

# DEVELOPING SOUND SENSE

## The Foundation for Literacy



**A Complete Phonological/Phonemic Awareness FREE Curriculum Available from**

**SIGHTWORDS.com**

“Decoding depends on phonemic awareness: a child’s ability to identify individual speech sounds. Decoding is the on-ramp for word recognition.” ~G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D.

## **Features of the curriculum:**

It is a foundational, core “pre-phonics” curriculum that is:

- ◉ Comprised of 12 online modules with a total of 110 sequenced games and activities to develop all aspects of phonological awareness from listening to beginning reading.
- ◉ Includes a 2-minute video demonstrating how to teach each lesson.
- ◉ Includes all printables and downloadable scripts needed for each lesson and gives suggestions as to how to reduce or increase the difficulty of each lesson.
- ◉ Free to all users everywhere---school districts, schools, teachers, tutors, parents.
- ◉ Provides scaffolding in the early lessons of each module to help ensure student understanding and success.
- ◉ Contains a pacing guide and links for on-going assessments for phonological awareness skills mastery.
- ◉ Appropriate for use with small group classroom instruction provided by teachers or paraprofessionals, Tier II instruction, individual intervention, tutoring, home schooling, and parental reinforcement of classroom instruction.
- ◉ Uses direct, explicit, sequenced, systematic instructional methodology, which is especially helpful for ESL learners and novice or struggling readers.
- ◉ Includes forms for teachers to send to parents to reinforce individual skills at home.
- ◉ Fully aligned with the science of reading.
- ◉ Built upon the findings of the National Reading Panel and the work of Marilyn Adams, Ingvar Lundbergh, Joseph Torgesen, the Florida Center for Reading Research, and the National Institute for Direct Instruction.
- ◉ Developed through a grant from the Callaway Foundation, piloted in classes in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, and sponsored by the Georgia Preschool Association, which serves educators and parents of children from birth through age eight.

## About the Authors

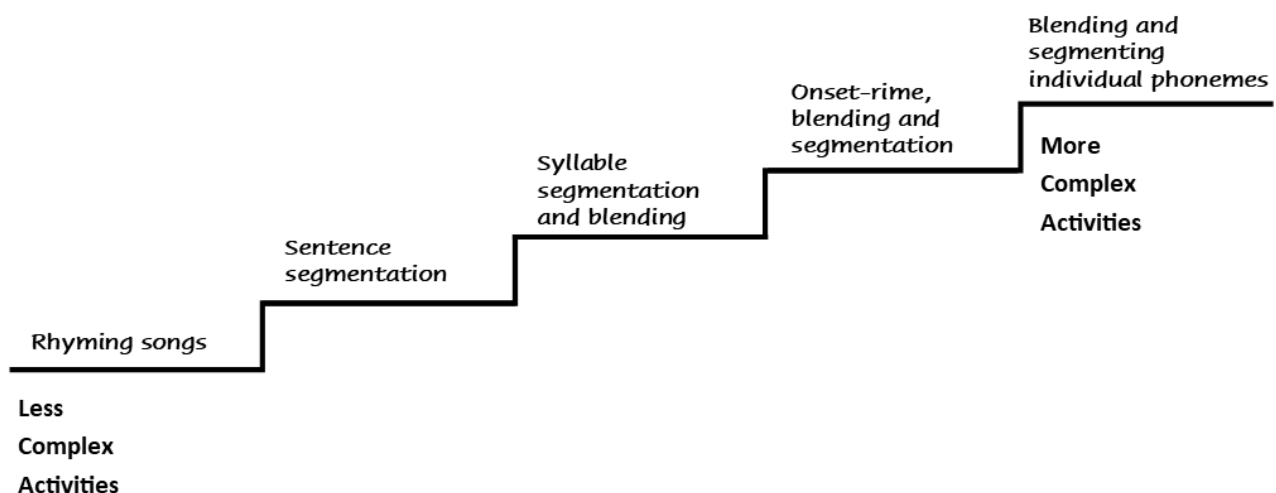
**Gajan Retnasaba**, an entrepreneur with a law degree from Harvard University, created the *Developing Sound Sense* online phonological awareness curriculum. After attending a workshop on phonological awareness to support his young daughter's reading development, he approached **Betsy Primm** and **Donna House**, experienced educators, to develop a free online curriculum for parents and teachers worldwide.

