

Raising a Reader

without pulling your hair out

Uncover Phonics



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Introduction

I'm Frances Wong, and I've been a teacher since 2005. In that time, I've had the joy of helping thousands of children discover the magic of reading, including my own two!

I'm also the author of a number of children's books, which means I get to see reading not just from the classroom, but through the wonder of stories themselves.

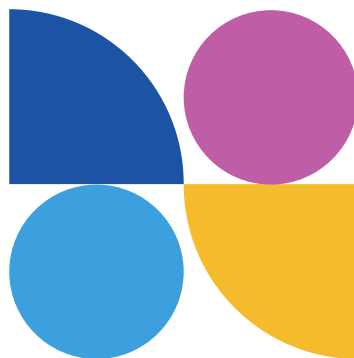
Everyone says that phonics isn't the only way to teach children to read, and you may have heard people say it doesn't work for every child.

Both of these statements are true.

However, in my 20+ years of teaching young children, I've seen phonics successfully support 99.9% of children on their reading journey.

The key is to follow your child's lead. Phonics gives children the tools, but your encouragement, patience, and flexibility will help them find the way that works best for them.

Remember, phonics is a tool, not a test. Celebrate progress, keep sessions short, and always nurture curiosity alongside skill.



Frances Wong

Children's Author
Teacher with over 20
years experience
teaching children to
read

Phonics in a Nutshell

Before we dive into phonics, it's important to remember that all children learn at their own pace. Some may show readiness at just 2 or 3 years old, while others may not feel ready until 6 or 7, and that's perfectly normal. Learning to read is never a race. What matters most is that children grow up seeing reading as fun, exciting, and enjoyable. If your child finds reading tricky, lean into their interests, keep it playful, and try some of the simple, engaging activities included in this guide.



Phonics

Phonics is all about breaking words into their individual sounds, known as phonemes. Instead of seeing a word as one overwhelming challenge, children learn to break it into smaller, manageable chunks.

This makes reading feel bitesize and achievable, giving children the confidence to tackle even tricky-looking words.

When children first begin learning phonics, they sound out each letter or letter group carefully. For example, c-a-t. Over time, with practice and exposure, many of these words become so familiar that children no longer need to

sound them out. They begin to sight read these words automatically, saving phonics for unfamiliar or more complex words.

Two key skills form the foundation of phonics: **blending** and **segmenting**.

Blending is when children push sounds together to read a whole word, like /d-o-g/ becoming dog.

Segmenting is the reverse, breaking a word apart into its sounds so they can spell it. Together, blending and segmenting build strong, flexible reading skills, helping children decode new words and develop independence as readers.

Learning Blocks: Alphablocks

If I could only give you one tip for teaching your child to read, it would be to please use the **Alphablocks**. It is through the Alphablocks that you will be able to learn the pure sounds and see how they work together.

I am a huge fan of the **Learning Blocks** and I think they are an incredible way of teaching reading to children.

The Learning Blocks also produce the **Numberblocks** which is an incredible way for teaching children about Maths.

The Alphablocks have **magazines, apps, videos** and lots of engaging ways for children to learn to read.



The Tip Top Best Tip



Make it Fun

Alphablocks is a fantastic way to bring phonics to life.

While phonics can sometimes feel dry or repetitive, Alphablocks makes it playful, visual, and memorable.

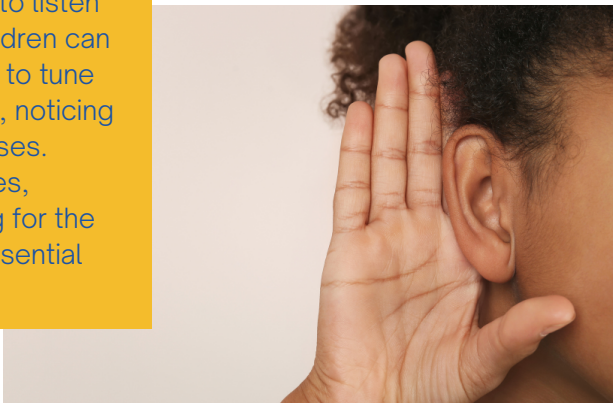
Each character represents a sound, and children see how those sounds blend together to make words.

This helps them grasp tricky concepts while laughing, singing, and joining in, proving that phonics can be both fun and effective.

Phonics has changed a lot in the last 20 years, as has the way we teach phonics. The Alphablocks will give you a fantastic update on how phonics is taught now.

