



What is Raising Literacy?

Raising Literacy is a newsletter produced by the Florida Department of Education’s State Regional Literacy Directors (SRLDs). For the 2025-2026 school year, three issues will focus on reading foundations by referencing Lindsay Kemeny’s book *7 Mighty Moves: Research-Backed, Classroom-Tested Strategies to Ensure K-to-3 Reading Success*. Consult your district-adopted materials when planning instruction around these components of reading.

DEFINE PHONEMIC AWARENESS

In order for students to develop as readers, they must have an awareness that the language they speak can be broken down into individual speech sounds (or phonemes, the smallest unit of sound within a language). This awareness is referred to as **phonemic awareness**, a major component of phonological awareness. While phonological awareness is the “umbrella term for the knowledge of sounds in spoken language, which includes larger chunks of sound, such as rimes and syllables,” (page 14) phonemic awareness is the ability to hear and manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.

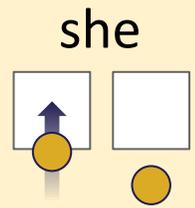
Beginning in kindergarten, students must be able to “identify the initial, medial and final sound of spoken words” (K.F.1.2) as well as “add or delete phonemes at the beginning or end of spoken words” (K.F.1.2). The English language has 44 individual phonemes, which are represented by 26 graphemes (written letters). Without strong phonemic awareness, students cannot accurately or fluently map phonemes to graphemes which are organized into words. Refer to grade-level benchmarks (F.1.2) for specific phonological awareness expectations.

APPLY PHONEMIC AWARENESS

In Move 1 of Lindsay Kemeny’s *7 Mighty Moves*, she shares that **multisensory instruction** is one way to support students’ development of **phonemic awareness**. Kemeny references Gillingham and Stillman, who “explain that the goal of multisensory instruction is to help students build a link between the grapheme they see (visual), the phoneme they hear (auditory), what they feel in the mouth as they produce the sound, and the hand and fingers as they write (kinesthetic and tactile)” (page 63). One way to incorporate multisensory instruction is by using manipulatives. Manipulatives support explicit instruction in the skills within the F.1.2 benchmark for phonological awareness in which students are asked to manipulate individual phonemes (K.F.1.2.c.-f. and 1.F.1.2.a.-e.).

One common manipulative used during phonemic awareness instruction is bingo chips. These chips can be provided for students to slide into Elkonin (sound) boxes during segmenting tasks. The steps for this strategy are below:

- Teacher **states** the word and asks students to repeat the word.
- Students **say** the word, then **slide** a chip into an Elkonin (sound) box for each sound they hear.
- Teacher **provides** corrective feedback as needed, ensuring students move from left to right with one chip per sound.



Manipulatives should be seen as temporary scaffolds that are gradually removed when a student no longer needs support carrying out the task. When planning to implement this strategy, district-adopted materials should be consulted to ensure a systematic approach to phonemic awareness instruction.

CONNECT & PRACTICE AT HOME

How Can Families Help at Home?

The Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR) has provided [#AtHomeWithFCRR](#), a YouTube channel with videos that guide families through their Student Center Activities. Each video also includes a link to the directions and materials. Below are two links to videos supporting phonemic awareness development:

- [Phoneme Counting Sort](#): Students identify the picture, segment the word and identify the number of phonemes in the word. Then students sort the picture under the correct number.
- [Medial Phoneme Dominoes](#): Each domino has two pictures. Students segment the sounds of one picture and identify the medial vowel sound. Then students match their domino to another with the same medial sound.

DEFINE PHONICS

What Is Phonics?

“Phonics refers to the relationship between graphemes (letters or letter combinations) and phonemes (speech sounds)” (B.E.S.T. ELA Standards, page 27). It is an essential literacy skill that connects phonological awareness to written language, and must be explicitly and systematically taught. In English, there are over 250 ways to spell its 44 phonemes with its 26 graphemes; therefore, while intentionally planning for content, design and practice opportunities, the teacher determines precise directions for letter-sound relationships. For example:

- **Content:** How can the content be broken down into obtainable chunks for students?
- **Design:** How can the gradual release model (“I Do, We Do, You Do”) support the delivery of content?
- **Practice:** How can students receive multiple opportunities to practice blending sounds to read words alongside their teacher and peers during feedback-rich guided practice (“We Do”) as well as independently (“You Do”)?

Sample Phonics Instructional Routine

The delivery of explicit, systematic phonics instruction requires a brisk pace. Here is a sample phonics instructional routine:

1. **Review** (3-5 min.) Practice previously taught skill using a visual, blending and auditory drill.
2. **State Goal and Purpose** (<1 min.)
3. **Give Phonemic Awareness Warm-Up** (3-5 min.)
4. **Introduce New Concept** (3-5 min.)
5. **Read Words with Targeted Skill** (5 min.)
6. **Practice Dictation** (5-10 min.) Use words that have the targeted skill.
7. **Read Decodable Text** (5-10 min.)
8. **Close** (2-3 min.) A good closing is interactive and includes retrieval practice.
9. **Provide Extended Practice in Small Groups** (3-5 min.)
10. **Read Connected Text in Small Groups** (10+ min.)

APPLY PHONICS

Strategy for Success

In Move 2, Kemeny strongly suggests that students participate in engaging tasks that help them “realize that the number of sounds in a word may be different from the number of letters in it, strengthening sound-symbol correspondences” (page 63). As students develop this understanding, they become more equipped to decode and encode words accurately (F.1.3). One engaging task that develops students’ understanding of sound-symbol correspondences is phoneme-grapheme mapping. In phoneme-grapheme mapping, students are given a word and then boxes, similar to the Elkonin (sound) boxes described for phonemic awareness instruction. Using only one box per sound, students write the grapheme(s) for each phoneme. Below are the explicit steps for phoneme-grapheme mapping:

1. Teacher **states** the word and uses it in a sentence.
2. Students **segment** the word orally.
3. Students **place** a marker or dot in each box as they segment the word.
4. Students **write** the grapheme(s) in the corresponding boxes.
5. Students **read** the whole word aloud.
6. Teacher **provides** corrective feedback as needed.

Examples

th	a	t
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b	oi	l
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s	p	r	i	ng
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Adapted from Kemeny, L. (2023) *7 Mighty Moves: Research-Backed, Classroom-Tested Strategies to Ensure K-to-3 Reading Success*. Scholastic.

CONNECT & PRACTICE AT HOME

How Can Families Help at Home?

[#AtHomeWithFCRR](#) also includes videos and materials to guide families through Student Center Activities focusing on phonics. Below are two links to videos supporting phonics development:

- [Brown Bag It](#): Students name the picture, identify the initial sound and place the picture under the letter that represents the initial sound.
- [Change My Word](#): Students practice building, blending and reading words with a common rime (vowel and consonant sounds following the onset), but different onset (initial consonant sound/sounds) by selecting a picture work board, naming the pictures, and placing the onset and rime cards to make the word under the picture.