



HOW TO TEACH SYNTHETIC PHONICS



An Introduction to Synthetic Phonics

Fun, fast
phonics that
develop a love
of reading



WHAT IS PHONICS?

Even for native speakers, the process of learning to read and write in English can be a long one. As words such as 'enough' and 'thought' or 'eight' and 'height' show, just because one word in English is visually similar to another, we do not necessarily sound those words out in the same way.

While some languages are phonetic (with one letter representing one sound), English is more complex and difficult to tackle. The English language has 44 unique sounds, but only 26 different letters in the alphabet. All the different spelling options for sounds come from these 26 letters. In English, we find that one letter may have multiple sound values (the letter 'c' may represent a hard /k/ in words like 'cat' or 'cough' but /s/ in words like 'circle'). We also encounter single sounds that can be represented by a variety of letters and combinations of letters (/ei/ for example, may be represented by -ay in 'day', -ey in 'prey', eigh in 'eight', and so on).

Phonics was developed to teach aspects of English spelling that follow regular patterns. Phonics instruction enables learners to connect the 44 sounds (phonemes) of the English language with the 200 or more letters and combinations of letters (graphemes) that are used to represent those sounds in written text. Over the last 20 years, phonics instruction has become a core part of early years education for first language English curricula in the UK, Australia, the US, and other countries. We have also seen an increase in the use of phonics around the world, in International schools and second language English classrooms.

APPROACHES TO PHONICS

There are three main varieties of phonics used in education: **analytic phonics**, **embedded phonics**, and **synthetic phonics**. While each methodology is based around the core idea of phoneme-grapheme correspondence (PGC), the approaches used are different. Let's look at each in turn.

Analytic phonics is taught by encouraging children to recognise the similarities and differences between words. In the classroom, the teacher might discuss what is the same about the words 'wipe', 'wing' and 'weather'. Children can then deduce for themselves that when they hear a /w/ sound, they should use the grapheme 'w' to represent it.

One of the criticisms of the analytical approach to phonics is that it assumes all students will already have the phonemic awareness skills they need to accurately compare and contrast sounds within words. This is not always the case. Even in the first language classroom, many children require extensive guidance and support to enable them to notice these similarities and differences. In an international context, children often have varied experience with oral English when they begin to read and write. This means that they may not pick up on distinctions between similar sounds, making an analytic approach less effective.

Embedded phonics introduces phonics instruction alongside other elements of literacy development, as part of 'whole-language' development. The teacher begins by introducing the whole word, typically as part of a sentence or a story. The children then decode the words, breaking them down into individual sounds. Phonics instruction is often used as part of the daily routine of the class, with teachers highlighting certain sounds and letters through questioning and noticing activities, such as asking 'Today is Wednesday, what sound does Wednesday begin with?'

The main issue with an embedded phonics approach is that it does not take a systematic approach to learning. Phonics instruction is used to highlight common errors, and elements that the teacher or institution have identified as challenging. This means that not all aspects of phonics are covered, and learners can be left with gaps in their knowledge. Furthermore, there is no systematic progression through PGC, meaning that children may learn less frequent examples earlier, making reinforcement and revision more difficult.

BENEFITS OF A SYNTHETIC PHONICS PROGRAMME



It isn't possible to rote learn all the words of English, so children must have a word attack strategy – and that strategy lies in the mastery of phonics and the ability to blend letter sounds.

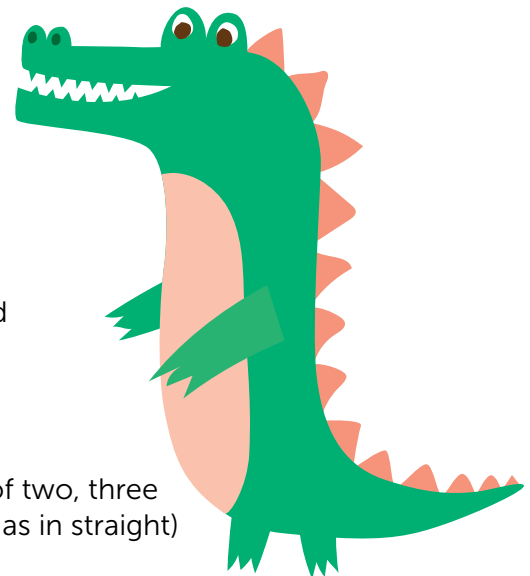
Stephanie Evans and Melanie Porter,
Snappy Sounds Series Advisers



