

Creating phonemic awareness by segmenting rhymes

Phonemic awareness--the recognition and understanding of phonemes, the smallest unit of sound in language--can be an important indicator of future literacy in children (Smith, 1998). In addition, "rhyme awareness appears to make a direct contribution to reading in a way which is independent of phonemic awareness" (Woods, 2003). This paper will discuss a strategy to link rhyme and phonetic awareness through readings and activities, using the text, *Mister Magnolia*, written and illustrated by Quentin Blake.

The readings and activities described herein are suitable for foundation year students, who are learning to identify letters and associate individual graphemes (letters) with their respective phonemes (sounds). The lesson is designed for a normal sized class (25 students), and will address two components in the Language tract of the National Curriculum, specifically ACELA 1438: "know how to use onset and rime to spell words," and ACELA 1439: "recognise rhymes, syllables, and sounds in spoken words" (National Curriculum, 2011). In keeping with a whole-part-whole strategy, the lesson will be concluded with a creative component of a collective re-creation of the text; creating literature in this way is referenced in the Literature tract by ACELT 1580: "retell familiar literary texts through performance, use of illustrations and images" (National Curriculum, 2011).

Most students at the foundation level can recognise and create rhyming word pairs, but are in the beginning stages of being able to recognise and manipulate individual phonemes. Additionally, foundation level students are at the beginning stages of recognising graphemes, yet most will be unable to read complete sentences or make meaning of unfamiliar words. The work of this lesson lays a foundation towards learning the relationship between phonemes and graphemes, and making the connection between the two to link to a specific word. This aspect of the lesson uses a "top-down" strategy of breaking down a word with a familiar meaning to increase comprehension of the word's construct.

The chosen book, *Mister Magnolia*, has been selected for this activity because of its use of a single phonogram rhyming word family: “boot”, “toot”, “flute”, “newt”, “suit”, “hoot”, “scoot”, “chute”, “fruit”, “salute”, and “brute”. In addition, the lesson offers opportunities for advanced students to understand the grapheme construction of blends (/fl/, /sc/, /fr/, and /br/), a digraph (the /ch/ in “chute”), and a multi-syllabic word rhyming with a single syllable word (“salute” with “boot”).

The actual book is read twice during the lesson. As a shared reading experience, prior to reading the text, the teacher engages the students with the book by looking at the cover image and reading the title, and asks typical engagement questions such as “What do you think this book is about?” If necessary, additional questions can be asked relating to footwear; for example, the teacher asks, "What do you think it would be like to only have one boot?" in order to assure adequate initial engagement with the text.

Next, the first reading begins, and focuses on the story and its rhymes. As each line in the story is read, the teacher uses an oral cloze method at the end of each rhyming sentence to further engage the students and to familiarize them with the rhyming words. Using the visual clues of the illustrations, the students will be able to guess most of the rhyming words (all word rhyme with "boot"--see Appendix 1 for story text), but if not, the first sound of the rhyme is provided by the teacher as a cue. The teacher accentuates the rhyming words during the first reading; however the main focus of the initial reading is to understand the meaning of the text, so it is important that the cloze activity does not significantly interrupt the flow of the story.

After the first reading, the teacher announces a game, and displays 11 illustrated cards (see Appendix 2 for cards). Preparation for this activity will be colour copies of each illustration in the book pasted to card stock, with large graphemes marked on each card; for example, the letter "T" for the rhyme "toot" accompanies the illustration of the trumpet-playing Mr. Magnolia, and the consonant blend "FL" accompanies the book's illustration for the rhyme "flute". As all rhyming words in this activity have the rime of /oot/, the purpose of the letters on the illustrations in

this activity is to help them to recognise the grapheme representation of the rhyme's onset!

Next, the teacher re-reads the story with the objective of assigning the 11 rhyming-word cards to chosen students. During the second reading, students volunteer to "be" the rhyme as each rhyme is encountered in the reading; they then receive the illustrated card with the onset grapheme(s). After all rhymes have been assigned in the second reading, the book is put away, and the class collectively segments each rhyme using the illustrated cards as cues. Initially assisted by the teacher, each student holding one of the illustrated cards says the onset of each rhyme (as represented by the grapheme(s) on their card), while the rest of the class subsequently says the /oot/ part of each rhyme. One by one, the group segments and blends each rhyme. The teacher also asks the students to identify and say the letter(s) on each card; for example, for the blend /fl/, the teacher asks the students to identify each letter "f" and "l", as well as make the rhyme's blended onset sound of both letters together. This segmenting and blending of the rhymes, and identification of the letters make up the majority of the lesson.

