# METHODS OF TEACHING EARLY LITERACY



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# Licensing

*A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in **Back Matter/Detailed Licensing**.*

# Acknowledgments

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# About the Authors

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**Nandita Gurjar**, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education at Rhode Island College, Providence, RI. Before her current position, she was an Assistant Professor of Literacy Education at the University of Northern Iowa in the Literacy division. While at UNI, she taught undergraduate and graduate courses in literacy, particularly *Methods of Teaching Early Literacy*, for several years. Nandita led America Reads program and was an Iowa Reading Research advisory council member. She co-chairs Early Childhood Education SIG at the Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education. Nandita earned her Ph.D. in Elementary Education from the University of Central Florida. Her research promotes inclusive, equitable learning and virtual learning communities. She has been published in numerous peer-reviewed journals: *The Reading Teacher, Reading Horizon-the Journal of Literacy and Language Arts, Childhood Education, TechTrends, Applied Instructional Design, Italian Journal of Educational Technology*, and *Educational Technology Research and Development*. Nandita is passionate about promoting developmentally appropriate technology and literacy skills in children and mentoring preservice teachers through community engagement and service learning in her classes. She has been selected as the 2023-2024 Open Education Research fellow.

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**Constance Beecher**, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Literacy in the School of Education at Iowa State University. She an Early Intervention researcher and educator, with an emphasis on language and literacy development. Her research is centered in the context of community-based research, and involves developing, evaluating, and disseminating interventions for young children that can be implemented by or for parents, teachers and caregivers in community settings. Her work has been published in peer-reviewed journals in early childhood, child development, special education and community engagement such as *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Journal of Early Intervention, Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, and the *Journal of Extension* among others. She leads state-wide efforts to increase literacy access in communities through outreach programs such as Read Across Iowa and Raising School-Ready Readers.

# About the Book

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*Methods of Teaching Early Literacy* is an open educational resource (OER), which means it is **free** to access online and that it is available under an open license which allows you to adapt the material for your needs, so long as you appropriately credit the authors and this original work. We hope that having access to this book will support the development and lifelong learning of teachers across Iowa and the world.

The book is based on longstanding and current research in literacy instruction, theories, and methods. It focuses on teaching early literacy in PreK-3 grades by applying an integrated multidisciplinary, 21st-century literacy approach to literacy instruction in the early grades while centering diversity and equity. Unlike static textbooks, this text provides a multi-modal, accessible way to engage with the content and interactive elements to deconstruct the meaning of the text.

In addition to the main text, educator resources and content to support preservice teachers are integrated throughout.

The development of this book was supported by the Regents Open Educational Resources Grant Program, managed jointly by Iowa State University, the University of Iowa, and the University of Northern Iowa. Funding for this grant program is provided by CARES Act Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund.

# Introduction

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We made this book because we wanted preservice teachers to have free access to information about early literacy development and instructional methods. When students have to purchase books, they often return them and lose valuable reference information. With this open access resource, preservice teachers will be able to turn to the information in this book whenever they need to. Another advantage of open access is the ability to update and edit the book easily.

## Our approach

Our approach to this book was as an introduction to the topic of early literacy development. This book is targeting pre-service teachers who are taking their first literacy methods courses. Therefore the scope is a wide view of literacy topics instead of a deep dive into literacy development. We anticipate pre-service teachers will continue their coursework in literacy, deepening their conceptual knowledge. At the same time, we included topics that are not often included in early literacy texts such as technology, family literacy, supporting diverse students and multicultural literacy.

## The content

The book begins by exploring multiple definitions of literacy with varying perspectives. Literacy is explored through the critical literacies' framework as a human right and a meaning-making experience involving digital tools and technologies through the lens of new literacies. The second chapter explores the foundations of literacy instruction. In subsequent chapters, each literacy component is further developed and discussed with concepts, strategies, and reflective practice. One chapter focuses on trauma-informed instruction, dyslexia, ELL, culturally relevant pedagogy, and multicultural literature. Lastly, we introduce disciplinary literacy for young readers. While we recognize that these are not the only topics that could be introduced in an early literacy textbook, we chose to focus on the topics we felt were essential for pre-service teachers to begin their study of early literacy.

# CHAPTER OVERVIEW

## 1: Chapters


Chapter 1 - What is Literacy? Multiple Perspectives on Literacy
Chapter 2 - Foundations of Early Literacy
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# Chapter 1 - What is Literacy? Multiple Perspectives on Literacy

> *"Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." – Frederick Douglass*




Download Tar Beach – Faith Ringgold Video Transcript [DOC]

**Learning Objectives**

- Describe two or more definitions of literacy and the differences between them.
- Define digital and critical literacy.
- Distinguish between digital literacy, critical literacy, and community-based literacies.
- Explain multiple perspectives on literacy.

**Keywords:** literacy, digital literacy, critical literacy, community-based literacies

## Definitions of literacy from multiple perspectives

Literacy is the cornerstone of education by any definition. Literacy refers to the ability of people to read and write (UNESCO, 2017). Reading and writing in turn are about encoding and decoding information between written symbols and sound (Resnick, 1983; Tyner, 1998). More specifically, literacy is the ability to understand the relationship between sounds and written words such that one may read, say, and understand them (UNESCO, 2004; Vlieghe, 2015). About 67 percent of children nationwide, and more than 80 percent of those from families with low incomes, are not proficient readers by the end of third grade (The Nation Assessment for Educational Progress; NAEP 2022). Children who are not reading on grade level by third grade are 4 times more likely to drop out of school than their peers who are reading on grade level. A large body of research clearly demonstrates that Americans with fewer years of education have poorer health and shorter lives. In fact, since the 1990s, life expectancy has fallen for people without a high school education. Completing more years of education creates better access to health insurance, medical care, and the resources for living a healthier life (Saha, 2006). Americans with less education face higher rates of illness, higher rates of disability, and shorter life expectancies. In the U.S., 25-year-olds without a high school diploma can expect to die 9 years sooner than college graduates. For example, by 2011, the prevalence of diabetes had reached 15% for adults without a high -school education, compared with 7% for college graduates (Zimmerman et al., 2018).

Thus, literacy is a goal of utmost importance to society. But what does it mean to be literate, or to be able to read? What counts as literacy?

Here are some definitions to consider:

> "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society." – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

> "The ability to understand, use, and respond appropriately to written texts." – National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), citing the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)

> "An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, compute, and solve problems, at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job, in the family of the individual, and in society." – Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Section 203

> "The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society." – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), as cited by the American Library Association's Committee on Literacy

> "Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential." – Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu, & Dunleavy (2007). Literacy in Everyday Life: Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NCES 2007-480)

**Reflection Questions**

Which one of these above definitions resonates with you? Why?

## New literacy practices as meaning-making practices

In the 21st century, literacy increasingly includes understanding the roles of digital media and technology in literacy. In 1996, the New London Group coined the term "multiliteracies" or "new literacies" to describe a modern view of literacy that reflected multiple communication forms and contexts of cultural and linguistic diversity within a globalized society. They defined multiliteracies as a combination of multiple ways of communicating and making meaning, including such modes as visual, audio, spatial, behavioral, and gestural (New London Group, 1996). Most of the text's students come across today are digital (like this textbook!). Instead of books and magazines, students are reading blogs and text messages.

For a short video on the importance of digital literacy, watch The New Media Literacies.

The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE, 2019) makes it clear that our definitions of literacy must continue to evolve and grow (NCTE definition of digital literacy).

> "Literacy has always been a collection of communicative and sociocultural practices shared among communities. As society and technology change, so does literacy. The world demands that a literate person possess and intentionally apply a wide range of skills, competencies, and dispositions. These literacies are interconnected, dynamic, and malleable. As in the past, they are inextricably linked with histories, narratives, life possibilities, and social trajectories of all individuals and groups. Active, successful participants in a global society must be able to:

- participate effectively and critically in a networked world.
- explore and engage critically and thoughtfully across a wide variety of inclusive texts and tools/modalities.
- consume, curate, and create actively across contexts.
- advocate for equitable access to and accessibility of texts, tools, and information.
- build and sustain intentional global and cross-cultural connections and relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought.
- promote culturally sustaining communication and recognize the bias and privilege present in the interactions.
- examine the rights, responsibilities, and ethical implications of the use and creation of information.
- determine how and to what extent texts and tools amplify one's own and others' narratives as well as counterproductive narratives.
- recognize and honor the multilingual literacy identities and culture experiences individuals bring to learning environments, and provide opportunities to promote, amplify, and encourage these variations of language (e.g., dialect, jargon, and register)."