Synthetic Phonics is the most structured approach to phonics, and because of this, it is also the most widely used. The Synthetic Phonics approach begins by introducing phoneme-grapheme correspondences one by one. Throughout synthetic phonics instruction, children are taught the individual sounds, then they are encouraged to blend sounds together to make words (e.g. /s/ /i/ /t/; "sit").

Typically, all synthetic phonics programmes follow an almost identical order of instruction. This is because synthetic phonics begins with sound and letter combinations that are frequently used and simple to understand, such as /s/ in 'sun', before moving on to the less obvious representations, such as /s/ in 'once'. It is a comprehensive approach that teaches students:

- the phonemes (or spoken sounds) of the English language
- graphemes (or written letter/s) to represent the phonemes, in a systematic and cumulative order
- how to blend the phonemes in the written word to read the word
- how to segment the phonemes in a spoken word to spell the word
- that a phoneme can be represented in multiple ways (e.g. 'ai' as in rain or 'ay' as in play)
- that phonemes can be represented by single letters or by groups of two, three or four letters (e.g. /t/ as in tin, /sh/ as in ship, /air/ as in fair, /aigh/ as in straight)
- that the same grapheme can make a different sound (e.g. 'ow' can represent /ow/ as in cow or /oa/ as in snow).



Over the last 20 years, a large number of evidence-based reports and international studies have shown that systematic synthetic phonics instruction supports improved reading outcomes. In response, the implementation of synthetic phonics in Early Years instruction has become commonplace.

- UK: 'The evidence is clear that the teaching of systematic synthetic phonics is the most effective way of teaching young children to read, especially those at risk of having problems with reading' (Department for Education, 2010).
- USA: 'Systematic phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than alternative programs' (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, NIH, HHS, National Reading Panel, 2000).
- Australia: 'provide systematic, direct and explicit phonics instruction so that children master the essential alphabetic code-breaking skills required for foundation reading proficiency' (Rowe & National Inquiry into Teaching Literacy, 2005).

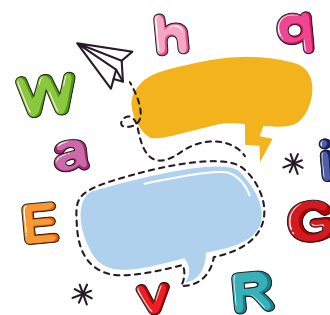


INTRODUCTION TO SNAPPY SOUNDS

Snappy Sounds is a systematic, synthetic phonics programme designed to make phonics teaching as simple and speedy as possible. Students will learn to sound out and then blend the letter–sound combinations in the word in order to read the word. Once students can read the text on the page, their vocabulary and comprehension skills and knowledge are required to draw meaning from that text. The Snappy Sounds series includes decodable books matched to every week of learning – starting from week 1. It progresses in a step-by-step sequence of learning, providing students with a feeling of success straight away. With Snappy Sounds, students learn the skills and knowledge required to read every book in the series without needing to guess. This makes it highly motivational for students of all abilities, and supportive for teachers aiming to meet the needs of each individual student in their class.

Snappy Sounds supports teachers to deliver phonics teaching effectively through:

- an explicit and snappy 'I do, we do, you do' teaching routine
- a mastery teaching sequence that dedicates a quarter of lessons to consolidation and catch up, so that teachers have flexibility to set the right pace for their students
- engaging fiction and non-fiction decodable books for students to apply and practise their learning from week 1
- an assessment check that reveals exactly where students need further support
- professional development and teacher support built into all resources
- digital teaching support and resources.



