

## Phonics Activities

### 1. Read Decodable Books

Decodable books focus on developing a child's mastery of specific sounds and spellings through a series of books that begin with very simple letter/sound combinations (like *hat* or *bat*), and then advance to more complex words in later books. These books build upon what the child has already learned. They are designed for independent student reading. (They do *not* make good read-aloud books).

Most decodable book series begin with a few consonants and a short vowel sound (for example, /ă/ as in *apple*). A good decodable book series will introduce all of the basic consonant sounds and all of the short vowel sounds before advancing to long vowel letter/sound combinations.

For beginning readers, it is important that the series of books does not introduce too many new letter/sound combinations at the same time, and that the majority of words in the book can be sounded out using the letter/sound combinations that have been introduced. If a book is labeled as “decodable” or “phonics reader” but introduces too many letter/sound combinations at one time, or contains quite a few words that cannot be sounded out with the letter/sound combinations given, then set that book aside for later when the student has a stronger understanding of phonics.

A variety of decodable book series are available. Some focus on a specific letter/sound combination. If you know, for example, that a child struggles with “ch” words, you can go right to the book in the series that focuses on that particular letter-sound combination. A good source for these types of decodable books is [www.readinga-z.com/books/decodable-books/](http://www.readinga-z.com/books/decodable-books/).

Others decodable books introduce a couple of consonants and a vowel sound so that students can read CVC (Consonant-Vowel-Consonant) words in the context of a story. *The Bob Books* by Bobby Lynn Maslen is a particularly effective series at helping beginning readers learn to sound out basic decodable text. Still others focus specifically on vowel sounds and the letter(s) that make them. These books are particularly good for older struggling readers who know the consonant sounds, but struggle with the vowel combinations. A great example of this type of decodable series is *Now I'm Reading!* by Nora Gaydos.

### 2. Read-Aloud Books that Focus on Letter/Sound Combinations

Read-aloud books can be a great help in teaching children letter/sound combinations. Alphabet books almost always include words that start with each letter. They are a great way to teach both the way the letter looks and the sound(s) the letter makes. They are especially helpful for global learners who need to understand the big picture before they can learn the individual parts. There are also books that focus on a particular letter/sound combination. For instance, Stan and Jan Berenstain have created *The A Book*, *The B Book*, and *The C Book*. All three are humorous books that focus on a particular letter. Likewise, Jane Belk Moncure has created a book for each letter in the alphabet. The books are all have titles such as *My “b” Book* or *My “e” Sound Box*.

### 3. Go on a Word Hunt

This is similar to a scavenger hunt, but even easier. Start by identifying what letter/sound combination you want to work on with children. The task is for children to see how many words they can find that have the letter/sound combination you identified. Give them a set amount of time, such as 5 minutes, to walk around the room and find as many words as they can with the letter/sound combination you've targeted.

This works best with letter/sound combinations that are consistent. For example, the /m/ sound is almost always spelled with an *m* and the /t/ sound is almost always spelled with a *t*, while the /f/ sound might be spelled with an *f* or *ph*. As the student finds objects or words that fit the targeted sound/letter combination,

either have the student write down the word the best they can or write it down for them, depending on their spelling ability.

If you want to challenge students who are more experienced with spelling, choose a letter/sound combination such as *c* with the hard-*c* sound /*k*/. In this example, only words that have a *c* and the /*k*/ sound would count (*candy, cat, care, car, etc.*). Words with the soft-*c* sound would not count (*city, center, etc.*), and words that start with the /*k*/ sound but begin with a *k* would not count (*kitten, kite, etc.*).

Competition variation: The child with the most words wins.

#### 4. Draw Word Family Flowers (or Bugs)

Word families are groups of words that rhyme and share a spelling pattern. For example, *mop, top, and hop* are all in the word family “*op*.”

Draw a circle in the center of a piece of paper. Around that circle, draw several more circles so that it looks like a giant flower. In the center circle, write the word family; for example, “*ack*.” The child then writes a letter(s) in the other circles that, when put in front of “*ack*,” form a word. In this case, adding *b, st,* and *r* would create *back, stack* and *rack*. You can draw the circles so that they make other shapes, like a caterpillar or a ladybug.

#### 5. Play the Mystery Word Game

Provide students with letters that form a word or words, but the letters are not in order of the word. Students use the letters to create as many words as they can. For beginning readers, use three-letter CVC words and have the students move the letters around until they can form a word. For example, if you give the child an *a, b,* and *t*, the child could come up with *bat, at,* or *tab*. As students grow in their reading ability, you could give them the letters in a longer word such as *a, e, m, s,* and *t*. The students would be able to create a variety of words with those letters (for example, *mat, sat, me, sea, tea, meat, seam, etc.*), culminating with a word that uses all of the letters (for example, *steam, meats, mates*).

#### 6. Slide, See, and Say Flashcards

Nora Gaydos developed a set of flashcards that allow the tutor or student to gradually open a window so that the student could see one sound of the word at the time. The tutor or student can slide the cover back and forth to help the student learn to blend the sounds together in order to form the word on the flashcard. She created two sets of the flashcards:

- *Now I'm Reading!: Slide, See and Say Flashcards: 50 Short Vowel Words*
- *Now I'm Reading!: Slide, See and Say Flashcards Long Vowel Words*