Both Betsy Primm and Donna House hold Ed.S. degrees in education, and each has over three decades of teaching and administrative experience, specializing in learning disabilities and reading instruction. They have taught at various public and private educational institutions, trained thousands of general education, special education, and pre-school teachers, and provided private tutoring to both advanced and struggling children. Their passion lies in helping children succeed in reading.

Collaborating with **Margo Edwards**, the online program director, the team spent two years developing the curriculum. Betsy Primm and Donna House provided the content, while Margo Edwards created the engaging games, videos, printables, and clear instructions for the 110 lessons. The curriculum was integrated into Mr. Retnasaba's website, **Sightwords.com**, in 2016 and has since been accessed by millions of people worldwide. In 2023, the curriculum was updated and expanded. The goal of the curriculum and the website is to provide free, high quality, engaging instructional material for use by anyone, any time, anywhere.

## Curriculum Overview

Our free phonological/phonemic awareness curriculum is a carefully sequenced, comprehensive program consisting of twelve modules containing a total of 110 lessons. Each lesson provides a two- or three-minute video that demonstrates to an adult how to teach the lesson. The curriculum provides the downloadable instructional materials needed to teach all lessons. It also provides an optional script for adults to use in presenting each lesson. Although the curriculum is online, children do not implement any of the curriculum activities using a computer. The online material is strictly for an adult to use in preparing to teach a lesson. The 110 lessons are in game or activity format. All lessons require direct, explicit, systematic adult instruction. However, they are designed to be engaging and fun for children. They are meant to supplement a core reading program. The lessons are appropriate for use in small groups (2-5), or on a one-to-one basis. They are suitable for Tier 11 use, as well as use by children who need extra instruction, tutoring, or home practice. The lesson modules follow the research-backed progression of phonological skills development depicted in the diagram below. (Chard, D. and Dickson, S. 1999)



## Curriculum Features

The module lessons begin with children's orally combining phonological segments to produce whole words (synthesis) and progress to their orally segmenting words into parts (analysis). The science of reading has confirmed that phonological synthesis is an easier task than phonological analysis. (Yopp, 1988; Anthony and Francis, 2005). Visit our website for the full scope and sequence of our curriculum and its alignment to Georgia's ELA K-2 Foundational Standards for Domain F: Phonological Awareness.

Our curriculum provides suggestions for scaffolding each lesson activity as well as ways to scale up the activity's difficulty. It provides a Fast Track to allow adults to move more quickly through the curriculum with children who exhibit mastery of the skill presented in a module prior to its being taught. It also provides a criterion reference benchmark assessment that can be administered whenever a child completes all the lessons in a given module.

Additionally, it provides suggestions for other criterion reference and normed assessments for consideration.

Each lesson provides a short communications form for teachers or tutors to send home to a child's parents with specific instructions for the reinforcement of a lesson. The curriculum is offered FREE of charge so that it can be used by anyone, anywhere, any time. Our goal is to help teachers and other adults teach effectively so that children will experience future success and pleasure in learning to read.

# **RESEARCH SUPPORTING OUR CURRICULUM**

## **AND ITS FEATURES**

### **WHAT IS THE RESEARCH SUPPORTING OUR CURRICULUM?**

After re-writing and revising the curriculum, based on feedback from a number of preschool classroom teachers in programs in Georgia between 2014 and 2016, the developers conducted an action research project in coordination with selected preschools in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. The Director of the parish preschools for the Archdiocese selected seven of the 32 schools under her supervision to participate in the pilot study. All teachers in the study were provided complete curriculum printables and trained in the curriculum's use. The pilot continued throughout the 2016-2017 academic school year. Teachers provided weekly feedback to the Archdiocese preschool director and the curriculum developers via email. At the end of the study, the curriculum was found to be more effective with students than the phonological awareness programs and materials used by the schools in the control group. The Callaway Foundation of LaGrange, Georgia, provided the funding for the development of the curriculum and for this action research project. The Georgia Preschool Association, which is the oldest preschool association in Georgia, sponsors the free curriculum. Ideally, every reading curriculum program would undergo rigorous experimental research, but the enormous cost, time, and labor intensity of doing so make it prohibitive for most programs. Louisa Moats, the pioneer and research giant in the science of reading, has stated in a Webinar interview with Liz Brooks, "I think that the most important thing (in programs) is alignment—alignment with the tenets of research—alignment with what we know about language learning." (Moats, L., April 24, 2023) Our curriculum is tightly and rigorously aligned with the science of reading. It was updated and expanded in 2023.

