

Play On Words

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“Don’t gobblefunk around with words.”

The BFG, Roald Dahl

Beloved childrens’ author Roald Dahl must have had a twinkle in his eye as he wrote this for the giant who finds words such a “twitch-tickling problem”. Inventing words like “frobscottle”, “whoopsy-splunkers” and “frizzlecrump”, Dahl gives us not only the joy of reading these delicious words aloud but encourages us to **play with language**. The skill of **manipulating sounds within spoken words is the foundation of literacy** – it unlocks the door to written communication and therefore much of the world around us. Yes, **oral language is crucial for reading and writing**.

Simply, your child must learn that **spoken words consist of speech sounds which act as building blocks to create words**. For example, ‘dog’ is made up of 3 phonemes: /d/, /o/ and /g/. This knowledge allows your son or daughter to learn to spell (ie. write letters or letter combinations that represent sounds) and read (ie. decode words by looking at letters and “hearing” the corresponding sounds).

Luckily, playing with words is a whole lot of fun (and less messy than playing with food)! Your child will benefit greatly from early, frequent exposure to activities that develop the following:

Rhyming (eg. bake – take – cake):

- Sing nursery rhymes to and with your child. The following will get you started:
<https://www.abcmusic.com.au/discography/australias-favourite-nursery-rhymes-1-various-artists>
http://raisingchildren.net.au/baby_karaoke/baby_karaoke_landing.html
- Pick a word, then think of as many words as you can that rhyme with it. Try ‘pig’, ‘bat’, ‘pack’, ‘right’, ‘take’...
- Read Dr Seuss books

Alliteration (eg. mean monkeys make a mess):

- Pick a sound (eg. “sss” or “mmm”) or letter and make up a silly sentence with lots of words starting with that sound or letter, eg. “My mum munches on many M ‘n’ Ms...”

Syllables (eg. te-le-phone):

- Clap and count the syllables in a word

Blending sounds (c-a-t → cat):

- Take turns arranging magnet letters on the fridge into words

Isolating sounds (eg. dog → d-og):

- Identify the first and last sounds in a word
- Write word beginnings (eg. “sp”) and word endings (eg. “ace”) on cards and see how many real and nonwords you can create
- Speak Pig Latin

Segmenting words (eg. fish → f-i-s-h):

- Count the number of sounds and identify the first, second, third sound etc.

Deleting sounds (eg. spill → pill):

- See what you’re left with after removing a sound (“Let’s say ‘spill’ without the “sss” ...” or “What do you get when you take away the first sound?”)

Substituting sounds (eg. top → mop):

- Take away the first or last sound or a word and replace it with another (“Say ‘table’; now take away the /t/ and put /f/ at the start”)

Note that blending ability will emerge before segmenting, with manipulation being most difficult. **Play with nonsense words** too as this helps children with vocabulary and figuring out the rules of English, such as which sounds are “allowed” to sit together. For example, when substituting sounds, ask your child whether the result is a real word, eg. top à zop, or when playing with magnet letters, ask if you can start a word with ‘zbr’.

Other resources:

- Letterland is an excellent resource to help children learn to associate sounds with letters and how to form letter shapes.
<http://www.letterland.com.au/parents>
- Literacy activities for children
http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/activities_to_promote_literacy.html
<http://www.phonologicalawareness.org/phoneme>

Milestones of Literacy Development

Typical Age	Literacy Socialization	Phonological Awareness	Print Knowledge
0-2 yr	Enjoys joint book-reading Learns to hold book right-side up Learns to turn pages Answers questions about pictures, characters	Exposure to rhyme initiates rhyme awareness	Learns to distinguish print from pictures
2-5 yr	Learns the need to turn page to get to next part of story Learns left-right progression of print Learns print is stable; anyone reading a book reads the same words	Can segment sentences into words Can segment words into syllables Can recognize/produce rhymes Can recognize/produce words with same beginning sound Can segment/blend words by onset/rime (s + un = sun)	Learns alphabet song Learns to recognize and name letters Learns letters "have" sounds Learns clusters of letters separated by space form words
5-7 yr	Reads picture books for pleasure, with assistance (e.g., audio-taped book) Reads picture books for pleasure, independently	Can identify (name) first sound in word Can list words that start w/same sound Can count sounds in words Can blend 3-4 sounds to make a word (/h/ + /n/ + /d/ = hand) Can segment words into 3-4 phonemes (hand = /h/ + /n/ + /d/) Can manipulate sounds in words (What's hop without /p/? [ha/])	Learns alphabetic principle: Words are made up of sounds; sounds can be represented by letters Learns all letter names, letter sounds for consonants Learns sounds for vowels Can match letters to sounds
7-9 yr	Reads "chapter books" for pleasure, independently May read non-fiction for pleasure, as well	Can play with sounds in words, as in pig latin and other secret codes	Begins to learn conventions for punctuation, capitalization, other conventions of print

From Rhea Paul's "Language Disorders: From Infancy through Adolescence"

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