**Socio-cultural context** refers to the idea that language does not exist in isolation and is closely linked to the culture and society in which it is used and taught. Activities that can raise awareness of socio-cultural context include using stories from different countries, analyzing newspaper headlines, and looking at slang and idiomatic language.

## Learning Activities

In other words, literacy is not just the ability to read and write. It is also being able to effectively use digital technology to find and analyze information. Students who are digitally literate know how to do research, find reliable sources, and make judgments about what they read online and in print. Next, we will learn more about digital literacy.

### Important terms

- **Malleable**: can be changed.
- **Culturally sustaining**: the pedagogical preservation of the cultural and linguistic competence of young people pertaining to their communities of origin while simultaneously affording dominant-culture competence.
- **Bias**: a tendency to believe that some people, ideas, etc., are better than others, usually resulting in unfair treatment.
- **Privilege**: a right or benefit that is given to some people and not to others.
- **Unproductive narrative**: negative commonly held beliefs such as "all students from low-income backgrounds will struggle in school." (Narratives are phrases or ideas that are repeated over and over and become "shared narratives." You can spot them in common expressions and stories that almost everyone knows and holds as ingrained values or beliefs.)

## Literacy in the digital age

The Iowa Core recognizes that today, literacy includes technology. The goal for students who graduate from the public education system in Iowa is:

> "Each Iowa student will be empowered with the technological knowledge and skills to learn effectively and live productively. This vision, developed by the Iowa Core 21st Century Skills Committee, reflects the fact that Iowans in the 21st century live in a global environment marked by a high use of technology, giving citizens and workers the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions as never before. Iowa's students live in a media-suffused environment, marked by access to an abundance of information and rapidly changing technological tools useful for critical thinking and problem-solving processes. Therefore, technological literacy supports preparation of students as global citizens capable of self-directed learning in preparation for an ever-changing world" (Iowa Core Standards 21st Century Skills, n.d.).

**NOTE:** The essential concepts and skills of technology literacy are taken from the International Society for Technology in Education's National Educational Technology Standards for Students: Grades K-2 | Technology Literacy Standards

The following section is an adaptation of Digital Literacies and the Skills of the Digital Age by Cathy L. Green, used under a CC BY 4.0. license.

Literacy in any context is defined as the ability " to access, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society" (ICT Literacy Panel, 2002). " When we teach only for facts (specifics)… rather than for how to go beyond facts, we teach students how to get out of date " (Sternberg, 2008). This statement is particularly significant when applied to technology literacy. The Iowa essential concepts for technology literacy reflect broad, universal processes and skills.

Unlike the previous generations, learning in the digital age is marked using rapidly evolving technology, a deluge of information, and a highly networked global community (Dede, 2010). In such a dynamic environment, learners need skills beyond the basic cognitive ability to consume and process language. To understand the characteristics of the digital age, and what this means for how people learn in this new and changing landscape, one may turn to the evolving discussion of literacy or, as one might say now, of digital literacy. The history of literacy contextualizes digital literacy and illustrates changes in literacy over time. By looking at literacy as an evolving historical phenomenon, we can glean the fundamental characteristics of the digital age. These characteristics in turn illuminate the skills needed to take advantage of digital environments. The following discussion is an overview of digital literacy, its essential components, and why it is important for learning in the digital age.

Literacy is often considered a skill or competency. Children and adults alike can spend years developing the appropriate skills for encoding and decoding information. Over the course of thousands of years, literacy has become much more common and widespread, with a global literacy rate ranging from 81% to 90% depending on age and gender (UNESCO, 2016). From a time when literacy was the domain of an elite few, it has grown to include huge swaths of the global population. There are several reasons for this, not the least of which are some of the advantages the written word can provide. Kaestle (1985) tells us that

"literacy makes it possible to preserve information as a snapshot in time, allows for recording, tracking and remembering information, and sharing information more easily across distances among others" (p. 16). In short, literacy led "to the replacement of myth by history and the replacement of magic by skepticism and science."

If literacy involves the skills of reading and writing, digital literacy requires the ability to extend those skills to effectively take advantage of the digital world (American Library Association [ALA], 2013). More general definitions express digital literacy as the ability to read and understand information from digital sources as well as to create information in various digital formats (Bawden, 2008; Gilster, 1997; Tyner, 1998; UNESCO, 2004). Developing digital skills allows digital learners to manage a vast array of rapidly changing information and is key to both learning and working in the evolving digital landscape (Dede, 2010; Koltay, 2011; Mohammadyari & Singh, 2015). As such, it is important for people to develop certain competencies specifically for handling digital content.

## ALA Digital Literacy Framework

To fully understand the many digital literacies, we will look at the American Library Association (ALA) framework. The ALA framework is laid out in terms of basic functions with enough specificity to make it easy to understand and remember but broad enough to cover a wide range of skills. The ALA framework includes the following areas:

- finding,
- understanding,
- evaluating,
- creating, and
- communicating (American Library Association, 2013).

### Finding

Finding information in a digital environment represents a significant departure from the way human beings have searched for information for centuries. The learner must abandon older linear or sequential approaches to finding information such as reading a book, using a card catalog, index, or table of contents, and instead use more horizontal approaches like natural language searches, hypermedia text, keywords, search engines, online databases and so on (Dede, 2010; Eshet, 2002). The shift involves developing the ability to create meaningful search limits (SCONUL, 2016). Previously, finding the information would have meant simply looking up page numbers based on an index or sorting through a card catalog. Although finding information may depend to some degree on the search tool being used (library, internet search engine, online database, etc.) the search results also depend on how well a person is able to generate appropriate keywords and construct useful Boolean searches. Failure in these two areas could easily return too many results to be helpful, vague, or generic results, or potentially no useful results at all (Hangen, 2015).

Part of the challenge of finding information is the ability to manage the results. Because there is so much data, changing so quickly, in so many different formats, it can be challenging to organize and store them in such a way as to be useful. SCONUL (2016) talks about this as the ability to organize, store, manage, and cite digital resources, while the Educational Testing Service also specifically mentions the skills of accessing and managing information. Some ways to accomplish these tasks is using social bookmarking tools such as Diigo, clipping and organizing software such as Evernote and OneNote, and bibliographic software. Many sites, such as YouTube, allow individuals with an account to bookmark videos, as well as create channels or collections of videos for specific topics or uses. Other websites have similar features.

### Understanding

Understanding in the context of digital literacy perhaps most closely resembles traditional literacy because it is the ability to read and interpret text (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2006). In the digital age, however, the ability to read and understand extends much further than text alone. For example, searches may return results with any combination of text, video, sound, and audio, as well as still and moving pictures. As the internet has evolved, a whole host of visual languages have also evolved, such as moving images, emoticons, icons, data visualizations, videos, and combinations of all the above. Lankshear & Knoble (2008) refer to these modes of communication as "post typographic textual practice." Understanding the variety of modes of digital material may also be referred to as multimedia literacy (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2006), visual literacy (Tyner, 1998), or digital literacy (Buckingham, 2006).

## Evaluating

Evaluating digital media requires competencies ranging from assessing the importance of a piece of information to determining its accuracy and source. Evaluating information is not new to the digital age, but the nature of digital information can make it more difficult to understand who the source of information is and whether it can be trusted (Jenkins, 2018). When there are abundant and rapidly changing data across heavily populated networks, anyone with access can generate information online. This results in the learner needing to make decisions about its authenticity, trustworthiness, relevance, and significance. Learning evaluative digital skills means learning to ask questions about who is writing the information, why they are writing it, and who the intended audience is (Buckingham, 2006). Developing critical thinking skills is part of the literacy of evaluating and assessing the suitability for use of a specific piece of information (SCONUL, 2016).

## Creating

Creating in the digital world makes the production of knowledge and ideas in digital formats explicit. While writing is a critical component of traditional literacy, it is not the only creative tool in the digital toolbox. Other tools are available and include creative activities such as podcasting, making audio-visual presentations, building data visualizations, 3D printing, and writing blogs. Tools that haven't been thought of before are constantly appearing. In short, a digitally literate individual will want to be able to use all formats in which digital information may be conveyed in the creation of a product. A key component of creating with digital tools is understanding what constitutes fair use and what is considered plagiarism. While this is not new to the digital age, it may be more challenging these days to find the line between copying and extending someone else's work.