## **WHY DOES OUR PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS CURRICULUM USE SO MANY LESSONS WITH PICTURES?**

In our phonological awareness curriculum, we recognize that, while phonological awareness is an auditory skill, there are a variety of factors that can affect a child's development of this skill. These factors include age, attention span, motivation, and being an English language learner. To support children's phonological awareness development, we incorporate pictures into our activities, which make the activities more game-like and engaging. This, in turn, builds children's confidence and aids memory recall. Furthermore, pictures indirectly aid in developing a child's vocabulary, which is especially helpful for English language learners. When pictures are used in a lesson, the next lesson in the module usually presents a similar phonological activity that omits pictures. Research on the development of the kindergarten version of the Test of Phonological Awareness-second edition: 2+ (Torgesen and Bryant, 2004) determined that pictures to assess a child's ability to isolate and match or delete initial and ending phonemes was appropriate for use in this nationally normed assessment measure. Significantly, the phonological awareness activities developed for classroom use by the Florida Center for Reading Research (2014) and co-copyrighted by the Florida Department of Education use pictures throughout its curricula for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.

## **WHY IS OUR PHONOLOGICAL CURRICULUM TAUGHT IN SMALL GROUP (2-5) OR ON A ONE-TO-ONE BASIS?**

Our phonological curriculum is taught in small groups of 2-5 or on a one-on-one basis because the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) found in their report, *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel* (2008), that adult-directed instruction focused on children's involvement in using the skill being taught in small groups or on a one-to-one basis yielded the best results (Lonigan, C. and Shanahan, T., 2010). Our curriculum aligns with this

finding in order to provide effective instruction for phonological awareness development.

**DO CHILDREN WHO START THE CURRICULUM BEFORE KINDERGARTEN NEED TO BE TAUGHT DIFFERENT SKILLS THAN CHILDREN WHO BEGIN IT IN KINDERGARTEN?**

Surprisingly, the answer to the question is no (Rice, et.al., 2022). Although there is limited research on age and phonological development, the research that does exist indicates that both preschoolers and kindergarteners benefit from similar phonological awareness instruction (National Early Literacy Panel Report, 2009). The sequence of instruction is similar for both groups, although the scope of instruction will typically be less for early preschoolers and pre-kindergartners than for kindergarteners and older children.

With this research in mind, we urge you to use our curriculum's pacing guide as just that: a guide. Many factors can and do influence when an adult uses the curriculum with children. For example, in a research article from Kimoda Health (March 14, 2023), the medical writers state that post pandemic pediatric speech disorders more than doubled in children between the ages of 0-12. The largest percentage of increase in children with diagnosed speech disorders were between the ages of 0 and 5 years old.

This finding will have an impact on many of these children's acquisition of phonological skills in view of research that children's phonological skills develop rapidly during their very early years. (Lonigan, C. et. al., 1998). This early phonological skills development was more recently confirmed in research summarized just prior to the start of the pandemic (Gillon, 2018). It is too early to know the full impact of the pandemic on children's phonological development and its subsequent impact on their reading skills. The important thing to keep in mind is not when you teach phonological awareness but that you teach this foundational skill that research (Adams, 1990)



has found to be one of the two most important indicators of children's success in learning to read.

### **WHY DO YOU USE UNCONVENTIONAL PRONUNCIATIONS FOR THE PHONEMES REPRESENTED BY SUCH LETTERS AS Q, W, AND Y?**

By pronouncing those phonemes as koo, woo, and ye respectively, they shift from stop sounds to continuant sounds. Continuant sounds can be held much longer than stop sounds. That makes them easier for many children to hear and for a young child to articulate. When uttered as the initial sound of a word, these unconventional phoneme pronunciations blend smoothly with the sounds that follow them to make whole spoken words. (Engelmann, Haddox, & Bruner, 1986). Examples such as blending "ye" with "ard" to form the spoken word, "yard" and "woo" with "ill" to form the spoken word, "will" illustrate this technique.

Words that end with w or y often have different sounds, but that variation is taught in phonics instruction, not in our phonemic awareness curriculum lessons. Phonemic awareness is not phonics, but its development makes learning and using phonics much easier.