ACTIVITIES FOR INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

Young Learners need to build their phonics skills in a systematic way that is age-appropriate and engaging. Following a synthetic phonics programme such as Snappy Sounds will ensure that you present new PGCs in a logical and cumulative order, but how can we make sure that the way we teach these new combinations is fun and engaging? Here are a few ideas for working with individual phoneme – grapheme correspondence.

1. I spy

Materials: none needed.

You are probably already familiar with the game I spy, which is perfectly suited for raising awareness of individual sounds and letters. All you need to do is begin by saying "I spy with my little eye something beginning with" and add in the sound of your choice. Remember make the sound a pure sound ssss instead of suh, mmmmm instead of muh. Children then have to guess the item around them that you are looking at.

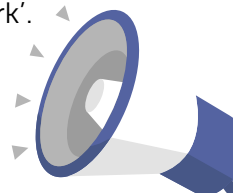
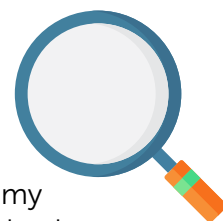
Extension: You can change the difficulty of this game by varying the position of the sound in the word. For example "I spy with my little eye something ending with /d/" might bring you 'board' or 'card', while "I spy with my little eye something containing /m/" could be 'hamburger', 'marker' or even 'homework'.

2. Sound Hunt

Materials: Timer.

Sound Hunt is similar to I spy, but adds in movement and physical interaction. Set a timer for 1 minute (or longer if you wish). Tell the children that they will have 1 minute to find you as many items as they can that begin with a specific sound. You can either model the phoneme or show the grapheme on a flashcard or your whiteboard. The children then use the time to run around and collect as many items as they can which begin with that grapheme/phoneme. If, for example, you chose the grapheme 'b', they could collect books, bags, bears, boats, and so on.

Extension: In a classroom environment, you can add a bit of competition to the game. Allocate points for every item collected, e.g: 1 point if someone else has the same object as you, 2 points if you are the only person/team with that item.



ACTIVITIES FOR INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

3. Bingo

Materials: Pre-prepared bingo sheets (4 x 3) with known graphemes in each square.

Bingo is the go-to teacher's game because it is so versatile. With a few adjustments it can be used to practise phoneme/grapheme correspondence. All you need to have is enough 4 x 3 grids for the number of children. In each square, write the graphemes you want to practise. To begin with, keep it simple. Just say the phonemes that match and when the child hears what is written on their bingo board they cross it off. Once they are familiar with the game you can increase difficulty by using full words, or changing the position of the phoneme in the word as we did with I spy (on the previous page).



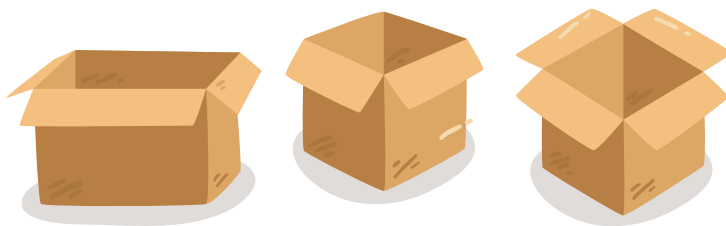
Extension: Why not increase the engagement by getting the children to make their own bingo cards. Provide a list of known graphemes for them to choose from. Children can then decide which graphemes they want to listen out for and where to put them on the board. This will also decrease your preparation time.

4. Sorting

Materials: a selection of items, images or word cards to represent each phoneme being practised.

Sorting activities encourage the use of critical thinking skills, and are a great way of assessing what

children have learned. Choose two similar sounding phonemes, for example /d/ and /g/ and select a group of words that begin with each sound. These can be pictures, word cards or even physical objects. Ask the students to sort the words into two separate groups. Remind students to sound out the words as they sort them: d-a-d, dad; g-a-p, gap.



