Dandelion

Phonics Teacher Guide

Catch-up



PhonicBooks®

DK Learning



Produced for DK by Westchester Education Services

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First published in Great Britain in 2024 by
Dorling Kindersley Limited
DK, One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens,
London, SW11 7BW

The authorised representative in the EEA is
Dorling Kindersley Verlag GmbH. Arnulfstr. 124,
80636 Munich, Germany

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
001–343409–Dec/2024

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A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.
ISBN: 978-0-2416-9991-1

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For details, contact: DK Publishing Special Markets,
1745 Broadway, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10019
SpecialSales@dk.com

www.dk.com

Printed and bound in China



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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS PHONIC BOOKS?

Phonic Books specialises in publishing systematic synthetic phonic books for beginner and catch-up readers.

The company was founded in 2006 by Wendy Tweedie, Tami Reis-Frankfort, and Clair Wilson, three special needs teachers passionate about teaching all children to read. Using their expertise, they set about developing phonic reading books for young children and older readers.

Following demand from customers, the range has extended from the initial 10 titles to over 300 today, and is continuing to grow. Our UK range of books caters for pupils in Reception to older readers in secondary school.

With a growing reputation for quality and effectiveness, our books are now used by schools, tutors, and parents in the UK and 40 countries around the world.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



The Phonics Teacher Guide Catch-up is organised into three main parts. The first part introduces foundational concepts and prevalent teaching strategies in phonics instruction.

In the second part, the focus shifts to the practical elements of the Phonic Books programme. It provides an overview of the programme, a scope and sequence, guidelines for lesson planning, complementary teaching methods and strategies for differentiation providing teachers with the necessary tools for effective teaching.

The third section of the guide forms its core: the lesson plans for the Phonic Books programme for catch-up readers. The first set of lesson plans, Moon Dogs Set 1, focuses on the alphabet's sounds articulated in CVC words and expands to include double consonants. Progressing to That Dog!, learners are introduced to an expanded set of CVC words, alongside CVCC words, adjacent consonants and digraphs. In the next set, the lesson plans explore split vowel spellings, guided by the Moon Dog Split Vowel Spellings series. In the next set of lesson plans, the Moon Dogs Vowel Spellings series, pupils are introduced to alternative vowel spellings. The final set ends with the Island Adventure series, which delves into further alternative spellings for vowel sounds and features longer texts.

Although the guide primarily centers on these four series, its lesson plans are designed to be adaptable to any series from the Phonic Books catalogue. The guide includes a diagnostic assessment tool that pinpoints which phonics skills require attention, and then offers reading suggestions to create a personalised learning journey. Through identifying a pupil's strengths and areas for improvement, educators and parents can choose the most appropriate series as a starting point. They can then teach or adjust the lesson plans to align with their pupil's skill level.

Each series introduces a new phonic focus, while reinforcing previously acquired knowledge and high-frequency words.

Teachers can access curriculum mapping grids on the Phonic Books website to align these lesson plans with their specific curriculum requirements.

A glossary is provided at the back of the book.

ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

Decodable books, such as the Phonic Books series, are important for teaching foundational skills. These controlled texts allow the pupil to practise their phonetic knowledge and read successfully at each developmental stage. They also encourage pupils to use the most effective and reliable reading strategies for life (sounding out words).

Many teachers find they need additional resources to support pupils who are beginner and older readers. For example: students may face challenges with letter sounds, phonemic awareness, retaining phonics lessons or have gaps in their vocabulary. The Phonic Books series, encompassing both decodable readers and activity books, can be used as a classroom resource in various ways: with a whole class, in reading groups, or in 1:1 reading support.

The Phonic Books website also contains many free teaching resources as well as advice for teachers. The resources include phonics infographics, teaching strategies, word lists, word chains, dictation exercises, phonic code tables, high-frequency word charts, game templates and progress trackers. The website also includes assessment tools such as reading assessments and assessment cards, alongside advice on how to use the Phonic Books series in different educational settings.



SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

This teacher guide primarily focuses on the Moon Dogs, That Dog! and Island Adventure series of decodable books and the corresponding activity books. However, Phonic Books has a wealth of parallel books and supplementary materials to help teachers with their phonics instruction. More details are provided in the programme overview section on page 19.

FOUNDATIONS OF PHONICS

WHAT IS PHONICS?

Phonics is a method of teaching reading and writing that focuses on the relationship between sounds (**phonemes**) and their spellings (**graphemes**). It involves teaching pupils to connect sounds in words with letters or groups of letters and to blend these sounds to form recognisable words.

English has a complex writing system. It has 26 letters but roughly 44 sounds (this depends on pronunciation), leading to roughly 160+ different spellings for these 44 sounds. In order to teach them in a methodical way, they have been organised according to the 44 sounds they spell. This organisation is called the **Alphabetic Code** or **Phonic Code**. Research has shown that pupils who are taught these letter–sound correspondences will learn to decode words more successfully. Decoding underpins fluency, and fluency underpins reading comprehension.