In part, the reason for the increased difficulty in discerning between plagiarism and new work is the "cut and paste culture" of the Internet, referred to as "reproduction literacy" (Eshet 2002, p.4), or appropriation in Jenkins' *New Media Literacies* (Jenkins, 2018). The question is, what kind and how much change is required to avoid the accusation of plagiarism? This skill requires the ability to think critically, evaluate a work, and make appropriate decisions. There are tools and information to help understand and find those answers, such as the Creative Commons. Learning about such resources and how to use them is part of digital literacy.

## Communicating

Communicating is the final category of digital skills in the ALA digital framework. The capacity to connect with individuals all over the world creates unique opportunities for learning and sharing information, for which developing digital communication skills is vital. Some of the skills required for communicating in the digital environment include digital citizenship, collaboration, and cultural awareness. This is not to say that one does not need to develop communication skills outside of the digital environment, but that the skills required for digital communication go beyond what is required in a non-digital environment. Most of us are adept at personal, face- to-face communication, but digital communication needs the ability to engage in asynchronous environments such as email, online forums, blogs, social media, and learning platforms where what is written may not be deleted and may be misinterpreted. Add that to an environment where people number in the millions and the opportunities for misunderstanding and cultural miscues are likely.

The communication category of digital literacies covers an extensive array of skills above and beyond what one might need for face-to-face interactions. It is comprised of competencies around ethical and moral behavior, responsible communication for engagement in social and civic activities (Adam Becker et al., 2017), an awareness of audience, and an ability to evaluate the potential impact of one's online actions. It also includes skills for handling privacy and security in online environments. These activities fall into two main categories: digital citizenship and collaboration.

Digital citizenship refers to one's ability to interact effectively in the digital world. Part of this skill is good manners, often referred to as "netiquette." There is a level of context which is often missing in digital communication due to physical distance, lack of personal familiarity with the people online, and the sheer volume of the people who may encounter our words. People who know us well may understand exactly what we mean when we say something sarcastic or ironic, but people online do not know us, and vocal and facial cues are missing in most digital communication, making it more likely we will be misunderstood. Furthermore, we are more likely to misunderstand or be misunderstood if we are unaware of cultural differences. So, digital citizenship includes an awareness of who we are, what we intend to say, and how it might be perceived by other people we do not know (Buckingham, 2006). It is also a process of learning to communicate clearly in ways that help others understand what we mean.

Another key digital skill is collaboration, and it is essential for effective participation in digital projects via the Internet. The Internet allows people to engage with others they may never see in person and work towards common goals, be they social, civic, or business oriented. Creating a community and working together requires a degree of trust and familiarity that can be difficult to build when there is physical distance between the participants. Greater effort must be made to be inclusive , and to overcome

perceived or actual distance and disconnectedness. So, while the potential of digital technology for connecting people is impressive, it is not automatic or effortless, and it requires new skills.

### Learning Activities

Literacy narratives are stories about reading or composing a message in any form or context. They often include poignant memories that involve a personal experience with literacy. Digital literacy narratives can sometimes be categorized as ones that focus on how the writer came to understand the importance of technology in their life or pedagogy. More often, they are simply narratives that use a medium beyond the print-based essay to tell the story:

> Create your own literacy narrative that tells of a significant experience you had with digital literacy. Use a multi-modal tool that includes audio and images or video. Share it with your classmates and discuss the most important ideas you notice in each other's narratives.

## Critical literacy

Literacy scholars recognize that although literacy is a cognitive skill, it is also a set of practices that communities and people participate in. Next, we turn to another perspective on literacy – critical literacy. "Critical" here is not meant as having a negative point of view, but rather using an analytic lens that detects power, privilege, and representation to understand different ways of looking at texts. For example, when groups or individuals stage a protest, do the media refer to them as "protesters" or "rioters?" What is the reason for choosing the label they do, and what are the consequences?

### Learning Activities

Critical literacy does not have a set definition or typical history of use, but the following key tenets have been described in the literature, which will vary in their application based on the individual social context (Vasquez, 2019). Table 1 presents some key aspects of critical literacy, but this area of literacy research is growing and evolving rapidly, so this is not an exhaustive list.

Table 1. Key Aspects of Critical Literacy

| **Key aspect** | **Example** |
|---|---|
| Reading includes the everyday texts students encounter in their lives, not just books assigned at school. | Students write down the messages that they see in public, take photographs of graffiti or signs, or collect candy wrappers to bring to class. |
| Diverse students' knowledge (coming from the classroom and the children's homes) (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2006) and multilingual/modal practices (Lau, 2012) should be used to enhance the curriculum. | Invite children to bring and share meaningful objects, stories, and language from home. |
| Students learn best when learning is authentic and connected to their lives. | Provide a wide variety of texts in the classroom to represent children from many different backgrounds. |
| Texts are never neutral but reflect the author's social perspective. On the flip side, the way we read texts is not neutral either. | Maps are based on selections of what to include and exclude. Putting north at the top and Europe at the center implies that those regions are more important. |
| Critical literacy work focuses on social issues, including inequities of race, class, gender, and disability, and the ways in which we use language to form our understanding of these issues. | O'Brien (2001) asked children to analyze a catalogue promoting Mother's Day. They discovered that the mothers in the photographs were all youthful (age), White (race), well-dressed (class), and able-bodied (disability). |
| Literacy practices should be transformative: Students should be empowered to investigate issues that impact them and then to engage in civic actions to solve problems. | Students take photographs of trash in their local park. They interview people in the neighborhood about the park conditions, and then they create a slideshow to present at a city-council meeting. |

An important component of critical literacy is the adoption of culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy. One definition comes from Dr. Django Paris (2012), who stated that Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) education recognizes that cultural differences (including racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, sexuality, and ability ones) should be treated as *assets* for teaching and learning. Culturally sustaining pedagogy requires teachers to support multilingualism and multiculturalism in their practice. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literary, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling.

For more, see the Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Framework. The framework helps educators to think about how to create student-centered learning environments that uphold racial, linguistic, and cultural identities. It prepares students for rigorous independent learning, develops their abilities to connect across lines of difference, elevates historically marginalized voices, and empowers them as agents of social change. CR-S education explores the relationships between historical and contemporary conditions of inequality and the ideas that shape access, participation, and outcomes for learners.

**Reflection Questions**

1. What can you do to learn more about your students' cultures?
2. How can you build and sustain relationships with your students?
3. How do the instructional materials you use affirm your students' identities?

## Community-based literacies

You may have noticed that communities are a big part of critical literacy – we understand that our environment and culture impact what we read and how we understand the world. Now think about the possible differences among three Iowa communities: a neighborhood in the middle of Des Moines, the rural community of New Hartford, and Coralville, a suburb of Iowa City:



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"City Center Squire" photo is by American007, CC BY SA 3.0.

**Reflection Questions**

What kind of signs might you see? How easy would it be to find and visit a library? Where can children access books? Is there a bookstore? Do the schools have large libraries?

You may not have thought about how living in a certain community might contribute to or take away from a child's ability to learn to read. Dr. Susan Neuman (2001) did. She and her team investigated the differences between two neighborhoods regarding how much access to books and other reading materials children in those neighborhoods had. One middle-to-upper class neighborhood in Philadelphia had large bookstores, toy stores with educational materials, and well-resourced libraries. The other, a low-income

neighborhood, had no bookstores or toy stores. There was a library, but it had fewer resources and served a larger number of patrons. In fact, the team found that even the signs on the businesses were harder to read, and there was less environmental printed word. Their findings showed that **each** child in the middle-class neighborhood had **13** books on average, while in the lower-class neighborhood there was **one book per 300 children**.

Dr. Neuman and her team (2019) recently revisited this question. This time, they looked at low-income neighborhoods – those where 60% or more of the people are living in poverty . They compared these to borderline neighborhoods – those with 20-40% in poverty – in three cities, Washington, D.C., Detroit, and Los Angeles. Again, they found significantly fewer books in the very low-income areas. The chart represents the preschool books available for sale in each neighborhood. Note that in the lower-income neighborhood of Washington D.C., there were no books for young children to be found at all!

Now watch this video from Campaign for Grade Level Reading. Access to books is one way that children can have new experiences, but it is not the only way!




Learning Activities

**What is the "summer slide," and how does it contribute to the differences in children's reading abilities?**

## The importance of being literate and how to get there

> *"Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope" – Kofi Annan, former United Nations Secretary-General.*




Kofi Annan, Special Envoy from the Joint United Nations, and Arab League to Syria, speaks to the press about the mission in Syria (July 11, 2012, photo by Jean-Marc Ferré, CC BY NC ND 2.0).