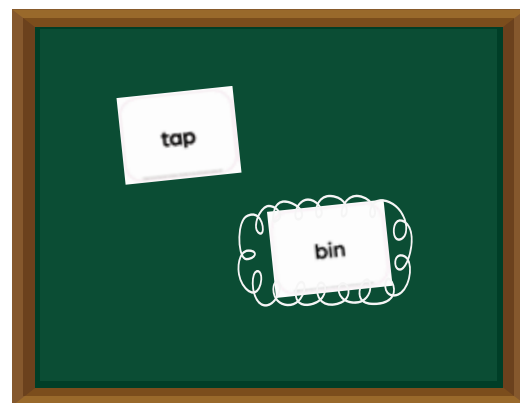
Extension: You can also use this game to encourage learners to differentiate between graphemes that represent the same phoneme. For example, if you are working with the /ei/ sound, you might have words to represent -ay, -ey, -eigh, a_e and so on.

5. Circle the Sound

Materials: Picture flashcards/illustrations on the board, board markers.

This is a simple variation of a typical board race game. Either stick the flashcards to the board, or draw your own illustrations. Arrange the class into two teams and have them line up, one behind the other, facing the board. Give the person at the front of each line a different coloured marker. Call out a phoneme that you have studied. The students with the markers should

run to the front of the classroom and circle the picture that matches the phoneme you said, for example if you say 'sss' the student might circle a picture of the sun. Before each new phoneme, the student passes the marker to the next person, then moves to the back of the line.



ENCODING AND DECODING ACTIVITIES

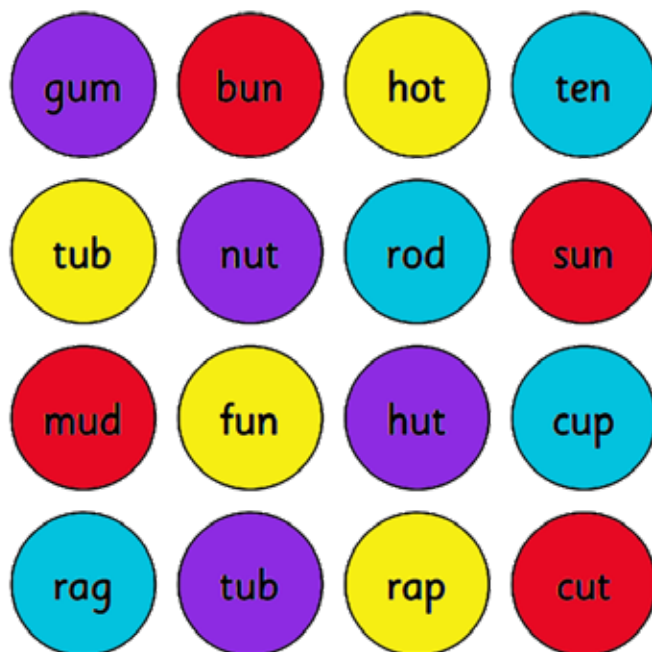
As learners build their confidence in phoneme/grapheme correspondences, we need to make time for them to put their knowledge into practice. Remember, you should start doing encoding and decoding right from week one of their phonics instruction. In this group of activities, learners are encouraged to blend and segment graphemes to identify whole words.

1. Four in a row

Materials: 2 players, coloured counters, a pre-prepared 'four in a row' grid.

The objective of the game is for the children to sound out words formed of known graphemes. Place the four-by-four word grid (see side picture) so that both players can see it. The children then take it in turns to read one of the words on the grid by sounding out and blending the sounds. (This is not necessary if they can read the word automatically.) If the child gets it right, they then put one of their counters on the word to cover it up. The next player then has their turn. Play continues until a player has four counters in a row horizontally, vertically or diagonally.

Extension: You can increase the level of challenge in this game by asking the students to put each word they land on into an oral sentence, to demonstrate comprehension of the word.



2. Sound Swap

Materials: A range of small grapheme flashcards, a list of words that you can make with the chosen graphemes.

This game can be played with as few or as many words as you like, depending on the progress you have made with your phonics programme. Explain to the students that in this task they will be building words and just changing one sound in a word at a time. Read a word from your list aloud and ask the students to repeat it. Have the grapheme flashcards placed in a straight line above the word building space. Ask the student to drag down the graphemes one by one, saying each sound, to build the word. For example, if your first word is 'cat' the child should choose 'c', 'a', and 't' – cat. Next, ask a student to change one grapheme to make a new word. For example, if the last word was cat, the new word could be hat. In this case, the student swaps the 'c' flashcard for an 'h' flashcard. Play continues until there are no more possibilities.



