
READY for SCHOOL Parent News: **Phonemic Awareness: Rhyming**

As parents of children approaching school-age, there are many reading terms we may be expected to understand. Let's start with some definitions from *Reading First and Beyond* by C. C. Block and S. E. Israel:

- *Phoneme* – Smallest unit of *spoken* language that makes a difference in the meaning of words. The English language has about 41 phonemes. A word like “a” has only one phoneme, but most words have more than one phoneme (“if” has 2 phonemes – the sound of “i” and the sound of “f”; stop has 4 phonemes – the sounds of “s,” “t,” “o,” and “p”). If you took out a phoneme, it would change the sound and meaning of the word.
- *Phonemic Awareness* - The ability to hear, identify, and use the individual sounds or phonemes in *spoken* words.
- *Phonological Awareness* – A more comprehensive term that includes phonemic awareness as well as identifying and using syllables and parts of syllables.
- *Phonics* – Understanding that there is a relationship between the *sounds* in words (phonemes) and the letters and spellings of *written* words.

In the past, the study of phonics got the most attention. Now we know that phonemic and phonological awareness are equally important and are important earlier in a child's life. These are key skills for three- and four-year-olds. Helping children understand **rhyming** is one key skill of phonemic awareness. Here are some suggestions for rhyming activities to incorporate into daily routines in the car or during other waiting times:

- Have children finish phrases with a rhyme. “The fat rat sat on a _____.” Making up nonsense rhyming words works too (like “grat”). Whisper the words that don't rhyme.
- Help children learn simple rhymes to recite including jump rope rhymes, nursery rhymes, and favorite songs with rhymes.
- Read books full of rhymes and repeat them often. As children get to know the stories, pause and let them fill in the missing words. Dr. Seuss books like *Cat in the Hat* are great for this.
- During waiting times (at the doctor's office, grocery store or restaurant), ask rhyming questions. Have children think of a real word or nonsense word that rhymes with their name (“Anna banana”) or with a color word (“blue shoe”).
- You can also play a game to help your child recognize when words don't rhyme. Say, “I am going to say some words that rhyme. Let me know if I get any wrong.” Then follow with “car-tar; bed-red, tan-fan, ice-truck” and let your child tell you which didn't rhyme. Children often enjoy feeling like they are ones in the know and they get to correct you.

It is helpful to not just use rhyming with children, but also to talk about what rhyming is (i.e., “These two words rhyme – their ending is almost the same”). Have fun with rhyming as your child learns this important phonemic awareness skill.

Reference:

Block, C.C. & Israel, S. E. (2005). *Reading First and Beyond: The Complete Guide for Teachers and Literacy Coaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.