Our economy is enhanced when citizens have higher literacy levels. Effective literacy skills open the doors to more educational and employment opportunities so that people can lift themselves out of poverty and chronic underemployment. In our increasingly complex and rapidly changing technological world, it is essential that individuals continuously expand their knowledge and learn new skills to keep up with the pace of change. The goal of our public school system in the United States is to "ensure that all

students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live." This is the basis of the Common Core Standards, developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center). These groups felt that education was too inconsistent across the different states, and today's students are preparing to enter a world in which colleges and businesses are demanding more than ever before. To ensure that all students are ready for success after high school, the Common Core State Standards established clear universal guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade: "The Common Core State Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do help teachers figure out the knowledge and skills their students should have" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012).

## Explore the Core!

Go to iowacore.gov and click on Literacy Standards. Spend some time looking at the K-3 standards. Notice how consistent they are across the grade levels. Each has specific requirements within the categories:

- Reading Standards for Literature
- Reading Standards for Informational Text
- Reading Standards for Foundational Skills
- Writing Standards
- Speaking and Listening Standards
- Language Standards

Some states follow the Common Core as written, and some states (like Iowa) have their own version. See more at www.corestandards.org

### Learning Activities

Download the Iowa Core K-12 Literacy Manual. You will use it as a reference when you are creating lessons.

Next, explore the Subject Area pages and resources. What tools does the state provide to teachers to support their use of the Core?

Describe a resource you found on the website. How will you use this when you are a teacher?

### Video Examples

Watch this video about the Iowa Literacy Core Standards:



### Key Takeaways

- Literacy is typically defined as the ability to ingest, understand, and communicate information.
- Literacy has multiple definitions, each with a different point of focus.
- “New literacies,” or multiliteracies, are a combination of multiple ways of communicating and making meaning, including visual, audio, spatial, behavioral, and gestural communication.
- As online communication has become more prevalent, digital literacy has become more important for learners to engage with the wealth of information available online.
- Critical literacy develops learners’ critical thinking by asking them to use an analytic lens that detects power, privilege, and representation to understand different ways of looking at information.
- The Common Core State Standards were established to set clear, universal guidelines for what every student should know after completing high school.

## Resources for teacher educators

- Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education Framework [PDF]
- Common Core State Standards
- Iowa Core Instructional Resources in Literacy

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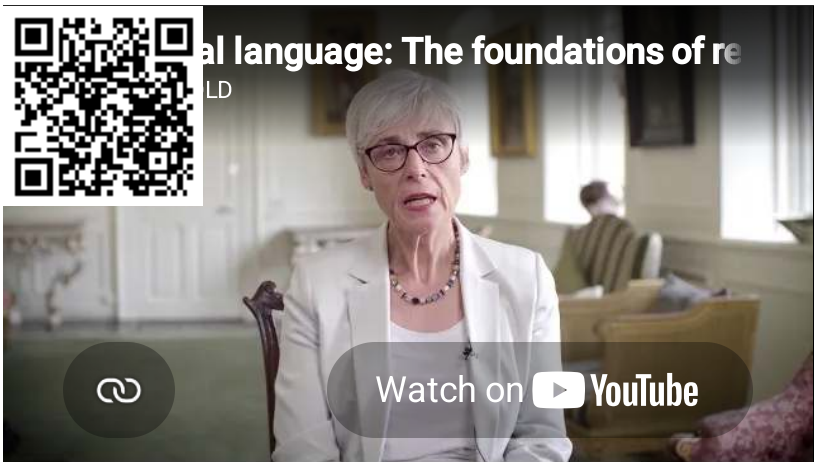
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# Chapter 2 - Foundations of Early Literacy

> *"No one is born a writer; literacy is a peculiar mode of being, but I was all about stories from a very early age, before reading." – Rebecca Solnit*




**Learning Objectives**

- Explain how alphabet knowledge, print concepts, phonological awareness, and oral language development are foundation for literacy development.
- Define alphabet knowledge, print concepts, phonological awareness, and oral language development.
- Define phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- Distinguish phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics.
- Explain how phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension work for reading.

(All learning objectives in this chapter are aligned with InTASC standard #4: Content Knowledge)

**Keywords:** print concepts, phonological awareness, oral language development, phonemic awareness, phonics

Children need to know so much more than the ABCs in order to read books in English (Schickedanz & Collins, 2013). Many caregivers and teachers tend to focus too much attention on letter names and letter sounds when it comes to teaching their children to read. Even in countries where they do not speak English as their first language, they often start with teaching the ABCs to their young children if they want to teach them English as a second language. However, knowing the names and sounds of the letters is just part of learning how to read in English. Let's say children successfully decode the word *don*, a fairly easy word to decode. It is entirely possible that they do not understand what it means, as it is not a frequently used word among young children. The word *don*, which means "to put on," is known by fewer than 40 percent of American children by the end of grade six in the United States (Biemiller, 2010). The bottom line of reading is comprehension (Shea, 2016), understanding what you read. The most important foundation for reading is *oral language development*, because it can help children make meaning out of reading in English.

## The emergent literacy stage

You might observe children pretending to read, even before they start formal reading instruction. Perhaps they might hold a favorite book like *Hush Little Baby* by Sylvia Long upside down while making up their own story. Before children are able to say recognizable words, they might hold a book just like you do while cooing or babbling. These pretend behaviors with books are considered by educators to be part of emergent literacy. Sulzby and Teale, who first used the term *emergent literacy*, explained the concept:

> "Emergent literacy is concerned with the earliest phases of literacy development, the period between birth and the time when children read and write conventionally. The term emergent literacy signals a belief that, in a literate society, young children – even 1- and 2-year-olds – are in the process of becoming literate" (1996, p.728).

Therefore, you can observe the process of children's literacy emerging, including the aspects of oral-language development, phonological awareness, the print concept, and alphabet knowledge.

Before reading is taught formally, children have to know the language that they are trying to decipher. Oral language is not just knowing the meaning of words. It involves the grammar that combines the words correctly. It means having appropriate language for different social contexts, such as school or a party. Let alone understanding the meaning of a word, just being able to say its smallest part, like the phoneme /m/ in *Mom*, is something that takes a newborn baby a long time, hearing it repeated by caregivers, siblings, and neighbors. It is a long journey to acquire the sounds used for the first language and learn to distinguish them from foreign-language or animal sounds. Oral language is an important foundation for future reading development.

### Important terms

- **Alphabet Knowledge**: The knowledge of letter names and sounds. It involves recognizing, writing, and identifying the names and sounds of the letters in the English alphabet.
- **Print Concepts**: The awareness of how print works to convey a message
- **Phonological Awareness**: The awareness of how various sound structures of speech work in a language
- **Oral Language Development**: The development of skills and knowledge used for listening and speaking. It is an important foundation for reading comprehension and writing.
- **Phonemic Awareness**: A subcategory of phonological awareness which focuses on the individual phonemes
- **Phonics**: An instructional approach that teaches the letter-sound relations
- **Fluency**: The ability to read with accuracy, automaticity, natural prosody, and stamina
- **Vocabulary**: The words that are understood and used
- **Comprehension**: The understanding of what is read by decoding and meaning making

## Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is "the ability to pay attention to, identify, and reflect on various sound structures of speech… Phonemic awareness is a subcategory of phonological awareness and refers to the ability to identify and reflect on the individual phonemes" (Johnston et al., 2015, p.58). A phoneme is the smallest audible unit of any language, not only English. Simply explained, phonemes refer to individual sounds. For example, *pen* consists of three phonemes: /p/, /e/, and /n/. Phonological awareness is an important foundation for future formal reading instruction, in which children will decode all of the individual sounds in a word and blend them together to make meaning out of the word.

### Learning Activities

Making compound words is a fun phonological-awareness activity that you can do with the children when you are driving in the car for a short distance.

Say, "What word do you get if you put the words *sun* and *flower* together?" If the children answer, "*Sunflower*," you affirm them and ask another question: "That's right, the word *sunflower* consists of the words *sun* and *flower*.

How about the words *air* and *plane* together?" There are many compound words such as *basketball*, *cowboy*, *doughnut*, and *inchworm*. Whenever you bump into compound words in a book that you are reading aloud with the children, you can use the opportunity as a teachable moment.

