

Home Reading Program

Infancy through Preschool

ALPHABET PHONOGRAMS WITH WORDS

Phonogram in word stands out and words contain the phoneme.

Description of Alphabet Phonograms With Words

There are 39 double-sided flashcards. The phonogram is shown on the face, and an accompanying word is shown on back. There are more alphabet phonograms than letters of the alphabet because phonograms represent sounds, and there are more than 26 letter sounds comprising alphabet phonograms. The sounds of speech are called *phonemes*, and every phoneme has its own phonogram card and word.

How to assemble the flashcards

Make a printout of the flashcards. One side of the flashcard shows the phonogram and the other side shows the word. Put the sheets back to back, matching the words to the phonograms. Use index paper or cardboard for backing. Place the backing between the sheets and insert the flashcard into loose-leaf sheet protectors.

Some pointers before you begin

- Practice your presentation in front of a mirror until you are comfortable handling the flashcards. Do this before showing them to the child.
- Show flashcards when both you and the baby are feeling well and are in good spirits. Otherwise, wait for a better time.
- Good lighting is essential.

- Eliminate noise and distractions.
- Pick a time when the child is not doing something he enjoys and be certain you are not interrupting him.
- Phonograms should be shown in alphabetical order the first few times they are presented. Then you may mix-up the order and show them randomly.

Note: to reinforce and retain alphabetical order, continue singing the Alphabet Song and reciting the alphabet for the child. Review Alphabet Flashcards from time-to-time if the child maintains interest in seeing them.

- You will be presenting the phonograms without the words before showing the phonograms with the words.

Presenting Phonograms

1. Before you show the phonograms, tell the child you have phonograms and that you will be happy to show them to him. Ask him if he would like that. (He may not be able to answer you, but it is respectful that you should still ask.) His looking at the flashcards shows his consent.
2. Before you begin tell the baby that phonograms are symbols representing the sounds of speech. Add that phonograms are alphabetic symbols and are comprised of the letters of the alphabet.
3. Take a few cards in alphabetical order, holding them in one hand, with the word facing you. The word is the key to your pronunciation of the phonogram.

Note: How many cards you would show depends upon the interest of the child.

4. Hold the flashcards steady at the baby's level and at a comfortable distance where the baby can see clearly without straining –about 18 inches for an infant. Get down on the floor with him.

5. Take the flashcards from behind and bring them to the front, one at a time, saying the name of each phonogram as the child looks at the flashcard.

Note: You may want to put the flashcards on your lap and raise-up the top flashcard for the child to see, or you may prefer putting them in a ring binder and flipping them over as in a flip chart.

6. Show the child the phonogram and clearly articulate the sound the phonogram represents.

Note: The sounds that phonograms represent are called *phonemes*. The word on the back of the flashcard is the key to the pronunciation of the phoneme.

7. DO NOT present the words until you have shown the phonograms, at least, once. You could show them two or three times, as long as the child has interest, but move on to words before phonograms become old hat. Words will keep the child's interest.

8. Presentations should be done as quickly and as smoothly as you are comfortable and proficient.

Presenting the Phonograms with the Words

Follow the above guidelines but turn the flashcard around and say the word shown on the other side.

Maintaining the Child's Interest

Keep in mind that the rule is to stop before the child loses interest, so that the child will be eager to see the flashcards the next time you show them. Don't keep showing cards if the child is not looking, and don't try to force his attention upon the flashcards. If it works better for you or for the child to show fewer flashcards or more flashcards, show the number that works best.

WHY TEACH THE ALPHABET OR SING THE ABC SONG BEFORE LEARNING PHONOGRAMS?

A child's familiarity with the alphabet is good preparation for learning phonograms, and music helps the developing infant ear to develop like nothing else does! Sing the Alphabet Song and recite the alphabet soon after the baby is born. Singing the ABC Song will key the child's interest in the alphabet, and he will want to see the alphabet flashcards when you show them –because the baby is curious to know what is this ABC, etc., that he has heard sung to him, so often. In addition, knowing the alphabet is to have an essential tool for spelling, as well as for mastering alphabetical order, which is important to know when consulting the dictionary, besides having many other practical uses.

Help the baby gain phonemic awareness by singing the ABC Song.

Phonemic awareness (*being able to hear the sounds of speech that the phonograms represent*) comes easily when the child knows the names of the letters of the alphabet –because the names of most of the letters contain the sounds (*called phonemes*) that the alphabet phonograms represent. That is why the letters were given the names that they have in the first place! By learning the alphabet the baby is learning to hear and, at the same time, he is being prepared for reading. Singing and reciting the alphabet is a simple way for parents to clearly convey the basic sounds of speech to the newborn whose ear is still developing.

Phonograms consist of the 26 letters of the alphabet, which combine in certain ways to comprise the 70 phonograms. Phonograms are taught, not according to the names of the alphabetic characters (letters), but the sounds that the characters represent.

Phonograms First?

Some experts say you should teach phonograms first and that the names of the letters should come much later – even as late as when the child starts school! I disagree with postponing the alphabet, since a baby can so easily learn the alphabet when parents sing the ABCs and recite the alphabet for the baby. So why make the child wait until he is in school –when memorizing is not nearly so effortless and when a baby can learn it effortlessly?

