



Phonics: a guide for families

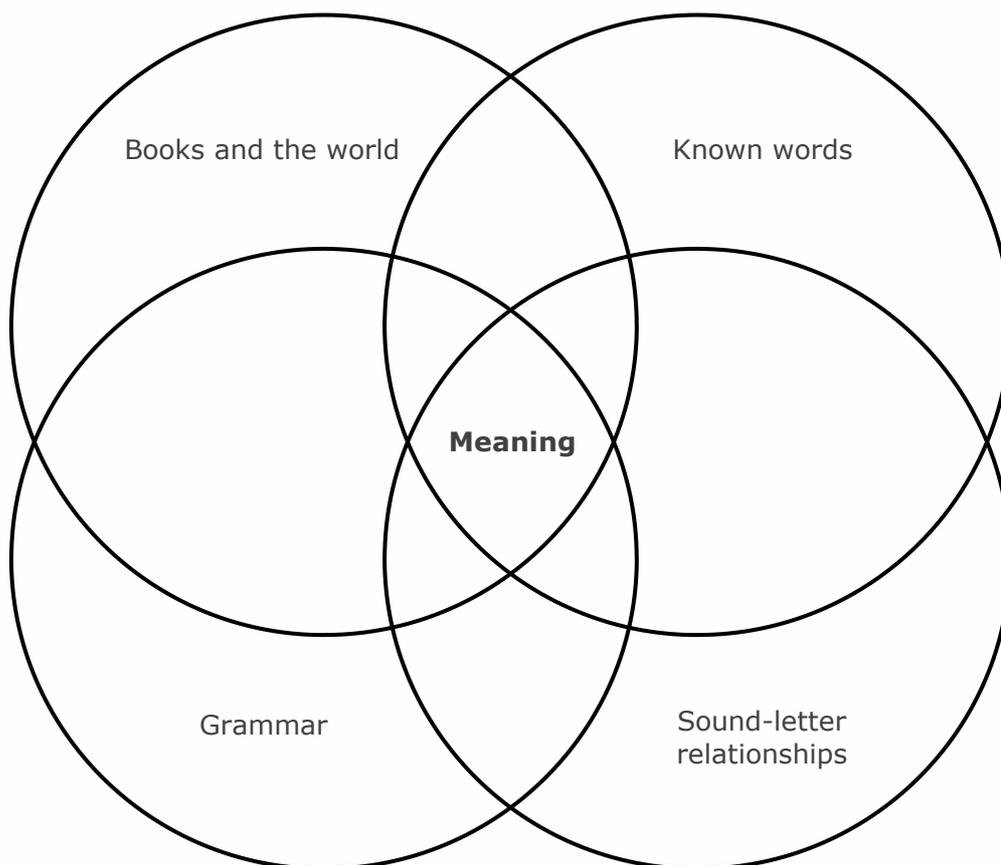
Why do we read?

When we read, whether we are reading for enjoyment or for information, we aim to understand, to make meaning from what we read.

How do readers read?

To be able to understand or comprehend a text, as we read, we apply different knowledge. Readers bring together their knowledge of:

- books and the world
- the way words are used in a sentence to sound grammatically 'correct'
- words recognised automatically, by 'sight'
- the letters of the alphabet and the sounds each letter and groups of letters represent.



Learning the alphabet: phonics

In the early years, children are taught the letters of the alphabet. They learn:

- what each letter looks like
- how each letter is formed when written
- the sound that each letter and groups of letters represent when spoken aloud.

The teaching of this sound–letter relationship is often called ‘phonics’.

Why teach phonics?

It is important for young children to learn phonics because it helps them to spell words when they are writing and gives them a strategy for decoding unfamiliar words when they are reading.

How is phonics taught?

Phonics teaching begins by introducing the individual letters of the alphabet. However, teaching might not start with the beginning of the alphabet and work through it. Teachers structure their lessons so that:

- letters that are used to build many words are taught first
- letters that sound or look similar will be separated over several lessons
- short vowel sounds will be taught early on.

If you would like to read more about the role of phonics in learning to read visit [The Big Six: a guide for families](#).

References

Carnine, DW, Silbert, J and Kameenui, EJ (1997) *Direct instruction reading*, 3rd edn, Merrill/Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.

Shapiro, L and Solity, J (2008) ‘Delivering phonological and phonics training within whole-class teaching’, *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 79: 597–620.

University of Oregon, [Big ideas in beginning reading, website](#)