Unlike languages with "transparent" writing systems like Italian and Spanish, where letters spell sounds in a simple and consistent way, English has an "opaque" writing system. Its complexity is a result of layers of adopted words from different languages and shifts in pronunciation over many years. Consequently, learning to read in English is more time-consuming, often taking years compared to the few months it might take in more phonetically consistent languages.

Where to start in phonics instruction

All phonics programmes start with the sounds of the letters of the alphabet. The Phonic Books programme starts with the simple principle of one letter corresponding to one sound. Pupils initially learn a few letters at a time, building simple words as they progress.

THE ALPHABETIC CODE abc

The **Alphabetic Code** is the framework that shows how the 44 sounds of English are represented by letters and letter combinations.

Key aspects include:

1. 26 letters are used and reused in many different combinations to represent the 44 sounds of speech.
2. A sound can be represented by 1–4 letters.
3. A sound can be spelled in numerous ways.
4. A spelling (or grapheme) can represent different sounds.

Pupils need to recognise these letter–sound relationships automatically to become fluent readers. Due to the complexity of the code, many phonics programmes will first introduce a simple part of it and later the more complex letter–sound correspondences.

CHALLENGES IN THE ALPHABETIC CODE

Navigating the complexities of the Alphabetic Code can be a daunting task, especially for students learning English. The Alphabetic Code is marked by a notable disparity between the sounds (phonemes) and the letters (graphemes) used to represent them. This mismatch leads to various challenges.

English uses the same letters to represent different sounds because of the mismatch between the number of letters and sounds. Because of this disparity, letters are reused to spell the extra sounds. For example, the letters 's' and 'h' together spell a completely new sound: /sh/ as in the word "**sh**ip." This is a **consonant digraph**. That wouldn't be such a problem if our Alphabetic Code were simple and straightforward – but it isn't!

Sounds spelled by 1–4 letters

Sounds in English can be spelled by 1–4 letters. In the word "cat", each letter spells one sound. In the word "chip", the consonant digraph 'ch' spells the sound /ch/. Here two letters spell one sound. In the word "night", the vowel team 'igh' spells one sound /ie/. Finally, in the word "dough", the four-letter spelling 'ough' spells just one sound, /oe/.

Multiple spellings for one sound

A further complication is that a sound can be spelled in different ways. For example, the sound /ae/ can be spelled in numerous ways: r**ai**n, m**ay**, c**a**m**e**, th**ey**, w**eigh**, v**ei**l, gr**ea**t, etc. Pupils need to learn these alternatives so that when they see them within words, they know how to sound them out. And when they learn to encode (spell), students will need to remember which alternative fits in which word.

One spelling, multiple sounds

Not only are there different ways to spell these sounds, but once learnt, pupils find that some spellings can be pronounced in different ways. For example, the spelling 'ea' spells the sound /e/ in "h**ea**d," /ee/ in "m**ea**t," and /ae/ in "gr**ea**t."

These are difficult concepts to teach, and students need a structured system to learn them. This is why it is so important that reading instruction is taught in a systematic and structured way. When taught well, the Alphabetic Code is unlocked and pupils learn to decode and encode any word.

UNLOCKING THE ALPHABETIC CODE

Demonstrating the mechanics

We begin by illustrating the basic mechanics of the English language: reading from left to right, and understanding how individual letters and their combinations represent distinct sounds in speech.

Teaching the code

We then teach the Alphabetic Code, focusing on specific letter–sound correspondences in the English language.

Neglecting to teach the Alphabetic Code risks depriving pupils of the key to learning to read and the vast opportunities for learning and exploration it offers.

Diagnostic Assessment

Catch-up Series

When a pupil begins a reading programme, it is important to assess where the pupil is at, what knowledge and skills they have acquired and what they need to learn. It is also useful to observe their reading strategies. This will inform the teacher where to start and what to focus on. This is particularly important for pupils who are struggling with reading. This assessment will help to determine from which point the teacher should start teaching. The "Recommendations" sheet will match suitable decodable books (from the Phonic Books range) to the reading level of the pupil.

How to use this Diagnostic Assessment

1. Cut out the reading cards below. The pupil should read them in sequential order. The teacher's sheet is for the teacher to record the pupil's responses.
2. Ask the pupil to start with sounding out the letters at the beginning of the assessment. Note if the pronunciation of the sounds is "precise" (no "uh" after the consonants). Is the pupil using letter names instead of sounds?
3. Explain to the pupil that the words in lists 2–5 are nonsense words which help to assess decoding skills.
4. If the pupil starts to struggle, complete that section for diagnostic purposes. The teacher will need to use their judgement as to whether to start at this point or to start from the previous section in order to build up the confidence of the learner.
5. Record what the pupil has said (not just a check or cross). This will inform the teacher about the pupil's reading strategies.
6. Use the "Recommendations" sheet to see where to start and which books to use with your pupil.

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Pupil's reading cards

Card 1

s a t i m n o p b c
g h d e f v k l r u
j w z x y ff ll ss zz

Card 2

sof jum rel ked vug ziff

Card 3

kand seft ump roft benk lant

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