

Aycliffe Village Primary School

Great oaks from tiny acorns grow



Phonics: Explaining the Terminology

Phoneme: the smallest unit of sound that you can hear within a word; the word phoneme refers to the sound, not the letter(s) which represent the sound in writing.

For example, in the word gate, there are three phonemes (g-long ay-t). There are 44 phonemes in English, which can be split into two groups:

24 consonant phonemes: for example, 'b' (bang, bubble), 'm' (monkey, hammer), 'ch' (chat, match). You can see in the examples that the sounds (the **phonemes**) can be written in different ways (different **graphemes**).

Top tip! When you talk about sounds to your child, use the **phonemes** (the letter sounds). The reason for this is that sounding out words is practically impossible if you use the letter names: cat doesn't sound like 'see-ay-tee'.

Top tip! When saying the sounds of b, d, g, j and w and other letters, you might notice the 'uh' sound which follows each ('buh', 'duh'...). It's hard to say the sound without it but do try to emphasise the main letter sound and avoid saying the 'uh' too much. In some letters, avoid the 'uh' completely (say 'mmm' rather than 'muh' and 'sss', not 'suh'). This is to avoid your child spelling a word like sat and wanting to add the 'uh' sound (s-u-a-t).

Blending: the merging together of the separate sounds in a word.

The separate sounds (**phonemes**) are spoken in order, all through the word, and are then merged together into the whole word - this is a vital skill for reading. For example, the three phonemes ch-a-t are blended to make chat, whilst th-r-ee blend to make three.

Decode: to read words

Grapheme: a grapheme is a 'symbol' of a phoneme - it's a letter or group of letters representing a sound and we use the letter names for this.

A one letter grapheme is the 'c' in cat; a two letter grapheme is in ship where the 'sh' sound is represented by the letters 'sh'; a four letter grapheme is contained in through where the letters 'ough' make the long 'oo' sound.

Digraph: is a two letter grapheme, such as 'ch', 'sh', 'oa' (two letters making one sound).

Split digraph: the 'e' at the end of words works with another letter to make a sound. Think about the difference between hop and hope - both have three sounds (**phonemes**), but the split digraph in hope creates and 'long o' sound.

Trigraph: a three letter grapheme, where three letters represent one phoneme, as in ear, air, high, (three letters making one sound).

Segmenting: breaking words down into **phonemes** to spell (the opposite process to blending).

The whole word is spoken aloud and then broken up into its sounds (**phonemes**) in order, all through the word - this is a vital skill for spelling. For example, hearing that 'cat' can be segmented into c-a-t,.

Encode: to spell words.