Extension: As students become more skilled, you can increase challenge by setting a time limit and asking the children to see how quickly they can form a new word.

3. Pelmanism

Materials: A set of picture flashcards for known words, a set of matching word cards.

Pelmanism, or snap, is another classroom favourite. Shuffle the word cards and picture cards together and place them all face down in a grid on the floor or table. Children take it in turns to flip two cards, if they match then they can keep the pair and have another go. When children flip the picture cards, ask them to say the word that it represents out loud. When they flip over a word card, encourage them to say each sound and blend them together to build the word.



4. Making Words

Materials: A pre-prepared making words worksheet (see below).

In this activity, students insert missing graphemes to form the word that completes a sentence. An illustration of each missing word should be provided to support understanding. Encourage students to sound out and check each word to ensure their answers are correct responses once completed. In this example, all the words are CVC words, with single letter graphemes. If you are working with multi-letter graphemes, each one should still be represented by a single line. This is because each dashed line represents a sound, not a letter.



The dog and the _ _ _ nap.

A _ _ _ can

5. Silly Quizzes

Materials: 5 – 10 decodable quiz questions.

Arrange children into small groups and hand out one quiz sheet per 'group'. Ask students to take it in turns to read each question one at a time, blending sounds through the word. For example, you might use a question such as 'Is it fun to run in mud?' The student should then decide on their answer and justify their answer to the group. Encourage students to use full sentences in their justification and to elaborate on their response. Try to use questions that don't have a right or wrong answer.



DECODABLE READERS

Decodable readers are books that support learners who are beginning to read by 'decoding' words; that is, sounding out and blending to read words. They are a useful tool for encouraging children to apply, practise and consolidate the phonics knowledge they acquire in class. Decodable readers use only the letters and sounds that students have learnt in their sequence of learning and a small number of high frequency words – so students can read every word in a decodable book. This is highly motivational for all students.

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Theoretical research and empirical evidence support the need for students to apply phonics skills in connected text ... Evidence is very clear that decodable text positively impacts early reading progress.

Cheatham & Allor, 2012

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A good quality series of decodable readers will gradually introduce letters and sounds, and provide lots of practice. They should feature text that makes sense, has meaning and is engaging, such as a good story or an interesting informative text. Of course, to ensure that students aren't guessing what the words are, they should also include text that isn't too predictable, and images that don't encourage students to guess the words, so students need to read and decode to understand the sentences. Decodable readers should be used as part of your systematic phonics teaching in guided, shared and independent reading sessions.

USING DECODABLE READERS

Decodable readers can be used in class just as you would use any other reading material. Pre-reading activities such as predicting the story from the cover, or looking at chapter titles should be used to generate interest in the books. While reading, teachers should be discussing the meaning of the text and checking comprehension, as we would with a typical reader, and a number of different follow up activities can be used. The key difference with a decodable reader is that these activities are done in combination with the revision and practice of specific phoneme-grapheme correspondences.



While each of the Snappy Sounds decodable readers includes guidance on how to use them on the inside covers, here are a few top tips for teachers who are looking to implement them in class:

1. Choose a decodable reader to match students' decoding skills. Students should have the skills and knowledge to read every word in the book you give them.
2. When students show signs of struggle, provide them with consistent feedback. Ask them to sound out the letters and blend them to read the word. If they continue to struggle, sound out and blend to read the word together.
3. Avoid asking students to guess the word by looking at the picture or by asking what the word starts with. When reading a decodable reader, students should be able to use their phonic knowledge to sound out and blend the words.
4. Take time to discuss the book, including the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. The Snappy Sounds decodable readers include notes to help you with this and checking comprehension.

GLOSSARY

phoneme: the smallest units of sound that we can hear or say in words (they are mostly one mouth movement). There are 44 phonemes in the English language. They are usually denoted using forward slash marks (e.g. the phoneme /a/ as in 'a-nnn-t, ant'). Students must initially learn to say and identify these sounds in spoken words.