Back to Basics

The first step in phonics is learning to listen to and interpret sounds. Before children can match letters to sounds, they need to tune their ears to the world around them, noticing rhymes, rhythms, and everyday noises. Simple games like clapping syllables, spotting rhyming words, or listening for the first sound in a word all build the essential skill of sound awareness.



Step 1: Pre-Phonic Sounds

Environmental Sounds

Encourage children to notice sounds all around them, birds singing, cars passing, or the hum of the fridge. Talk about what they hear to build awareness.

Instrumental Sounds

Explore sound and rhythm using instruments or household objects like pans and spoons. This helps children recognise differences in pitch, tone, and volume.

Body Percussion

Clapping, stamping, and clicking are fun ways for children to use their bodies to make patterns and rhythms, strengthening auditory memory.

Rhythm and Rhyme

Nursery rhymes and silly rhyming games help children hear patterns in words and predict what comes next.

Alliteration

Playing with words that start with the same sound (like “Sam sings songs”) helps children tune in to initial sounds.

Voice Sounds & Oral Blending/Segmenting

Experimenting with silly voices, animal sounds, and blending sounds together prepares children to decode and build words later.

Pre-Phonics Activities

Environmental Sounds – Sound Hunt

Go for a walk and play “I hear with my little ear.” Take turns spotting and naming sounds like birdsong, dogs barking, or leaves rustling.

Instrumental Sounds – Kitchen Band

Hand your child pots, pans, and wooden spoons. Play a rhythm for them to copy, then let them make their own patterns.

Body Percussion – Action Beats

Clap, stamp, and click in a pattern (clap-clap-stamp). Encourage your child to repeat it, then invent their own rhythm for you to copy.

Rhythm and Rhyme – Silly Rhyming Basket

Fill a basket with rhyming objects (sock, block, clock). Pull one out and take turns finding a silly rhyme, real or nonsense!

Alliteration – Sound of the Day

Pick a sound (like s). Throughout the day, spot things beginning with that sound: socks, sandwiches, swings. Say them with playful emphasis.

Voice Sounds – Animal Talk

Take turns making animal noises or silly voices. Ask: “Can you talk like a robot? A giant? A squeaky mouse?”

Top Tip



Oral Blending and Segmenting – Robot Talk

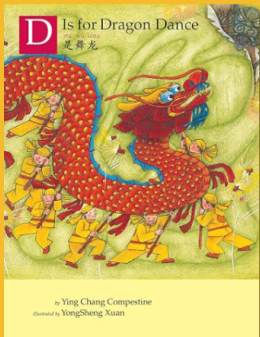
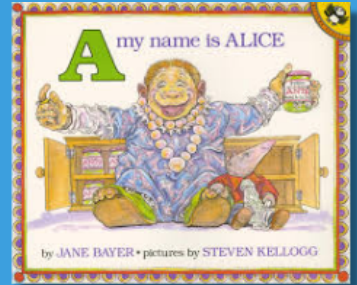
Robot Talk helps children practise breaking words into sounds (segmenting) and putting them together (blending). Say a word slowly like a robot: /c/ – /a/ – /t/. Encourage your child to blend the sounds into cat, then take turns giving you words to blend. Use toys, objects, or names. This fun game builds listening, sound awareness, and early decoding skills.



My Favourite Pre-Phonics Books

A My Name Is Alice by Jane Bayer

This classic book introduces alliteration through a playful exploration of names and sounds, helping children tune into the rhythm and patterns of language.

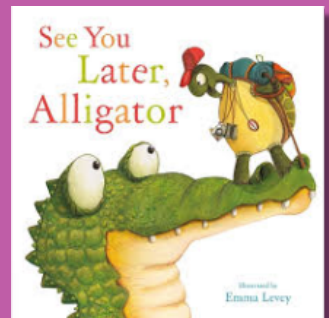


D is for Dragon Dance by Ying Chang Compestine

This book combines cultural storytelling with phonemic awareness, introducing children to the sounds of the alphabet through the lens of Chinese New Year traditions

See You Later, Alligator by Sally Hopgood

This book uses rhyming and rhythmic language to engage children, reinforcing the sounds and patterns in words.



Phonics Schemes



A phonics scheme is a structured, step-by-step programme that schools use to teach children to read.

It carefully introduces letters and sounds in a specific order, helping children build skills gradually and confidently.