The use of our pronunciations of the sounds of the letters of the alphabet (known as sound card pictures in our curriculum) has proved particularly helpful to young, naïve readers and children who struggle with learning to read (Shaywitz and Shaywitz, 2020). The authors suggest the use of *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons* (Engelmann, et. al., 1986) as a phonologically based, explicit, systematic reading program taught on a one-to-one basis for such readers.

It's acceptable if you choose to use the more conventional articulated phonemes for the sound card pictures, However, be sure not to add a vowel sound at the end of any consonant phoneme you teach (e.g. buh, duh, hih). This distortion makes phonics harder to learn and use later on in school. View our sounds pronunciation section of our curriculum for specifics on this matter.

## **WHY DOES THE CURRICULUM INTRODUCE LETTER NAMES STARTING WITH MODULE F?**

**THE CURRICULUM DOES NOT DO THIS!** Please note CAREFULLY the directions for the activities in Modules F through Module I. The lowercase alphabet cards are referred to as sound picture cards, NOT letters. They are never referred to as letter names in these Modules. This decision is based on the developer of Direct Instruction, Siegfried Engelmann's, use of the term, "sounds writing", instead of letter writing in his book, *Teach your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons (1986)*.

As Sally and Jonathan Shaywitz have noted, letters by themselves are meaningless marks of circles and lines. They are meaningful only as visual symbols representing the sounds of speech. (Shaywitz. S. and Shaywitz, J., 2020). Adams, et. al. used sound card letters in the last part of their book, *Phonemic Awareness in Young Children: a classroom curriculum (1998)*. The research findings of the National Early Literacy Panel (2009) indicated that combining phonemic awareness training with print-related activities enhances learning outcomes. Therefore, our curriculum first introduces letter names in Module J because of the need to teach long vowel sounds, which are the same as the vowel letter names. The curriculum does not dwell on phoneme grapheme associations in any depth until Module L, which is the last module of the curriculum and bridges the child to reading words. In this final module, the emphasis is on the substitution of initial, final, and medial sound picture cards to form simple CVC words. If the user prefers, they may use the Module L word lists for oral adding, deleting, or substituting of sounds in CV and CVC words. However, since the goal of phonological awareness is to make reading easier to learn, we agree with Clemens, et. al. (2021) that there is a questionable trend toward advanced phonological training "in the dark" when a child may be better served to realize that they can READ!

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## Phonological/Phonemic Awareness Pacing Guide

When your child has finished this curriculum and learned the Kindergarten sight words, he/she should be able to read a number of phonetically regular stories and age-appropriate books. When the child is in the Connecting Sounds module, you can start teaching sight words alongside the final Phonemic Awareness modules.

	2 Years Old	3 Years Old	4 Years Old	5 Years Old
A1-A9 Listening	<b>PRACTICE FREQUENTLY</b> but don't expect mastery yet	<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>REVIEW &amp; PRACTICE</b>	
B1-B10 Rhyming	<b>INTRODUCE</b> with songs and nursery rhymes with hand motions	<b>FOCUS</b> on B1-B5. Try B6-B7, but skip ahead to next module if child struggles.	<b>REVIEW &amp; PRACTICE</b>	
C1-C9 Sentences & Words		<b>INTRODUCE</b> activities C1-C3. Use sentences with 2-5 words.	<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>REVIEW</b> in first 4-6 weeks of school
D1-D8 Compound Words		<b>INTRODUCE</b> activity D1	<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>REVIEW</b> in first 4-6 weeks of school
E1-E14 Syllables			<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>REVIEW</b> in first 4-6 weeks of school
F1-F9 Word Families			<b>FOCUS</b> Do B6-B10 beforehand if not covered previously.	<b>REVIEW</b> in first 4-6 weeks of school
G1-G6 Beginning Sounds			<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>REVIEW</b> in first 4-6 weeks of school
H1-H12 Ending Sounds			<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>REVIEW</b> in first 4-6 weeks of school
I1-I6 Digraph Sounds			<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>REVIEW</b> in first 4-6 weeks of school
J1-J15 Connecting Sounds			<b>FOCUS</b>	<b>FOCUSED REVIEW</b> for several weeks before moving to next module
K1-K7 Consonant Blends				<b>FOCUS</b> If child struggles with this module, skip ahead to final module (and return later).
L1-L6 Beginning Reading				<b>FOCUS</b>