

The exciting phase where sounds and letters start coming together

## In a nutshell:

In a Phase 2 session, we ask children to think about a **phoneme** (speech sound) and we introduce them to a way of writing this phoneme. This will either be a letter or a group of letters and is known as a grapheme. We play fun games to help children to train their brains to match up the phoneme and the grapheme so that when they see the **grapheme**, they can say the phoneme and when they hear the phoneme they can write the grapheme. This knowledge of a sound-letter pairing is known as a **GPC** (grapheme phoneme correspondence). As soon as children learn a GPC they use their new knowledge to **blend** to read words and **segment** to write short simple words and phrases using only the GPCs they know so far. Children also get to know a simple strategy for reading a few high frequency words which contain bits of phonics they haven't learned yet. Phase 2 is learned in short sessions each day with lots of added opportunities in the rest of the day for children to make use of their new learning through reading decodable books, handwriting sessions, writing opportunities, role play, etc.

## Key learning:

**Knowledge - GPCs:** s a t p i n m d g o c k ck e u r h b f/ff l/l ss

**Reading words with tricky bits:** and the to no go l

**Skills:** **Blending** and **segmenting** (including a clear understanding that these skills are reversible)

## What else do we want children to get out of this phase?

Excitement, success, pride.

A buzz in the classroom. "We can read!" "We can write!"

The knowledge that phonics learning needs to be used all around the classroom all day.

A firm understanding that there are bits of phonics we know and bits we don't know 'yet' (but soon will) and being OK with that.

## This phase has an impact on future phases

**A good grasp of the Phase 2 GPCs** - This frees up brain power for learning less straightforward GPCs in future phases. When children are reading a word with a newly introduced GPC, we want that new GPC to be the only bit of the word that they are working hard on.

**A solid ability to blend and segment** - Future phases involve blending and segmenting more complex words. A solid foundation makes this task much easier.

**A positive attitude to learning 'tricky' words** - Phase 2 is children's first introduction to reading 'tricky' words. It teaches children that they can use their existing phonics knowledge to work out lots of bits of these words and it also teaches children to not be concerned when there are GPCs in words that they haven't 'yet' learned. This is incredibly helpful in preventing children from falling into a mindset of "I can't read/write that word because I don't know it." Instead, we can guide them towards an attitude of, "I can have a go at tackling the bits that I know and ask for help with the bits I don't know."

**Being able to read Phase 2 'tricky' words** - Children go on to learn to spell these words in Phase 3. This is easier if they can read them confidently already.

## Before starting this phase

Ideally children will have had:

Lots of fun Phase 1 learning - especially rhyming, alliteration and oral blending and segmenting.

Lots of opportunities to build fine motor skills and explore mark making.

Many joyful experiences sharing books, discussing books, playing with books and generally loving books.

However, when children enter Reception without having had these experiences, the advice generally given is to provide all these opportunities alongside Phase 2 rather than to delay the start of Phase 2.

## Misconceptions about this phase

### Misconception 1 - In Phase 2 we teach children phonemes

Children (and grown ups for that matter) already know all the phonemes. They use them in speech all day long. We guide them to recognise that they already know and use them in speech and help them to be able to talk about them. Children who have had strong Phase 1 experiences will be very comfortable talking about phonemes. Phase 2 doesn't teach phonemes, it introduces graphemes and helps children match phonemes and graphemes together in their brains.

### Misconception 2 - 'Tricky' words just need to be learned 'off by heart'

Phase 2 introduces a strategy for learning tricky words. Children are taught to think in terms of the bits of words that they can work out already using their phonic knowledge (so far) and the bits that they haven't learned to read (yet).

## Teaching tips

**Look and say** - For children to really connect the phoneme with the grapheme they need to look at the grapheme whilst saying the phoneme (a lot) and also write the grapheme whilst saying the phoneme (a lot). PhonicsPlay games give lots of opportunities for doing this. Children may still need lots of reminders to help them understand that if they're not looking or speaking then they won't be building that connection. Provide lots of encouragement.

**Treat GPCs as pieces of treasure** - Treat acquiring a new GPC as a big deal. Encourage children to feel proud and excited about adding a new GPC to the existing collection inside their brain - use drama, displays, fanfares, big reveals. Celebrate the fact that each new GPC means lots of new words they can read and write on their own.

**Decodable texts** - Give lots of opportunities for applying each day's GPCs or tricky words. Make sure children have access to decodable texts, decodable reading and writing opportunities. This should be in shared, guided, independent and home reading. It can also be in role play areas, on writing tables and in as many activities and teacher led sessions as possible.

**Amazing and important non-decodable texts** - Children need as many rich, wonderful, life-affirming books in their lives as possible. Most of these are not decodable at Phase 2. Similarly, it's impossible to cover the entire curriculum whilst only using Phase 2 words. Therefore, children need non-decodable texts. Simply take care that they don't have their newly forged reading confidence knocked. Be upfront with children that you aren't 'expecting' them to know how to read some of these words yet. Simply say "Ooh, we haven't learned all the GPCs we need for this word/book yet but we soon will." and help them out. Avoid telling them they won't be able to read these texts - some children are great at figuring out things that they haven't been taught - simply be clear that you aren't expecting them to know how. Unless you are clear about this, there is a risk that some children will assume that they 'should' be able to read all the words in books/texts that you give/show to them and they then feel like they are failing when they can't.

**Non-decodable texts that are neither amazing nor important** - Lots of schools still have scheme books and banded books from the past. These were not written to be decodable (although some are by accident). Some are simply fabulous books in their own right and brilliant for sharing. There are plenty though which are neither decodable nor fabulous. It is worth considering what value these books offer to children at this otherwise very magical and exciting stage of learning to read.