Much of a Muchness

Schemes include activities for blending sounds to read words, segmenting words to spell, and practising tricky or unusual sound patterns.

Different schools may use different schemes, such as **Letters and Sounds**, **Read Write Inc.**, or **Jolly Phonics**, but the goal is the same: to give children the tools to decode new words independently.

Schemes often combine reading, writing, and fun activities to keep children engaged.

I prefer **Letters and Sounds** because it's free to use and research led.

Phonics schemes are often very similar, but what I love about **Letters and Sounds** is that after just a couple of weeks, children can start building real words with the sounds they've learned. This early success is hugely motivating, giving children confidence and a sense of achievement.

Being able to blend sounds into words so quickly shows children that reading isn't just about learning letters, it's about using those letters to make meaning, which makes the whole process fun and rewarding.

And the best part? **Alphablocks** follows **Letters and Sounds**.

Graphemes and Phonemes



When your child starts phonics at school, you'll often hear words like phoneme and grapheme.

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a word. For example, cat has three phonemes: /c/ – /a/ – /t/.

A grapheme is the letter, or group of letters, that represents that sound when written down.

Sometimes one sound is made with two letters together, called a digraph (like sh in ship or oa in boat). Other times, a sound might use three letters, called a trigraph (like igh in night).

Your child's teacher may also use the term split digraph (sometimes called "magic e"), where the letters work together but are split by another letter, such as a_e in cake.

Schools use this shared language so children, teachers, and parents can all talk clearly about how words are built.

Understanding these terms will help you support your child at home, spot patterns in words, and celebrate their growing reading skills confidently.

Graphemes, Digraphs and Trigraphs



- A grapheme is a single letter representing a sound, like s or m.
- A digraph is two letters that make one sound, such as sh in ship or oa in boat.
- A trigraph is three letters making one sound, like igh in night.

Using the Alphablocks characters helps children see and remember the sounds visually, making these concepts easier to understand and fun to explore.

Encourage your child to point to the letters, say the sounds, and try blending them into simple words. This hands-on, playful approach reinforces phonics learning, helping them decode new words confidently.

The best way for children to learn how to say graphemes, digraphs, and trigraphs is (you guessed it) to listen to the Alphablocks!

Each character represents a sound, so when children hear /s/, /sh/, or /igh/, they can see it acted out, making it easier to remember. For example, s is a single sound (grapheme) that children can blend with a and t to read sat.

A digraph like sh in ship shows how two letters combine to make one sound, while a trigraph like igh in night demonstrates three letters working together.

Watching Alphablocks characters blend, swap, and play with sounds reinforces these patterns naturally. You can make this interactive at



home: pause the show and ask your child to repeat the sound, find an object that starts with it, or blend it into a simple word.

Listening repeatedly helps children internalise the sounds, boosting confidence in reading and spelling.

Blending and Segmenting



Blending and segmenting are the heart of phonics. Blending helps children read words by combining individual sounds, while segmenting helps them break words apart to spell or decode.

These skills are crucial because they give children the tools to tackle unfamiliar words independently. Practising both strengthens memory, listening, and sound awareness, building a strong foundation for confident, fluent reading.

Tips for Blending and Segmenting

- **Sound and Blend:** Say each sound slowly (/c/ – /a/ – /t/) and encourage your child to push them together to read the word (cat).
- **Segmenting Practice:** Ask your child to break simple words into individual sounds for spelling.
- **Hands-On Tools:** Use magnetic letters, cards, or toys to make blending and segmenting tangible.
- **Keep It Playful:** Short, fun sessions with praise build confidence and make learning enjoyable.

A Phonics Lesson



Regardless of the scheme your child's school uses, the lesson pattern will be similar. Each session begins with a review of previous learning, followed by the introduction of a new letter sound. Once this sound is taught, children start practising blending and segmenting with it, helping them build confidence and fluency step by step.

Teaching Phonics

Phonics lessons follow a simple pattern, easy to repeat with your child at home.

- **Review Previous Sounds (3–4 minutes):** Quickly go over sounds your child already knows using flashcards, letters, or paper. Say the sound together and turn it into a quick game.
- **Introduce a New Sound (4 minutes):** Show the new letter or letters (grapheme). Say the sound clearly, model how your mouth makes it, then let your child repeat and trace it in the air or on paper.
- **Blending Practice (4 minutes):** Build easy words with the new sound (e.g. if learning m, try mat, map). Sound them out slowly, then blend into a word.
- **Segmenting Practice (4 minutes):** Say a word aloud and encourage your child to split it into sounds, using fingers or counters to mark each one.
- **End with a Game (2 minutes):** Play “I spy” or a quick matching game to review the new sound with fun.