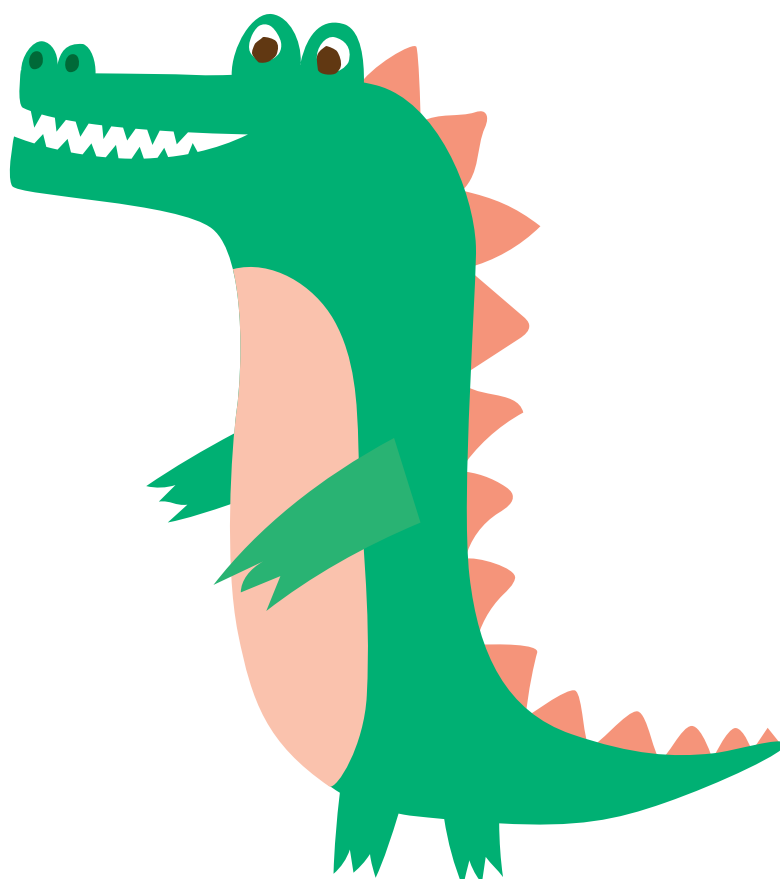
grapheme: a letter or group of letters that represents a phoneme in written text. We read and write graphemes. Some phonemes are represented by several graphemes (e.g. /ai/ as in aim, day, game, apron, break).


PGC: stands for phoneme–grapheme correspondence. In a synthetic phonics programme, students typically learn between one and four new PGCs per week.





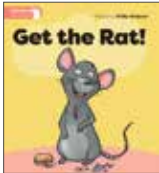









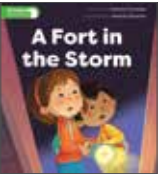












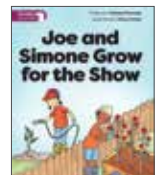



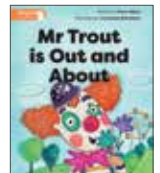








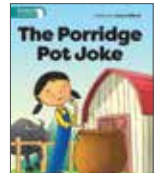


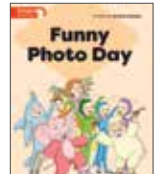

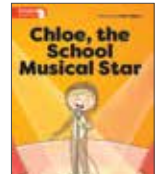
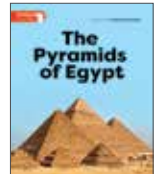
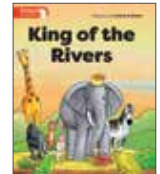
blending: the process of reading words by saying individual phonemes together until you can hear the word you are reading (e.g. 'b-lll-e-nnn-d, blend').

segmenting: the process of spelling words by hearing individual phonemes in a spoken word and attributing a grapheme to each of those phonemes to spell the word (e.g. '/k/ /a/ /t/, c-a-t').

sound out: saying a word by breaking it down into its individual sounds. For example, saying "sssss- uh – nnn" rather than 'sun'.



