Phonics Shed

What is Phonics Shed?

Phonics Shed is the phonics programme used in school to teach your child how to read and write.

It includes daily 30-minute sessions to teach essential skills for reading and writing. The Phonics Shed programme is narrative based, with lots of fun and engaging characters, songs and stories to help develop a love of reading and writing alongside the other basic skills it teaches. It is split into four chapters and is mostly used from ages 3 to 7.

What is Phonics?

The government recommends phonics as the best way to teach children to read and write.

Phonics teaches children to identify the smallest units of sound within a word (known as phonemes). It helps them to begin to decode the words, which means reading a word by blending its sounds together and spelling a word by breaking them down (known as segmenting).

Phonics Sounds Complicated!

Written language is like a code. Phonics teaches children to crack that code and then use it to read and write. Children learn the simplest letters and sounds first and then progress to get the hang of trickier ones later. Each lesson uses a variety of activities and plenty of repetition to help the children master phonics.

Cracking the code

Chapter 1 is all about building the foundation to reading and writing. Your child will develop their listening, comprehension and motor skills. Then, from Chapter 2 to 4, there are six main skills your child will be taught in phonics sessions:

1. **GPC:** This stands for 'Grapheme-Phoneme Correspondence'. This simply means that children are taught all of the phonemes (sounds) in the English language and which letters (graphemes) make those sounds. Sometimes more than one letter makes a sound: A digraph is when two letters make a sound, for example 'ch' an 'ck' in 'chicken', and a trigraph is when three letters make a sound such as 'igh' in 'night'. There are some GPCs that use four letters, but these are not taught until towards the end of the programme. In Phonics Shed, each GPC has a special character and an action to help children to remember it. Copyright © 2021 Education Shed Ltd 2

2. **Letter Formation:** When children are taught a GPC for an individual letter for the first time (in Chapter 2), they are also taught the letter's name and a rhyme to remember how to write it. They can then use the name of the letter to spell out graphemes that have more than one letter. Digraphs and trigraphs are supported by the individual letter characters from Chapter 2 so that the children have a consistent guide on how to form the letters needed. Children are also taught how to form capital letters in Chapter 2 and begin to learn when to use them (at the start of a Name or Sentence). They have their own character, which links to the lower-case character, and a special formation rhyme to help them write those too.

3. Blending: Your child will be taught to say the sounds that make up a word and then merge the sounds together until they can hear what the word is. The method used to teach this is Sound it, Squash it, Say it:

* Sound the word out, e.g. c-a-t. Using pure sounds (/t/ not 'tuh', see p.4) and the sounds rather than letter names (/k/ not 'see').

* Squash the sounds together by saying them in order faster than before.

* Say the word that is made by squashing the sounds together. Your child will start with shorter words (known as CVC or consonant-vowel-consonant words, like 'cat' or 'dog') and progress to longer words.
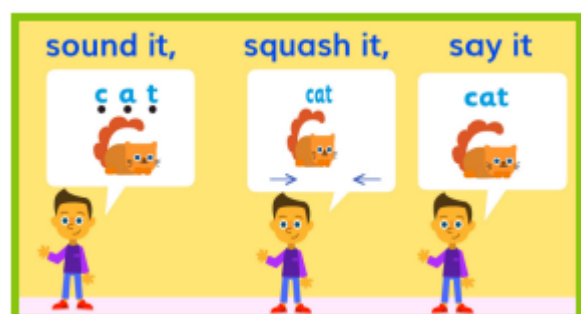
4. Segmenting: This is the opposite of blending – breaking up the sounds so that they can spell the words. The method used to teach this is Say it, Stretch it, Sound it:

* Say the word.

* Split it up into its individual sounds. Again, use pure sounds here. Saying it slowly will help.

