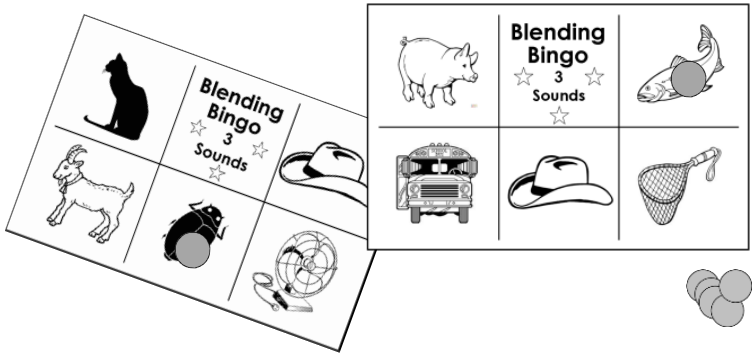
How a Child Teaches Himself to Decode

Phoneme Segmentation

The door to decoding words is unlocked with phoneme segmentation. When a child can segment a spoken word into individual sounds, he can map those sounds onto the letters in a printed word and begin the process of teaching himself how to decode.

The ability to break words apart into individual sounds is the foundation for each word-reading activity in this program. Phoneme segmentation will guide him in learning how to decode and spell words.

The teacher must first teach phoneme segmentation with activities that *model* this segmentation skill for the child.



Blending Game Bingo

Blending Game Bingo is one of several games the teacher will play with students that allow her to *model* the segmentation of words into individual sounds. She will ask, "Who has /h/../a/../t/?" "Let's find /b/../u/../g/."

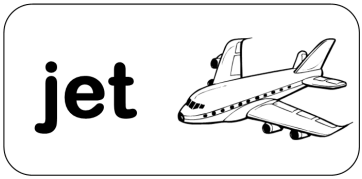
When a student demonstrates the ability to segment a word into sounds on his own, we provide activities that direct him to practice phoneme segmentation so that it becomes quick and automatic. He will use this segmentation skill to learn how to decode words.

Phoneme segmentation forms the foundation of understanding and mastering the decoding process and is therefore the most important reading skill.

Phoneme segmentation forms the foundation of understanding and mastering the decoding process and is therefore the most *important* reading skill. Struggling readers often lack this crucial ability to separate spoken words into individual sounds. Mapping speech sounds onto letters of a printed word strengthens the child's phoneme segmentation skill and creates deeper alphabet knowledge.

Applying the Alphabetic Principle to Words

The student's ability to isolate the three sounds of the word JET allows him to map those sounds onto the nearby letters. This is an example of the alphabetic principle at the word level.



The Alphabetic Principle at the Word Level.

The student can now easily read the letters in a printed word that is next to a picture.

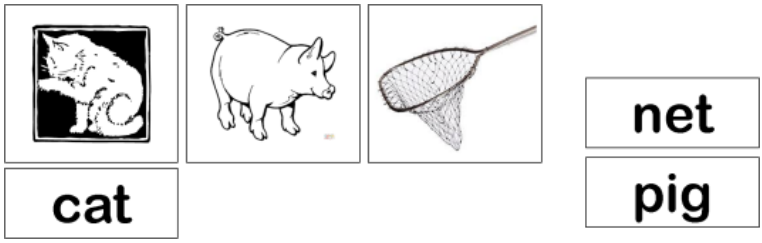
Using his phoneme segmentation skill to apply sounds of *spoken* words to *printed* words, the student starts to teach himself how to decode simple 3 & 4-letter words.

Games & Activities for Learning to Decode

The teacher's role is to organize the self-guided learning games and activities so that each child has many opportunities to map sounds onto printed words and learn to decode.

The child starts with 3-letter highly regular, short vowel words (DOG, PIG, HAT), then moves on to 4-letter words (FLAG, PLUG, CLAP), and later to longer words with 5 and 6 letters (PLANT, STAMP, HELMET).

The teacher will always introduce a new word-reading activity by starting with a picture, *segmenting* that word into individual phonemes and then finding the word with letters that match those sounds.



3-Letter Short Vowel Pictures & Labels

The picture of the PIG in this game is giving the student his marching orders.

Veronica, the sounds in my word are /p/../i/../g/.

Find the word that has the letters that match those sounds.

The student uses phoneme segmentation to determine which sequence of printed letters matches that sequence of sounds.

Mapping the sounds of a spoken word onto the letters of a printed word sounds exactly like decoding.

This is not true decoding, but it *mimics* decoding. As the child speaks and maps the spoken sounds onto a printed word, it is an exact *simulation* of the decoding process. It sounds *exactly* like decoding.

Note also that this does not require strong letter identification. The student is not required to read a letter, just to recognize it when prompted by a sound.

In *real* decoding there is no picture to guide the student. He must know the sound of each letter of a word so he can blend them together to identify the word. In

real decoding he starts with the unknown and must discover a word he knows. Decoding the 3-letter word SUN is a *test* with 3 questions he must answer. This requires accurate (i.e. strong) letter identification which is always a stumbling block for struggling readers.

Practice materials with pictures that depict spoken words will help a struggling reader who can already decode, but not very well. Moving from speech to print and mapping sounds of a spoken word to letters of a printed word allows him to grasp at a deeper level what decoding is—what it sounds and feels like to decode. This strengthens his decoding, which starts to become more fluent and automatic.

This mapping process will also strengthen his letter recognition and phoneme segmentation skills and offer the many successful repetitions needed to make simple one-syllable decodable words into *sight words*—words that are read automatically, without the need to sound out each letter. With successful decoding practice, the student subconsciously begins to learn how to read words automatically, an ability that grows stronger over time.