<p>Snappy Sounds Level 1</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>s a t m</p>	<p>p i n</p>	<p>d g o</p>	<p>c h b</p>
<p>Snappy Sounds Level 2</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>x ck</p>	<p>ff ll ss zz</p>	<p>VCC and CVCC words; Suffix: -s</p>	<p>CCVC words</p>
<p>Snappy Sounds Level 3</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>ai</p>	<p>ee</p>	<p>igh</p>	<p>oa</p>
<p>Snappy Sounds Level 4</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>Suffixes: -le -ing</p>	<p>oi</p>	<p>ur</p>	<p>er -er</p>
<p>Snappy Sounds Level 5</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>/ee/: e ea</p>	<p>/eel/: e-e y</p>	<p>/ai/: a ay</p>	<p>/ai/: a-e ea</p>
<p>Snappy Sounds Level 6</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>/y/+oo/: ew ue</p>	<p>/y/ + /oo/: u u-e</p>	<p>long /oo/: ew ue</p>	<p>long /oo/: u-e ui</p>
<p>Snappy Sounds Level 7</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>/s/: c ce se st</p>	<p>/j/: g dge ge</p>	<p>/z/: s ze se</p>	<p>/er/: ir or</p>
<p>Snappy Sounds Level 8</p>				
<p>Focus Letters and Sounds</p>	<p>/u/: o; /e/: ea</p>	<p>/o/: a; /i/: y</p>	<p>/v/: ve</p>	<p>/ear/: are ear ere</p>

					
e k f	r u l	j v	w y z	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation
					
CCVC and CVCC words	ch tch sh	qu wh	th ng nk	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation
					
ar	Long oo Short oo	or	ow	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation
					
ear	air	ure	Suffix: -ed	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation
					
/igh/: i ie	/igh/: i-e y	/oa/: o ow	/oa/: o-e oe	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation
					
Split vowel digraphs	/ow/: ou	/oi/: oy	/r/: wr; /n/: kn	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation
					
/ar/: a al	/or/: a al	/or/: aw au	short /oo/: u ou	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation
					
/or/: oar ore	/f/: ph; /m/: mb	/uh/+/l/: -el -il -al	/k/: ch	Revision & Consolidation	Revision & Consolidation

Letters within slashes, i.e. /ee/, denote the phoneme (sound) or the grapheme (letter/s) being studied.



For further information on any of the Macmillan Education International Curriculum resources please contact us using the details below:

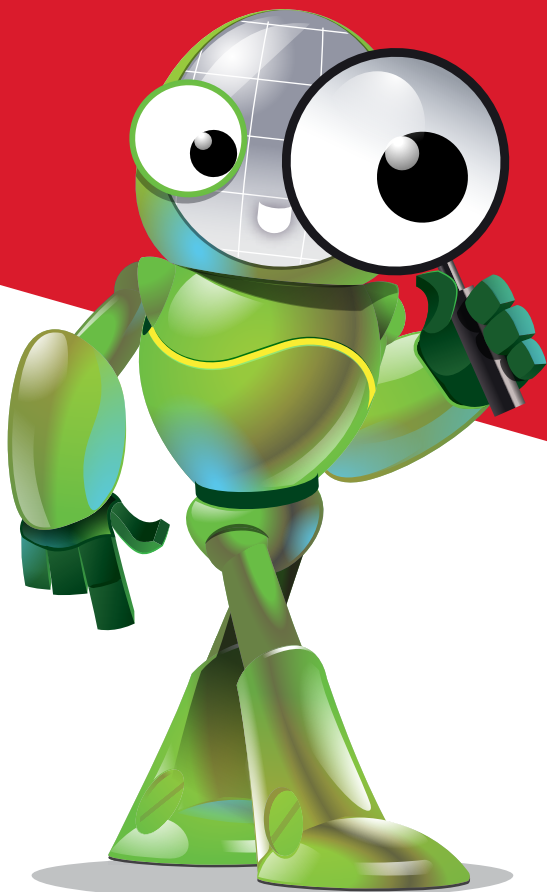
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