*Inch by Inch*, written by Leo Lionni, would be a good context for you to talk about *inchworm* as a compound word.

### Rhyming words

Attention to rhyming words also contributes to phonological awareness. When two different words end with the same sound, as in *school* and *cool*, we call them *rhyming words*. Dr. Seuss's classical children's book *Hop on Pop* presents a great number of pairs of rhyming words. Pairs such as *cup-pup* and *house-mouse* with humorous illustrations give you and the children fun moments to laugh together. *Mouse* and *house* are written in phrases: "Mouse on house," on the verso page, is natural and not so surprising; however, "House on mouse," on the recto page, is unnatural, impossible, and surprising. The illustration is humorous. The spelling patterns of these word pairs (*cup-pup*, *hop-pop*, and *mouse-house*) have identical endings. There are other rhyming words that end with different spellings. For instance, *fox* and *socks* are rhyming words whose endings are spelled differently. Reading Dr. Seuss's book titled *Fox in Socks* would be a good context for mentioning this fact.

Learning Activities

Syllable counting by clapping and identifying words with the same beginning (or ending) sound are other ways for you to assess and train children in phonological awareness.

Ask them, "Which word sounds longer, *caterpillar* or *ant*?" Then you can clap four times for *caterpillar*, as there are four syllables. *Ant* needs only one clap because there is one syllable in the word.

When you count syllables in words, do it only by listening and talking, not by looking at the spellings.

Phonological awareness training should not be based on visual images or spelling but on sound. You can use some clip-art images, though, when you do syllable counting or identifying words with the same sound. For example, display images for *mop*, *hop*, and *top*; then show the children a map. Ask the children which word in the first group (*mop*, *hop*, and *top*) has the same beginning sound as *map*.

## Print concepts

Oral language development and phonological awareness do not necessarily require written texts. However, print concepts, alternatively called *concepts about print* or *print awareness*, do involve them. They do not necessarily refer to sound and letter correspondences. Print concepts refer to the awareness of how print works to convey a message. The directionality that the written text flows is one of the print concepts for a language. English text is read from left to right, whereas Arabic and Hebrew flow in the opposite direction. The concepts of spaces between words and knowing the roles of authors and illustrators belong to print concepts. There are many more print concepts, such as how to hold a book and turn a page correctly. Basically, print concepts are acquired over time through all of the read-aloud experiences that children have from the first day of their lives. While you might not need to explicitly teach them all of these concepts, during a read-aloud you can say something like, "The author of this book is Donald Crews. The author is the person who writes the words. Donald Crews actually drew the pictures too, so he is also the illustrator."

### Alphabet knowledge

Alphabet knowledge includes both letter names and letter sounds. Knowing what sound each letter makes is essential for decoding, as children will need to blend the component sounds to say a word. However, knowing the letter *names* can help children communicate with their caregivers and teachers who are giving them formal reading instruction. There are many alphabet books of different types which can help you teach letter sounds and names. One type just identifies words that start with each letter, accompanied by illustrations for them. Elizabeth Doyle's (2015) *A, B, See!* and Suse MacDonald's (1986) *Alphabatics* are great examples of this type. In *Alphabatics*, the letters do acrobatics on the verso pages. Then the letters turn into things that start with those letters on the recto pages. For example, the lowercase *n* turns upside down in four steps on the verso page. Then it becomes a nest on the opposing recto page. You can simply say the name of the letter and explain the word that begins with the letter. Then add what sound that letter makes. "The name of the letter is *N* (pronounced 'en'). The word *nest* starts with the letter *N*, which sounds like /n/." There are other types of alphabet books that have more narrative, with themes or information, such as *Miss Bindergarten Takes a Field Trip with Kindergarten* by Joseph Slate (2004), Tasha Tudor's (2012) *A is for Annabelle*, and David McLimans's (2006) *Gone Wild: An Endangered Animal Alphabet*. You and the children can create an original alphabet book as a project. As reading and writing are developed simultaneously, you don't need to wait until the children master reading to make one.

This section has discussed the emergent literacy stage, which is the one before formal reading instruction takes place. In the next section, the early literacy stage will be explained as the one that follows the emergent stage. During formal reading instruction in the early literacy stage, concepts such as phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency become more important than alphabet knowledge or print concepts. Vocabulary and comprehension are still important, though, and are taught more explicitly.

Video Example

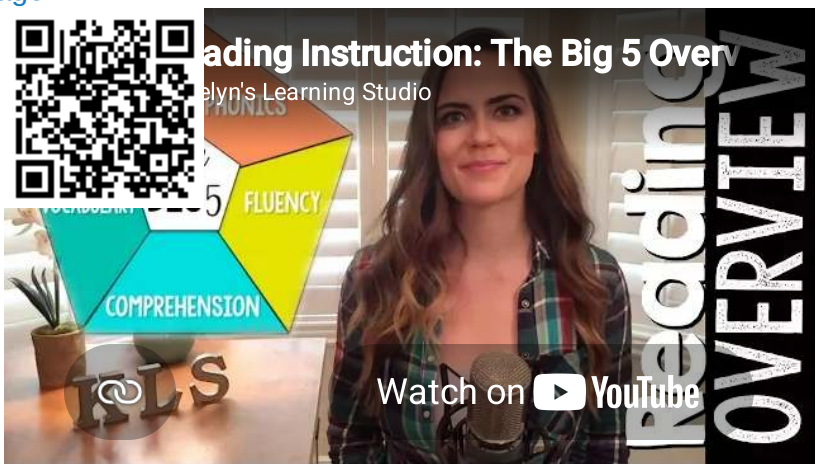



## Learning Activities

**Reflection Questions**

- What can you do to promote young children's emergent-literacy development?
- How can your oral language support young children's literacy development?

## The early literacy stage




Downlaod The Big 5 Overview Video Transcript [DOC]

### Comprehension is the bottom line of reading

Once children start formal literacy instruction at school, they learn to pay attention to the sounds in a word. They analyze the individual sounds, then they put the sounds together to make the word. Once children understand this system, we try to help them automatize the process so they can read fluently. Fluent reading with adequate speed can help children focus more on the meaning of the text. Since the bottom line of reading is comprehension, all of the discrete skills emphasized in formal literacy instruction (e.g., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary) should have the child's meaning-making success as their aim. Therefore, this chapter will show you how to focus on meaning-making and comprehension while you tutor them in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary.

### Vocabulary

Let's start with vocabulary. There are three kinds: receptive, productive, and sight-word. *Receptive vocabulary* is the words whose meanings are understood. When you read a sentence or listen to someone speaking, you can make sense out of it because you have

an adequate receptive vocabulary. *Productive vocabulary* is the words that can be readily used to generate speaking and writing. Even if you understand some difficult or fancy words when you see them, you may never use them for your own speech or writing: so they are not in your productive vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary develops earlier than productive vocabulary. *Sight-word vocabulary* is the volume of printed words that are recognized without a decoding effort. A large sight-word vocabulary would seem to be helpful for reading fluency, but it's useless if the reader doesn't know what the words mean. Early literacy development is comprised of teaching children to understand and use vocabulary words in reading and communicating.

Word selection for vocabulary teaching should be intentional. Sometimes there are words in children's picturebooks that adults don't even know. Words like *lackadaisical* and *languid* in Eric Carle's (2002) *Slowly, Slowly, Slowly, Said the Sloth* could be unfamiliar to caregivers, particularly to non-native speakers. It might not be a good idea to focus on your own difficulties in selecting the words to teach. Instead, focus on the words that are useful for the children you teach. When you pre-read a book before introducing it to the children, choose just two or three vocabulary words, because you don't want to spend the whole read-aloud time teaching vocabulary.

While vocabulary teaching *can* be fun, there are many other fun conversations that you can have with the children about other aspects of a book. When choosing the words to teach, then, think about three points. First, consider the usefulness of the words in the children's everyday lives. See if the children can use them easily in a conversation. See if you can also increase their exposure to these words in other contexts. *Driver* would be a good vocabulary-word choice from Mo Willems's (2003) *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*. While it might not be a difficult word for you, it might be new to the children whom you teach, and it is a useful word for the children's everyday conversations. Second, consider the concreteness of the words.As a general rule, focus on more concrete ones, which will be more useful to the children. Third, consider the amount of repetition in the book of the target words. If they appear multiple times, the child will see them in different contexts, which is helpful for learning nuances. You can also look for opportunities to teach some important homonyms (e.g., the verb *hide* meaning "keep out of sight" and the noun *hide* meaning "animal skin").