* Say the sounds that make up the word. Once your child knows more than one spelling for a sound and/or more than one sound for a spelling they will begin to use best fit rules to choose which one to use.
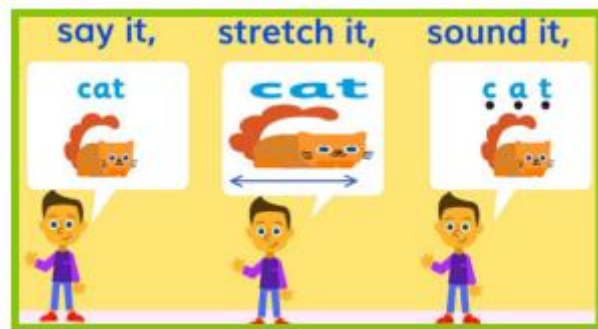
5. Best Fit Rules: When the children are taught an alternative spelling for a sound they already know, they will also be taught which one will most likely be used at which point in words.

These rules aren't often set in stone, but it is a good starting point

to being able to spell words correctly when writing. These rules can be tricky to remember and you may find that children will spell words incorrectly at first. For example, 'kat' is technically incorrect, but it demonstrates a great start to understanding how to decode words and the correct sound has been chosen. These errors should be corrected gently.

Children will also be taught to compare how the same letter can sometimes make a different sound, for example 'c' can make a /s/ or

/k/ sound (such as in 'princess' and 'cat'). They will be taught to try the different sounds out and see which one sounds right in the word, generally based on where it is in the word and what other sounds surround it. For example, 'c' often acts like an 's' before 'e', 'i' or 'y'.

6. Common Exception Words: There are a small number of words that occur very regularly in English. These are known as High Frequency Words (or HFWs). These words will be focused on during lessons when they become decodable in the scheme. However, some of these words have rare spellings so that they are not fully-decodable. For example, 'of', 'the', 'to' and 'so' are so common that they are handy to know before they are decodable. These are known as Common Exception Words (CEWs) or partially decodable words. You can spot these words as they will have some bold letters – the bold letters are the parts of the word that the children have not learned to decode yet. They are taught to decode the part of the word they know, and they will be told how to say the part of the word they can't decode yet. They are taught this way so your child can read longer texts sooner. You will find these CEWs in some of the reading books that get sent home.

How else can I help? You can also help by encouraging your child to use their phonics skills when they see words in everyday life, such as on food packets, bus timetables, leaflets, menus and signs and helping them to attempt to decode what the words say using 'sound it, squash it, say it' to sound them out and by highlighting GPCs they are learning in class.

Pronunciation When showing your child how to make sounds, it is important to use 'pure' sounds. Sometimes people add an 'uh' at the end of sounds, this is called a schwa. It is harder to blend sounds that have a schwa added. For example, 'cuh'-'a'-'tuh' is harder to

blend together than 'k'-'a'-'t'. Also, it is important to note that some sounds are long sounds, while some are short. For example, 'ssss', 'nnnnn' and 'mmmm' are long, stretched sounds, whereas 'p', 'd' and 't' are short, snappy sounds. Many people make longer sounds into shorter sounds using schwas, such as 'suh' for 's' and 'nuh' for 'n' and this again makes them more difficult to blend. Using the letter names to aid spelling is important when children begin to learn sounds that are made with more than one letter and alternative spellings for sounds. However, blending and segmenting must still be done using the pure sounds. For example, 'play' would be segmented as '/p/-/l/-/ay/' (not /p/-/l/-/a/-/y/) and then you would highlight that the 'aaayy' sound is made by the letters 'a' ('ay') and 'y' ('why').

What Next? For more information on how to pronounce the different sounds, what order GPCs are taught in and which characters and actions are used for each GPC ask your child's teacher for a copy of the 'GPC and Character Overview' booklet.

More information can be found on the Phonics Shed website: www.phonicsshed.com. If you have any further questions, please ask the class teacher or Mrs Warner (Phonics Co-ordinator)

Thank you for reading. We hope you enjoy sharing the Phonics Shed journey with your child.