Finally, the text is re-created. The students with illustrations line up (in any order) while displaying their illustration, and the teacher, with the help of the students, "reads" the story from the illustrations of each student in the line-up. During this "reading", some of the rhymes can be segmented and blended, and some of the rhymes can be orally clozed, but the purpose of this final reading is to have fun, and to close the lesson by returning to the whole meaning of the text. The students can also provide the refrain, "But Mr. Magnolia only has one boot!" Additionally, as each rhyme represents something that Mr. Magnolia has or can do, students can include animated actions for each rhyme. The teacher finishes up the lesson by paraphrasing the finale of the story in an animated fashion.

The activities described in the lesson focus on the text decoder component ("code-breaker") of the Four Resource Model (Campbell and Green, 2006, p. 106). A core component of learning to decode text involves the complex task of correlating

As the English language is often quite irregular in terms of the link between graphemes and phonemes, this activity reduces the confusion that might arise from variant spellings by purposely de-emphasizing the display of rime spellings in each rhyme; in this text the /oot/ sound is variously represented by "oot", "ewt", "ute", and "uit". Understanding such anomalies of the English language are reserved for later lessons in literacy.

graphemes (letters) with phonemes (sounds). The lesson also involves the students as text participants role by engaging them with the familiar objects contained in the story.

The lesson uses the 'whole-part-whole' strategy by first engaging the reader with the whole story which provided meaning of the text; second, delving into detail of segmenting and blending of each rhyming word first syllable onset; and finally, finishing up with a joint construction of the text. The whole-part-whole strategy is employed because of its similarity to “the way proficient readers actually use skills when they read and write” (Strickland, 1998, p. 6).

The lesson also incorporates elements of shared reading, with potential to spontaneously expand, depending on the level of engagement, with additional teacher questions or comments. One of the benefits of shared reading is the modelling of correct reading techniques. By pointing to each word as it is read, for example, makes explicit the tempo and amount of pause between each word, something a proficient reader takes for granted. Furthermore, the shared “extra-textual” talk in this lesson scaffolds existing knowledge by combining both low-cognitive demand talk (i.e. questions about boots), and high cognitive demand talk (i.e. the differentiation of phonemes); by using both high and low demand extratextual talk during a shared reading, cognitive understanding is enhanced and greater progress is possible (Blewitt, Rump, Shealy, and Cook, 2009).

The main focus of the lesson is to increase phonemic awareness--and the broader concept of phonological awareness--by examining onset phonemes for a family of rhyming words. Literacy is increased when children learn to "segment and analyse words phonologically by matching sounds to printed letters" (Peterson, 2010, p. 283). Furthermore, the link between phonemes and graphemes "results in the child's ability to independently decode words not previously taught through direct instruction" (Griffith, 1992, p. 85). The lesson also explicitly teaches rhyme; "children exposed to lessons in rhyme scored substantially higher ... on reading and spelling tests" (Peterson, 2010, p. 283).

Literacy is a lifelong process, but the mechanics of decoding (reading) and encoding (writing) text can be learned in the early years of childhood. By the age of five or six years, a child has typically developed a vocabulary of 4000-5000 words (Campbell, 2005, p. 35). Yet according to Piaget's developmental theory, a child in the pre-operational stage has limited or rudimentary abilities in classification, thus the ability to group similar word constructs and spellings is difficult at this early age. As a child advances into the concrete operational stage with increased abilities to identify and classify, rote methods to teach the illogical variations in the English language can be employed. Simply by acknowledging the vastness of the vocabulary that a foundation level child possesses indicates that there is great potential for innate learning.

At the foundation level, lessons which expand on the more innate aspects of language--which by their nature are more phonetically based--and by gently, yet explicitly, introducing graphophonic aspects of linking graphemes to phonemes, prepare the groundwork for later literacy learning that require additional memorization and classification skills.

References

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Appendix 1

Text of Mr. Magnolia by Quentin Blake (illustrations in parenthesis)

Mr. Magnolia has only one boot. (standing with one boot)

He has an old trumpet that goes rooty-toot (trumpet playing)

And two lovely sisters who play on the flute (two sisters playing flute)

But Mr. Magnolia has only one boot.

In his pond live a frog and a toad and a newt (pond scene)

He has green parakeets who pick holes in his suit (suit with birds)

And some very fat owls who are learning to hoot. (owls on bed)

But Mr. Magnolia has only one boot.

He gives rides to his friends when he goes for a scoot (scooter with kids)

And the splash is immense when he comes down the chute (splash in water)

But Mr. Magnolia has only one boot.

Just look at the way that he juggles with fruit! (juggling fruit)

The mice all march past as he takes his salute! (dressed and saluting)

And his dinosaur! What a magnificent brute! (dinosaur)

But Mr. Magnolia--poor Mr. Magnolia!--Mr. Magnolia has only one boot...

Hey...

Wait a minute...

Now then...

Keep going...

What's this?

Look!

It's a boot! It's a boot!