Reading aloud is a great context for children to learn vocabulary in. They can see the words and hear them when you read them aloud and when you talk about the story. Then you can explicitly teach child-friendly definitions for the target words, asking the children to repeat the words and use them in sentences, or act out their meaning.

### Fluency

Fluency is reading with accuracy, automaticity, natural prosody (e.g., intonation), and stamina. More succinctly, fluency means reading like you talk. When you hear children reading "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?" with good fluency, *brown* should have a higher tone than *bear*; and the children will take a short breath before saying "…what do you see?" On the other hand, reading with several awkward pauses and unnecessary repetitions like, "Brown…brown bear, brown,…brown bear, what do…ya,…you see?" does not sound like how you talk in English.

Making connections between oral language and reading is significant for fluency development. When you or another fluent reader reads a book to the children, it is an opportunity for them to perceive connections between oral language and the text. They can hear you demonstrating the intonation, rhythm, and flow of the sentences written in the book. Another important way to develop children's fluency is to let them read easy books lots of times. For instance, if a child's Guided Reading Level for instruction is H, books at levels C and D would be good fluency builders.

Again, reading aloud is a great context for building children's fluency. You can informally assess their ability when they read aloud to you. They can hear their own reading, which is immediate feedback to their ears. When a book is relatively easy according to the children's reading ability, they can feel the rhythm and flow of the language better, which reinforces the connection between oral and written English. So, if you see 7-year-old children grab *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* once in a while, you don't need to discourage them just because their instructional level is at the Junie B. Jones books. Encourage them to read the text aloud. You can use some prompts for dialogic reading to talk about topics like healthy eating or the life cycles of different insects and animals.

### Phonics

Phonics relates sounds to letters. It relates phonemes, the smallest sound units of a language, to graphemes, the letters or letter combinations that produce those sounds. For instance, *f* is the grapheme (symbol) for the phoneme /f/ (sound), as in the word *fat*. While this letter-sound connection is straightforward, many grapheme-phoneme relationships are more opaque. For instance, the letter *c* (not *k*) is the grapheme for the phoneme /k/ in the word *cat*. Moreover, there are multi-letter graphemes, such as the 2-letter grapheme "ph" for the phoneme /f/ in the word *phone*, and the 3-letter grapheme "igh" for the phoneme /ai/ in the word *night*. As there are many difficult letter combinations like this found in English phonics, it makes little sense to say phonics instruction

should be completed in a short period of time. Rather, it should take place over a long time, so children can observe patterns in how sounds correspond to letters in simple/short words as well as complex/multisyllabic ones.

The simple letter-sound correspondences in themselves are insufficient to enable children to grasp the meanings of long words. Multisyllabic words usually consist of multiple meaningful parts. In terms of understanding, it is less useful for a beginning reader to break a long word like *unrealistic* down into phonemes than to break it into meaningful chunks like un-real-ist-ic. Perhaps a child below 2nd grade might not need to deal with too many multisyllabic words in their process of learning to read. However, observing patterns within words and sorting words into different families, like the -um family (hum, chum, gum, and glum), and the -am family (ham, jam, and clam), can help children process parts of words in bigger chunks and later deal more easily with longer words with multiple meaningful parts.

Children gradually become aware of the smallest parts of their language having meaning, called **morphemes**. There are two types of morphemes: free morphemes and bound morphemes. A stand-alone word such as apple is a free morpheme. When free morphemes appear with other morphemes attached to them, they are the base or root word. Bound morphemes serve grammatical morphemes or derivational morphemes. Grammatical morphemes signal grammatical information such as number (e.g., cat vs. cat**s**), tense (e.g., walk vs. walk**ed**), and possession (e.g., Xavier vs. Xavier**'s**). They are always suffixes in English. Derivational morphemes make a new word by being attached to root morphemes, which change the meaning (e.g., from happy to **un**happy; from sing to sing**er**) or can change the syntactic category (e.g., from beauty to beauti**ful**). They can be prefixes or suffixes. Most grammatical morphemes are mastered during early childhood, whereas derivational morphemes are studied in the later school-age years (Pence Turnbull & Justice, 2016). Learning these morphemes during early and later childhood substantially increases vocabulary size. How excited the children are to figure out the meaning of a word they never saw before by deciphering the meaning units that they already know!

### Phonemic awareness

To explain phonics, I used the term *phoneme* several times. Again, a *phoneme* is the smallest unit of sound in a word. It does not bear any meaning itself. However, it can make a huge difference when you replace one phoneme in a word with another. When you replace /k/ in the word *cat* with /b/, you make a totally different animal. Replacing *c* with *b* in the word *cat* relates to phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness was briefly explained under the umbrella of phonological awareness. Phonological-awareness training on bigger word parts (at least syllable-size) should take place earlier than phoneme-level training. For instance, *door* and *knob* make the new word *doorknob*, which is an example of phonological awareness at the word level. This is easier than putting the phonemes /p/, /e/, and /t/ together to make the word *pet*. Perhaps children might even be able to skip phoneme-level instruction in learning to read long words if they know how to analyze patterns within words. The focus of reading instruction should be on meaning-making, which is the big picture of literacy development.

## Learning Activities

**Key Takeaways**

- Alphabet knowledge, print concepts, phonological awareness, and oral language development are foundational skills to develop at the emergent literacy stage.
- Oral language development at early ages is the most important foundation for later reading comprehension.
- Vocabulary, fluency, phonemic awareness, phonics, and comprehension are five pillars for the early literacy stage.

## Resources for teacher educators

- Resources for Oral Language Instruction from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Information about Phonics and Decoding
- Phonics resources

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# Chapter 3 - Phonological Awareness

> *"To learn to read is to light a fire; every syllable that is spelled out is a spark." – Victor Hugo*



**Figure 1**: "Storytelling" by Tumisu is in the Public Domain

## Learning Objectives

- Describe the developmental progression of phonological awareness (InTASC Standard #1).
- Define phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, phonemes, graphemes, syllables, onset, rime, short vowel, and long vowel sounds (InTASC Standard #4).
- Distinguish between phonological awareness and phonemic awareness (InTASC Standard #5).
- Describe effective phonological development strategies (InTASC Standard #8).
- Design a lesson to develop phonological awareness in PreK-3 children (InTASC Standard #3 & #7).

**Keywords:** phonological awareness, phonemes, graphemes, syllables, onset, rimes, short vowel sounds, long vowel sounds, hearing and recording sounds assessment

Phonological awareness is a foundational skill for children as it is one of the core components of reading, along with phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Consequently, preservice teachers must be prepared with strategies for facilitating phonological skills development in K-3 children. State standards provide benchmark expectations and guidance for preservice teachers to plan activities that facilitate specific literacy skills development.

## Iowa Core State Standards (Please check your state standards)

Phonological awareness falls under the foundational standards of literacy.

### Iowa Core Standard for Phonological Awareness: Kindergarten Benchmark Expectations (RF.K.2)

Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).

- Recognize and produce rhyming words.
- Count, pronounce, blend, and segment syllables in spoken words.
- Blend and segment onsets and rimes of single-syllable spoken words.
- Isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in three-phoneme (consonant-vowel-consonant, or CVC) words.* (This does not include CVCs ending with /l/, /r/, or /x/)
- Add or substitute individual sounds (phonemes) in simple, one-syllable words to make new words.

## Iowa Core Standard for Phonological Awareness: 1st Grade Benchmark Expectations (RF.1.2)

Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).

- Distinguish long from short vowel sounds in spoken single-syllable words.
- Orally produce single-syllable words by blending sounds (phonemes), including consonant blends.
- Isolate and pronounce initial, medial vowel and final sounds (phonemes) in spoken single-syllable words.
- Segment spoken single-syllable words into their complete sequence of individual sounds (phonemes).

A hum and productive clamor can be heard as children excitedly work in small groups with volunteers! Children are heard clapping the names of their favorite characters into syllables in one group; another group is seen playing a limerick rime game, while the third group is using their fingers to segment sounds of their favorite animals and then jumping over the number of spaces equal to the number of sounds in a word. All these indicate different ways the class is authentically engaged in building phonological awareness or awareness of sounds in the oral language!