And why begin with phonograms, which are more complex and not as easy to hear as the letter names. Why not rather begin with the alphabet, which is simple, starting with the names of the letters, which names are easy to distinguish? Learning pure phonemes can be difficult for the infant to hear because his ear is undeveloped. At first, hearing many of the consonant sounds may present a challenge. A vowel sound attached to a consonant makes the consonant easier to hear and distinguish. And a long vowel sound, such as found in the names of the letters of the alphabet, is easier to hear than a muted short vowel sound, which may be added to the consonants when teaching phonograms and their phonemes.

A muted short vowel phoneme is added to the consonant phoneme for the sake of audibility. For example, phonogram “b” becomes /beh/. However, the ‘eh’ is toned downed, muted. With the long vowel sound added, however, phonogram “b” becomes /bee/, the same sound as in the letter's name! ‘Bee’ is easier for the infant ear to hear than 'beh', especially when the ‘eh’ is muted.

Some people think that singing phonemes in alphabetical order instead of the names of the letters might be a good idea because good music stimulates the proper development of hearing –added to the fact that phonemes are used to decode words. They think that beginning with phonograms and circumventing the alphabet will give children a head start in reading. The problem with this is that if you try singing the phonemes without the short vowel sounds being added to consonants b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, p, s, t and x, you will get no music, whatsoever, as there is no sound coming from the vocal chords with these letters. Therefore, muted short vowel sounds must be attached (a sort of cheating, if you are a purist). All this results in the song being rather unmusical and difficult to sing. I have heard it done, and I would not want to hear the song again or sing it. It just isn't catchy like the Alphabet Song.

Even the adult ear has difficulty being able to distinguish between certain isolated consonant sounds unless a short vowel phoneme is added to the consonant phoneme. Irrefutably, even a muted short vowel sound, added to a consonant phoneme, does not constitute the pure sound of the consonant. So why would it be a backwards step for the child to learn the alphabet, first, since the infant can set his foot on the path of gaining phonemic awareness with long vowel phonemes just as readily, if not more readily, than as with short vowel phonemes?

Here are some examples of how the pure sound of a consonant can be almost impossible to distinguish, in some cases, without adding a vowel phoneme. Try differentiating between D and T without adding a muted short vowel sound. Or try B and P or C and G. These consonants have no sounds coming from the vocal cords. I contend that whether you add a long vowel sound to a consonant, as in the name of the letter, or a muted short vowel sound as one would do with phonograms, the result is the same in terms of gaining phonemic awareness. Infants do better hearing consonant phonemes when a long vowel sound, rather than a muted short vowel sound, is blended with the consonant phoneme. Consonant sounds blended with muted short vowel sounds can come later when you present phonograms, after the child has learned to hear letter sounds with the Alphabet Song and recitation of the alphabet.

I fail to see why the Alphabet Song is pooh-poohed by educators, including Montessori teachers, when teaching the alphabet is something all parents know how to do. Every parent in the United States can sing or play a recording of the Alphabet Song and can give their children a head start in life! In my day, when I was in grade school, I knew of no Johnnies that couldn't read. Truly, it was unheard of! And I didn't know a single child who couldn't sing and recite the alphabet before starting school, either. A coincidence? Children were proud they knew the alphabet and loved singing the song. And I loved singing it!

Today we have a very high illiteracy rate in the United States and parents are being told by educators to not teach their children. And, above all, parents are told, "Don't teach the alphabet." At the same time they are condescendingly being told, "You are wasting time singing the Alphabet Song to the child." (All that is supposedly old fashioned and not up-to-date.)

Since singing all of the pure letter sounds is impossible, and singing the alphabetic phonemes is not really musical, the Alphabet Song is all there is if we want to take advantage of the power of music to teach the sounds of speech to an infant. Children have always loved the song, and it's rather catchy. It's a shame that so many educators don't value the song and think to eliminate it from the classroom and from American culture.

The letters of the alphabet are the building blocks of literacy, and phonograms (depicting letter sounds) empower the child to read. In the Home Reading Program, the baby is not shown phonograms until after the baby has

repeatedly heard the names of the letters in song and in recitation. And the baby is shown the phonograms after having become familiar with the alphabet flashcards.

As a final word and as a disclaimer, I concede that with a preschool age child who did not learn to read as a baby, and where the window of opportunity for learning to read is not as wide open as with an infant, you may want to begin with letter sounds (phonograms) rather than letter names –since the time remaining for learning to read during the *absorbent mind stage* is much shorter for the preschooler than for the infant. Nevertheless, there is no reason for the child to not learn to sing the Alphabet Song, at the same time, and be able to see an alphabet chart. The ABC Song belongs in the child's repertoire of favorite songs, and with a chart the child can point to the letters as he sings or recites them.

We hope you and your child enjoy this reading program. The gift of reading is one of the greatest gifts you can ever give to your child. Early readers have all of the advantage in life; and it is never too soon (or too late) to begin to learn to read.

For more information on early learning, visit the Heart Parenting and Montessori website:
www.InternationalParentingAssociation.org

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