the limitations of human articulatory-motor production. For example, humans are not able to produce the high-frequency vocalizations of whales. Other constraints on our ability to produce speech have to do with the way our brains classify and perceive the minimal units of sound that make a difference to meaning — the units we call *phonemes*.

The differences between the sounds of two phonemes are often very subtle: Compare /b/ with /p/. Yet, these subtle differences in sound can signal dramatic differences in meaning: Compare *bat* with *pat*. Fortunately, because phonemes are the basic building blocks of spoken language, babies become attuned to the phonemes of their native language in the first few months of life. However, this sensitivity to the sounds of the phonemes and the differences between them is not conscious. It is deeply embedded in the subattentional machinery of the language system.

Phonemes are also the units of speech that are represented by the letters of the alphabetic language. Thus, developing readers must learn to separate these sounds, one from another, and to categorize them in a way that permits understanding how words are spelled. It is this sort of explicit, reflective knowledge that falls under the rubric of *phonemic awareness*. Conscious awareness of phonemes is distinct from the built-in

sensitivity that supports speech production and reception. Unfortunately, phonemic awareness is not easy to establish.

Part of the difficulty in acquiring phonemic awareness is that, from word to word and speaker to speaker, the sound of any given phoneme can vary considerably. These sorts of variations in spoken form that do *not* indicate a difference in meaning are referred to as *allophones* of a phoneme. For example, in the northern part of the United States, the pronunciation of *grease* typically rhymes with *peace*, whereas in parts of the South, it rhymes with *sneeze*. Similarly, the pronunciations of the vowels vary greatly across regions, dialects, and individuals. Alternately, variations in spoken form sometimes eliminate phonetic distinctions between phonemes. Thus, for some people, the words *pin* and *pen* are pronounced differently with distinct medial sounds corresponding to their distinct vowels. For other people, however, these words are phonetically indistinguishable, leaving context as the only clue to meaning. Indeed, because of variations in the language even linguists find it difficult to say exactly how many phonemes there are in English; answers vary from 44 to 52.

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