



Tātai Angitu

● EDUCATION ● EFFICACY ● ENTERPRISE

BUILDING WORD KNOWLEDGE

© Literacy@Massey team, Massey University, September 2021

Building knowledge of printed words begins by linking phonemes to graphemes. Competent readers have mapped phoneme-grapheme correspondences (PGCs) and can use these in instant recognition of words. Word building starts as small units such as consonant-vowel-consonant words (l-o-g) and builds to knowing how letters combine (eg, 'sh' 'oa' 'igh'). Graphemes are the concrete symbol for the abstract sounds in words.

The block activity outlined here¹ helps give learners a bridge from the abstract to the concrete. The blocks form a bridge between the abstract concept of phonemes and the concrete representation with graphemes. The activity can also include pictures of the target word to connect areas of the brain used in reading: phonology, orthography, semantics.

The examples here start from simple c-v-c words where the focus might be finding the letters or swapping a phoneme to change the word (hat → hut). The picture shows one block for each phoneme.

As the spelling patterns change, the use of blocks changes too. Teaching consonant blending involves showing two blocks each with their own sound. For teaching consonant digraphs, use two cubes but stacked to represent two letters and one sound. Similarly for vowel digraphs or vowel teams, the cubes can be stacked to show two or more letters are needed in that grapheme.

STARTING WITH C-V-C WORDS

One cube for each sound and one letter for each cube. It is useful to have another chart for the vowels until they are secure.

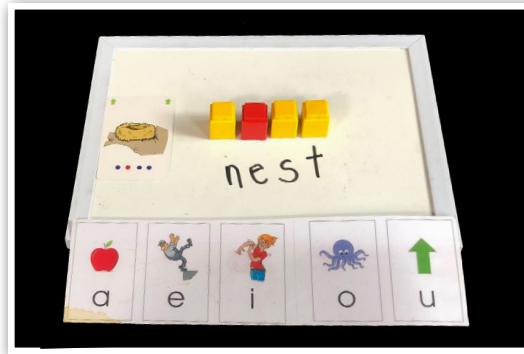
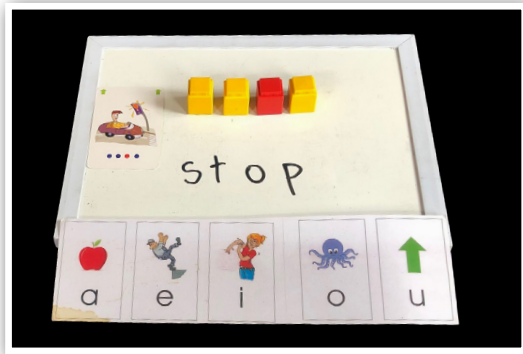


¹ From Natsha Plimmer, Parkvale School, Hastings

TEACHING BLENDING CONSONANTS

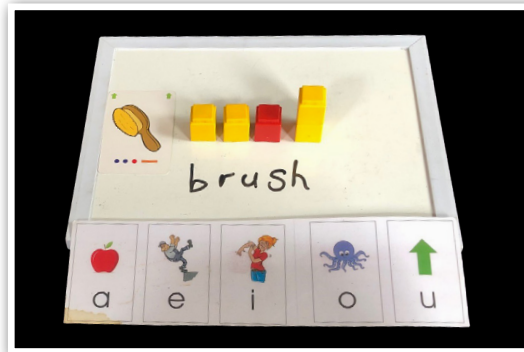
Explicit teaching of blending consonants (beginning and final)

The activity helps children to see they need to listen for and record the two consonants. This helps when children may write wet for went and so forth.



TEACHING CONSONANT DIGRAPHS

For explicit teaching of digraphs (two letters, one sound), we can show children that the phoneme is written with two letters even though it is one sound.



TEACHING SPELLING PATTERNS

For explicit teaching of spelling patterns (-ck, -ss, -ff, -ll) where two letters are used instead of one. Helps children to visualise what is needed and stops errors such as nek for neck or dol for doll.



TEACHING CORRECT SPELLING WHEN THE SOUNDS ARE DIFFERENT

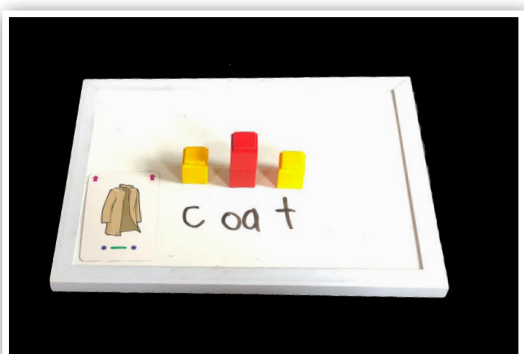
Teaching the -ng sound in a word like sing (thing, wing) can be done with two stacked blocks. The blocks can be used to help children distinguish between what they hear and what they write. We hear /wingk/ but write wink. That is how it sounds; this is how we write it. The blocks show that wink has two consonant sounds represented by two consonant letters, whereas, wing has one consonant sound and two consonant letters.



TEACHING VOWEL TEAMS FOR LONG AND OTHER SOUNDS

Vowel digraphs and vowel teams

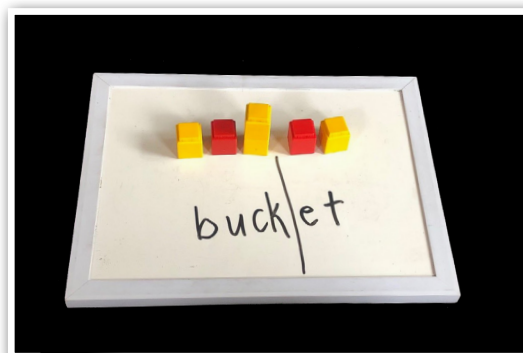
Progressing into long vowel sounds, the blocks can be used to show that two letters will be needed to represent the long vowel sound.



SYLLABLES

When words have more than one syllable, we can teach how to break up the word to read it in parts.

Identify the vowel sounds (red blocks). Read one syllable. Then add other. Push together. In the example of 'bucket', get children to say it like it is written buck ET but then smooch it together to make it sound like we say it (buck/it). They usually do it naturally as it is bringing the meaning in to check the initial decoding.



The small cards are from junior learning called Decoding flashcards: <https://juniorlearning.co.nz/products/jl211-decoding-flashcards>