As you can see, phonics lessons are very quick, short and fun for the children, although these timings are flexible.

How to Read with Your Child

Over my 20 years of teaching reading, one thing I've noticed is that many parents feel unsure about how to teach their child to read. This is completely normal, and nothing to worry about. I'd like to take this opportunity to guide you step by step, showing you simple, practical ways to support your child's reading journey with confidence.



Step One: Find a Quiet Moment



Choose a calm time of day, like bedtime, when screens are off and distractions are minimal. Bedtime works well because there's nothing else to do but relax together, making it the perfect moment to focus one-to-one.

If you have more than one child, use this time to practise turn-taking, so each child feels valued.

If you have another adult at home, pair up and swap children so both get special attention.

When I was the only adult with my reading-age children, I relied on turn-taking, it kept things fair and created a lovely routine we all enjoyed.

Children love one to one time with their significant adults, so using this time to focus only on your child and explore a story is just perfect!



How to Read with Your Child



Step 2 - Choosing the Book

If your child brings home a school book, start with that — it supports what they're learning in class. But don't stop there. Give them the chance to choose other books too, whether it's a favourite story, an "I read, you read" book, or even a wordless book to explore together.

Having a say in what to read makes children feel empowered and more motivated. Mixing school books with fun choices keeps reading fresh, enjoyable, and never a chore.

When it comes to choosing a book, variety is key. **Your local library** is a treasure trove. It's free, full of choice, and constantly refreshed with new titles.

Bookshops can be magical too; even a quick browse lets your child feel the excitement of discovering stories.

While it's important to explore fun books at home, don't forget the school book. I know from 20 years of teaching that these books can sometimes feel repetitive and uninspiring, but they serve a purpose. They're carefully matched to your

child's phonics level, helping them practise exactly what they're learning in class. Even if your child finds the school book dull, read it once or twice.

Then, balance it with something they choose and love. That mix, a little bit of practice, a lot of enjoyment, keeps children progressing while still seeing reading as joyful.

Don't forget the joy of shared reading. Wordless books, "I read, you read" books, or picture books spark conversation, imagination, and confidence, giving children a sense of control and fun.

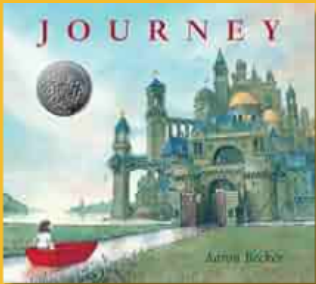
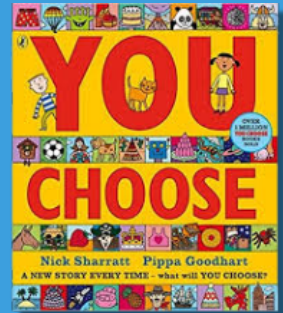
It's important to remember, not all books you read with your child need words.

My Favourite Wordless Books

You Choose by Nick Sharratt

Technically not a wordless book, but this book is full of conversation starters and suggestions for ideas.

Its playful illustrations and open-ended prompts make it perfect for encouraging children to talk about choices, describe what they see, and create their own stories.

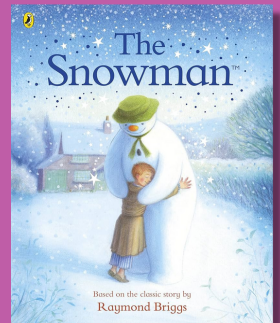


Journey by Aaron Becker

Journey is a gorgeous wordless book that takes children on a magical adventure. As they follow the girl through colourful, detailed scenes, you can encourage them to talk about what's happening, guess what might happen next, and make up their own story.

The Snowman by Raymond Briggs

We have all grown up watching The Snowman at Christmas with the iconic song, and the book is just as magical. Its gentle, wordless story encourages children to explore the illustrations, talk about the characters' adventures, and use their imagination to create their own version of the story.



How to Read with Your Child



Step 3 - Read Together

Now it's time to read! Let your child attempt words themselves. Don't jump in too quickly. Encourage them to use strategies like looking at the word in context, checking the pictures, or sounding it out. Give them time to self-correct; if they mispronounce a word, allow them to try again before offering guidance.