### Video Examples

This video explains the difference between phonological awareness and phonemic awareness:




Download Phonological and Phonemic Awareness Video Transcript [DOC]

This video demonstrates the difference between phonemes and letters:




Download Letters vs Phonemes Video Transcript [DOC]

## Phonological awareness

**Phonological awareness** is a set of auditory skills related to hearing sounds in spoken language. It is an umbrella term indicating an awareness of:

- units of spoken sounds such as syllables, onsets, and rimes;
- individual sounds (phonemes) of the spoken language.

## Phonemic awareness

**Phonemic awareness** is the ability to distinguish and manipulate phonemes. It consists of:

- identifying initial and ending sounds;
- identifying medial vowel sounds;
- substituting, adding, or deleting sounds to make new words;
- segmenting sounds;
- blending sounds.

### What is the difference between phonological awareness and phonemic awareness?

Phonological awareness is a broader term encompassing awareness of larger and smaller spoken language units. It consists of manipulating both the larger units (syllables, onsets, and rimes) and smaller units (phonemes). Children may work on identifying syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes. For example, they may clap to syllables, say the rhyming word, or identify the beginning, medial, or ending sound.

Phonemic awareness falls under the umbrella of phonological awareness. Phonemic awareness consists of distinguishing and manipulating the smallest units of spoken language (phonemes). In phonemic-awareness work, children can practice identifying and manipulating initial consonants, medial vowels, and ending phonemes, and segmenting, blending, and counting phonemes.

## Why develop phonological awareness?

Phonological awareness is the most important predictor of early reading ability (Carroll et al., 2003). Cartwright and Duke (2019) used the metaphor of "driving" to show what happens during reading, and to "drive" home the importance of phonological awareness. They noted that phonological awareness skills are the tire treads that help the vehicle move forward on the road. Therefore, it is essential to focus on developing phonological awareness in preschool and early elementary children through various means, as listed below.

## Assessing phonological awareness

Phonological awareness is assessed through tasks like the following:

- **phoneme deletion**: a phoneme is deleted from a spoken word, for example, /k/ from the *cat*.
- **phoneme addition**: a phoneme is added to a spoken word; for example, /d/ is added to *love*.
- **phoneme substitution**: a phoneme is substituted for another, for example, /m/ for /k/ in the *cat*.
- **phoneme counting**: tap the number of phonemes in the spoken word: /k/-/a/-/t/ (3).
- **phoneme segmentation**: break a word into its component phonemes: /k/-/a/-/t/.
- **syllabication** or dividing multisyllabic words into syllables: base-ball, choc-o-late, rain.
- **onset** and **rime segmentation** in spoken words: *c* is the onset and *at* is a rime.
- **rhyming words**: *cat* and *hat.*

**What is the difference between a letter and a phoneme?**

A letter is a visual representation of the sound it makes. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in spoken language. For example, six has three letters but four phonemes (/s/-/i/-/k/-/s/). A letter or grapheme such as *s* may make different sounds (phonemes) depending on the word. For example, the letter *s* makes different sounds in *snake* and *treasure*.

Important terms

- **Phoneme**: the smallest unit of sound in the spoken language. For example, “dog” has three phonemes: /d/, /o/, and /g/. Listening to phonemes in speech requires auditory discrimination. Phonemic awareness (awareness of individual sounds) requires the hearing ability to identify, distinguish, and manipulate individual sounds in speech. Listening to lullabies and nursery rhymes develops awareness of the sounds of a particular language in children.
- **Morpheme:** the smallest unit of meaning in a language. For example, “cat” is one morpheme, a single unit of meaning. Adding an “s” (a bound morpheme) to “cat” changes the meaning from a singular (cat) to a plural (cats) with two morphemes. See the phonics PowerPoint in Chapter 4 for types of morphemes. The reference to a morpheme is made to distinguish it from a phoneme.
- **Graphemes**: the letters representing the smallest unit of sound in the spoken language. The phoneme /d/ is written with a grapheme d. The phoneme /f/ can be represented with the graphemes- f or ph. Writing requires encoding phonemes into graphemes.
- **Syllable**: a unit of pronunciation having one vowel sound, with or without surrounding consonants. For example, nan-di-ta (3 syllables) or dog (1 syllable). See Jack Hartman’s video given in this chapter for syllable practice.
- **Onset**: the letter(s) representing the initial consonant sound before the vowel in a syllable or one-syllable word. For example, “C” in “cat” is an onset, and “d” in “dog” is an onset.
- **Rime**: the letters representing the medial vowel and final consonant(s) in a syllable or one-syllable word. For example, “at” in “cat” is a rime, and “og” in “dog” is a rime.
- **Short vowel sounds**: the short vowel sounds are usually found in (C)VC, (consonant)-vowel-consonant, words where the medial vowel has the short vowel sound, for example, the /a/ sound in *cat* or *apple*.
- **Long vowel sounds**: the long vowel sounds consist of words where the a, e, i, o, or u say their name. These words often have vowel teams or the letter *e* at the end, as in CVVC or CVCe words, for example, *rain* and *rake*.

## Theory of developmental progression of phonological awareness

Children’s developmental progression of phonological awareness occurs in 3 stages (Goswami & Bryant, 1990):

1. syllable awareness,
2. onset and rime awareness,
3. phoneme awareness.

Rhyme and alliteration are key in acquiring phonological awareness (Chard & Dickson, 1999). However, children first become aware of syllables in speech (Liberman, 1973). This is followed by the perception of onsets and rimes. Last comes their awareness of individual sounds. The ability to divide words into syllables develops before their ability to segment words into individual phonemes (Liberman et al., 1974).

### Development among Dual Language Learners

Dual Language Learners’ (DLL) performance in one language directly correlates with their performance in the other, according to Cummins’ (1979) **linguistic interdependence** hypothesis. Therefore, strong first-language skills help children develop their second-language ones. Specifically, leveraging their native-language literacy and prior knowledge helps DLLs develop phonological awareness in the second language.

It should be noted that DLLs differ in their developmental progression by language and skill due to various factors (Lopez, 2012):

- similarities between the languages,
- degrees of proficiency in the languages,
- the quality of adult input,
- cultural expectations,
- verbal memory, and
- personality.

The implications for the facilitation of children’s developmental progression are as follows. Read rhyming books and invite parents to share read-aloud picturebooks from their cultures. Also, leverage the children’s native languages in playing rhyming games, clapping syllables, and breaking up words into onsets and rimes. Lastly, practice breaking words up into individual phonemes. Segmenting, blending, and counting phonemes usually come toward the end once children can produce rhyming words and are already aware of syllables, onsets, and rimes in spoken words.

## Forty-four phonemes of the English language

The video below demonstrates 44 phonemes of the English language.



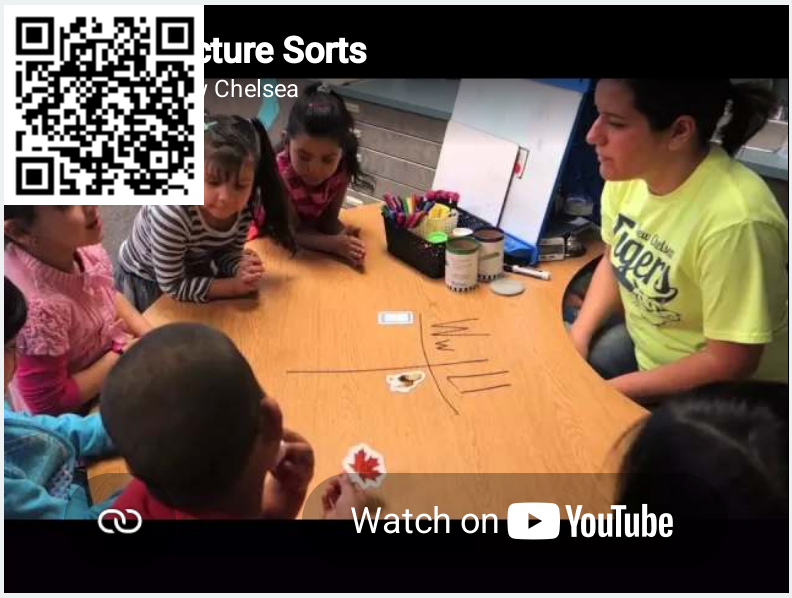

## Phonological development strategies

Our phonological development strategies are based on the Iowa Core benchmark expectations. Please refer to your state standards. The Iowa Core foundational standards for kindergarten focus on the following: demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes). The following tasks show the understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds.