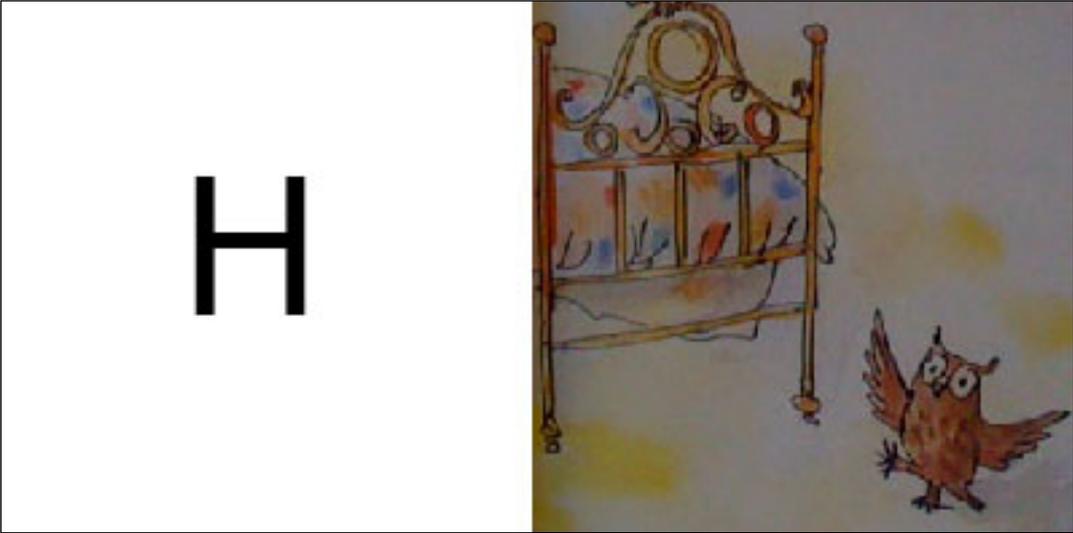
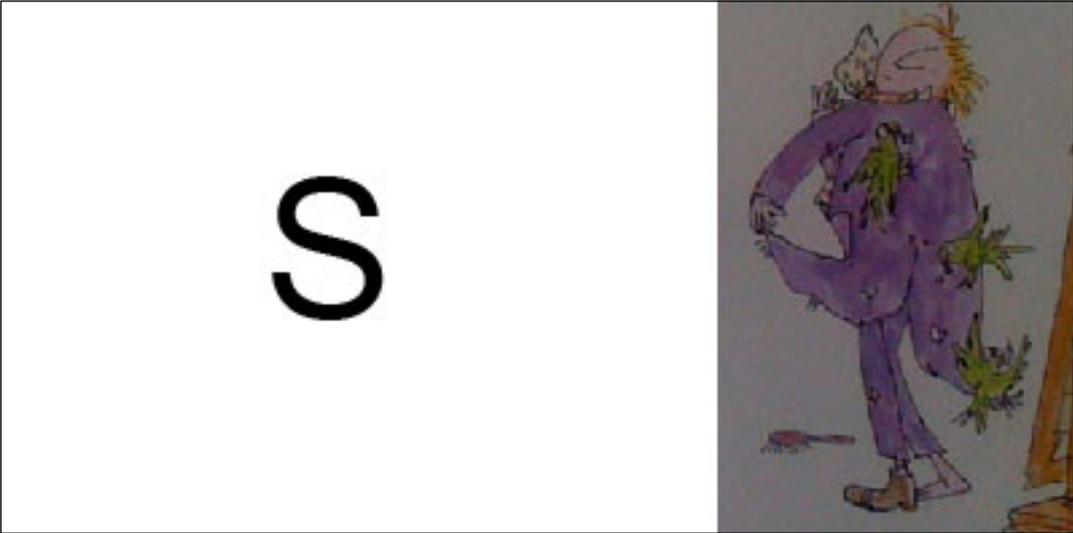
Whoopee for Mr. Magnolia's new boot!

Good night.

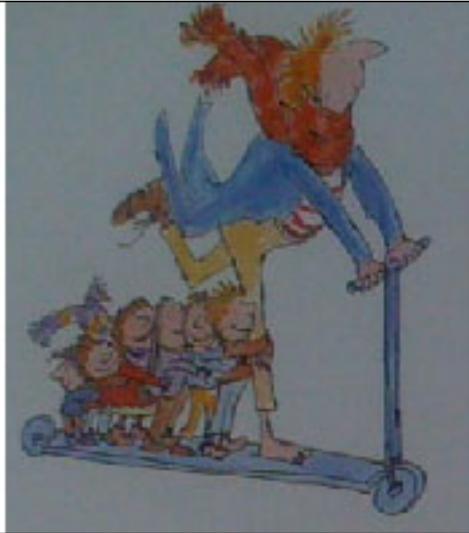
Appendix 2

Cards for Activity:





S C



CH



FR



S A L



B R