The goal is to build independence and confidence. Praise their efforts, celebrate successes, and remember that making mistakes is part of learning. Step back when possible, and let your child take the lead, while you support quietly. Reading together should be enjoyable, not stressful, so keep it playful, relaxed, and full of encouragement.

Over time, these small moments help children become capable, confident readers who feel proud of their achievements.

- Do: Praise effort, encourage independence, let them sound out words, and make reading fun.
- Do: Use pictures and context for clues.
- Don't: Rush, correct immediately, or make reading feel like a test.
- Don't: Read only aloud to them. Involve your child actively. Keep it playful, patient, and positive.

How to Read with Your Child



I Read, You Read Books

I talk a lot about I Read, You Read books, but what exactly does one look like? On this page, I've included an example. In these books, you read one part, and your child reads the next. I love them because they give children a sense of control while still being supported.

I Read, You Read books are designed to make reading interactive and fun. Typically, your child reads the larger, bolder words, while you, the adult, read the smaller or differently styled words. This split gives children a clear, manageable portion of the text to tackle themselves, building confidence and a sense of achievement.

Because they can read part of the story independently, children feel empowered and proud, which naturally encourages them to want to read more. They start to associate reading with success and enjoyment, rather than pressure or struggle.

These books also foster turn-taking, listening, and comprehension skills, since



children must pay attention to the story while waiting for their part.

Sharing a story this way makes reading a team effort, it's playful, engaging, and full of opportunities for conversation, laughter, and learning.

Most importantly, these books show children that reading can be fun and rewarding.

How to Read with Your Child

Step 4 - Talking About the Book

Once you've finished reading, take time to talk about the story together. This helps your child understand that reading isn't just about saying the words. It's about meaning, ideas, and imagination. Ask open-ended questions like, "What do you think



For younger children or those reading wordless books, simply narrating the story together can be very effective.

Let your child lead the narrative, using their imagination and language skills. You might also ask your child to act out a scene, draw a favourite character, or

create an alternative ending. Talking about books develops comprehension, vocabulary, and critical thinking, while keeping reading fun and interactive. Most importantly, it shows your child that their ideas and opinions matter.



will happen next?" or "Why do you think the character did that?" Encourage your child to describe the pictures, retell parts of the story, or guess what might happen.

You can also link the story to real life: "Have you ever felt like that character?" or "Does this remind you of something we saw today?" This makes the story more relatable and helps children build connections between text and the world around them.

Top Comprehension Questions

- What do you think will happen next?
- How is the character feeling? Why?
- What was your favourite part?
- Can you retell the story in your own words?
- Did the story remind you of anything in your life?

How Often?



There is no simple answer to this question. Well, there is, but that answer doesn't allow for the realities of busy family life. Some days reading might happen twice, other days not at all, and that's okay. What matters most is making reading a regular, enjoyable habit, even if it's just a few minutes at a time. Consistency over time builds familiarity, confidence, and a lifelong love of books.

The Realities of Reading at Home

If you read just once a week with your child, they will learn around 4,000 words. Reading two to three times a week increases this to 169,520 words, and reading every day helps them learn an impressive 1,483,000 words.

Personally, in our home, we made reading part of our bedtime routine, which meant our children read every day until they were old enough to choose to read for themselves.

To make reading part of your daily routine, keep books visible and accessible, pick a consistent time, even if only a few minutes, and involve your child in choosing stories.

Turn it into a special, cozy activity, with blankets, a lamp, or a comfy chair, so your child looks forward to it.

Even short sessions every day build confidence, vocabulary, and a lifelong love of reading.

I hope this guide has been useful and helped you see how phonics fits into your child's reading journey. You've discovered practical ways to read with your child, explored fun activities, and learned strategies to support confidence and independence. Most importantly, remember to keep reading enjoyable, laughter, curiosity, and shared moments make a lifelong love of reading.

Useful Links



[BBC Nursery Rhymes](#)

[The Book Trust](#)

[The National Literacy Trust](#)

[Reading Fairy](#)

[My Website](#)

[The Alphablocks](#)

Don't forget to check back to my website for more resources, tips, and book recommendations to support your child's reading journey.

If you have any questions, want to share your experiences, or need a little extra guidance, feel free to reach out on Threads, Instagram, or through the contact form on the site. I love hearing from parents and carers, and I'm here to help make reading a fun, joyful part of everyday life for you and your child.