### Recognize and produce rhyming words

1. Read books with rhyming words.
2. Listen to lullabies and nursery rhymes.
3. Play rhyming games.
    1. Finger rhymes and jump rope rhymes are some ways to have fun while building phonological awareness!
    2. Have fun with rhyming riddles!
4. Use word families to create rhymes.
5. Do picture sorts with rhyming words.

Video Example




Download Picture Sorts Video Transcript [DOC]

### Count, pronounce, blend, and segment syllables in spoken words

- Move your body to count syllables to make it fun and engaging! *Let's Learn About Syllables* | Jack Hartmann
- Play syllable games: Syllable games | classroom strategies
- Clap syllables in haiku poetry: Haiku poem interactive

### Blend and segment onsets and rimes of single-syllable spoken words

1. Play the *Chunks* game with onsets and rimes to make new words. Break the onset and rime apart, and then recombine them. For example, *c* is an onset, and *at* is a rime; *d* is an onset, and *og* is a rime.
2. Have children hold up CVC letter cards to say the onset and the rime.
3. Break the onset and rimes in digraph words apart, and put them together again, accompanied by movement and music.
4. Working with blends to break them apart into onsets and rimes with music and movement is fun for the children!

### Isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in three-phoneme (consonant-vowel-consonant, or CVC) words.* (This does not include CVCs ending with /l/, /r/, or /x/)

1. Identify some words to segment into individual sounds. Identify the initial sounds in 3-phoneme (CVC) words.
2. Identify the medial vowel sound in 3-phoneme words.
3. Identify the ending sound in 3-phoneme words.

Segmenting and blending sounds

### Add or substitute individual sounds (phonemes) in simple, one-syllable words to make new words

1. Play verbal riddles by adding, deleting, or substituting sounds.
2. Starting with letter titles, add and substitute phonemes to make new words.
3. Pattern a board game on *Chutes and Ladders* to move up or down based on giving the correct response.

## Learning Activities

### Adapting for diverse learners

- Leverage children's native language to build phonological awareness. For example, children can segment words into phonemes using their native language.
- Based on the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, present information to students in multiple ways, with visuals, video, and audio. This is especially important for English Language Learners (ELLs).
- Engage students in authentic learning experiences such as experiencing music, poetry reading, and dance from different cultural groups to hear the sounds and rhythms of different languages.
- Provide students with options and multiple ways of expression to assess their achievement of the learning outcomes. They may showcase their learning through written, audio, or video formats.

### Technology integration and professional development resources

- Explore online games related to phonological awareness.
- Read literacy blog posts for ideas on technology integration.
- Explore phonological development lesson plans and interactives.
- Engage in literacy professionals' Twitter chats such as #ILAchat and #NCTEchat.
- Listen to literacy podcasts (*Book Deserts*, *Cult of Pedagogy*, etc.).
- Explore professional literacy educators' TikTok and Instagram pages to see how they leverage technology to make learning fun and engaging in small bites!
- Listen to recorded stories and explore educational websites.
- Explore pertinent digital games and apps focused on developing phonological awareness.

### Integration across content (science, math, social studies)

- Count syllables using spoken words related to science, math, and social studies.
- Use spoken words related to science, math, and social studies to play rhyming games.
- Use spoken words related to science, math, and social studies to count and segment phonemes.

## Guardians as partners in literacy

- Encourage guardians to sing family and cultural lullabies to their children at home.
- Encourage oral storytelling at home. Relatives may pitch in as well. Have them think of folktales, fables, or other cultural stories.
- Encourage siblings to play rhyming games or makeup jump rope rhymes.

As metacognition is an important skill to develop in preservice teachers, here are some discussion-based reflection questions.

### Discussion-based reflection questions

- Think back to your memorable literacy experiences in early childhood. Make a T-chart in your notebook. On the left, list school, home, and community literacy practices. On the right, explain their role in your literacy development. Share and discuss your chart with your peers.
- What do you recollect about your school literacy practices?
- What were some memorable books that were read to you or that you read; traditional songs or lullabies that were sung to you or you listened to; and any other family or cultural literacy practices such as oral storytelling of folklore that you experienced?
- What were some community literacy practices that you experienced growing up? How did these practices build your phonological awareness?
- What role did these literacy practices play in your overall literacy development?
- How does the progression of phonological development in children inform your lesson planning?
- What are some of the ways you would develop phonological awareness in diverse children?
- How would you differentiate and personalize phonological awareness strategies for children with hearing or speech disabilities?

### Key Takeaways

- Phonological awareness is an auditory skill. It involves manipulating units of sound in the spoken language.
- Rhyme and alliteration are key in developing phonological awareness.
- Syllable awareness develops first.
- Onset and rime awareness develops next.
- Awareness of phonemes develops last.
- Read rhyming books.
- Sing lullabies and jump rope rhymes.
- Clap, count, and segment syllables, onsets, rimes, and phonemes.
- Build on students' first language and home literacies.

## Resources for teacher educators

### Blending games:

- Blending and segmenting games

### Phoneme segmentation games and activities:

- Phoneme segmentation games and activities
- Segmenting
- Phoneme segmentation fluency
- Reading Rockets resource on diagnosing phonological awareness difficulties from child's, parent's, and teacher's perspectives and how to help

### Teaching resources:

- Phonological Awareness [Slide deck]
- Effectiveness of Early Literacy Instruction: Summary of 20 Years of Research [PDF]
- Early childhood literacy narrative (see details below)

This potential assignment is culturally relevant and considers varied literacy practices situated in multiple cultural contexts while integrating technology. It honors cultural and community literacy practices. For example, I grew up in the oral storytelling tradition.

My phonological awareness developed as a child when I heard my grandmother tell me Indian folktales, fables, legends, and myths.

## Learning Activities: Early childhood literacy narrative

**Purpose of the assignment:** Identify early literacy practices.

1. Please identify your childhood school, home, and community literacy practices. Reflect on how they impacted your early literacy development. Prepare a multimodal media presentation to showcase your findings.
2. Please reflect on early childhood literacy experiences to identify significant school literacy practices, home literacy practices, and community/cultural literacy practices.
3. Investigate the contribution of literacy practices to early literacy development. Please reflect on how these literacy practices contributed to your early literacy development.
4. Create a multimodal presentation with visuals, photographs, audio, and video.

**Why is it relevant for future educators?**

Metacognition is a reflective activity encouraged in teacher-education programs. By reflecting on one's prior literacy practices at home, at school, and in the community, we can take future actions to promote positive literacy practices while honoring cultural and home literacies.

**How to do it?**

Storyboard your ideas. Sketch a visual representation of how they flow. Make notes and write a script for the audio and video. Choose a technology platform to create your early-literacy narrative. Select pertinent supporting visuals, photographs, videos, and hyperlinks to develop your multimodal narrative. Multimodality involves using more than one medium to express yourself. You may explore Prezi, iMovie, or another technology platform.

This is the rubric to evaluate the assignment. Encourage students to self-evaluate using this rubric.

The rubric of Early-Literacy Narrative

| Criteria | Proficient | Developing | Novice |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ideas | Brimming with fresh and original ideas focused on identifying the school, home, and community literacy practices and their contribution to the literacy development of the author. | Somewhat addresses all parts with interesting and focused ideas covering school, home, and community literacy practices. | Does not address all parts, with many details missing, and is not focused. |
| Organization | The piece is well-organized, with effective grabbers, transitions, and conclusions. Addresses all parts of the prompt. | Somewhat organized with effective grabbers, transitions, and conclusions, with room for improvement. Somewhat complete. | No evidence of an organizational structure. Incomplete areas. |
| Voice | Authentically infused with the author's identity, personality, and creativity in its design and composition. | Somewhat infused with the identity, personality, and creativity of the author. | The presentation is not infused with the author's identity, personality, or creativity. |
| Word choice | Concisely composed, with effective word choices, strong verbs (that show, not tell), and vivid vocabulary to create memorable moments. | Somewhat concisely composed with effective word choices. | Not concisely composed. Exhibits redundancy. |

| Criteria | Proficient | Developing | Novice |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sentence fluency | Flows smoothly. | Reads/flows somewhat smoothly, with some room for improvement. | Does not read/flow smoothly. Has choppy or run-on sentences. |
| Conventions | Polished and edited, with attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation. | Somewhat polished and edited. | Not polished and edited, with several errors in conventions. |
| Presentation | Visually appealing, with supporting visuals, videos, and hyperlinks. | Somewhat visually appealing, with supporting visuals, videos, and hyperlinks. | Not at all visually appealing and lacks multimodality. |

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