



Department
for Education

The reading framework

Teaching the foundations of literacy

Section 2: Language comprehension

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Section 2: Language comprehension

Developing talk

Young children typically gain several new words a day, acquiring vocabulary at an ‘astonishing rate’.¹ Yet by the time they start school, some children will have heard millions more words than others.² The number of words a child has heard and can speak by the age of three is a predictor of later language development, so these early vocabulary gains are critically important.³

A language-rich environment is one in which adults talk with children throughout the day. The more children take part in conversations, the more they will understand once they can read and the more vocabulary and ideas they will have to draw on when they can write.

Spoken language runs through the national curriculum programmes of study for English and all seven areas of learning and development in the revised Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework.

Back and forth talk across the curriculum

Underpinning the reforms to the Early Years Foundation Stage is the aim of reducing the language gap between children from language-rich homes and others.⁴ The progress of these children depends on adults engaging them in high-quality dialogue and direct teaching so that they can:

- articulate what they know and understand
- develop their knowledge across all areas of learning, using the vocabulary they need to support learning.

¹ Oakhill J, Cain K & Elbro C (2015). ‘Understanding and teaching reading comprehension. A handbook’ Abingdon: Routledge.

² One study found that children from higher-income homes will have heard 32 million more words than children from lower-income homes. A more recent conservative estimate gives a 4 million word gap at age four between the highest and lowest SES groups. See Hart B and Risley TR. [‘The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3’](#) American Educator: Spring 2003. Also see Jill Gikerson and others. [‘Mapping the Early Language Environment Using All-Day Recordings and Automated Analysis’](#) American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology: volume 26, issue 2, May 2017, pages 248-265

³ Hart B and Risley TR. [‘The early catastrophe: The 30 million word gap by age 3’](#) American Educator: Spring 2003

⁴ Department for Education (2020). [‘Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. EYFS reforms early adopter version. July 2020’](#) London: Department for Education

Critical to this are children's back and forth interactions with adults:

[These] form the foundations for language and cognitive development. The number and quality of the conversations they have with adults and peers throughout the day in a language-rich environment is crucial.⁵

These back and forth interactions involve the adult in:

- thinking out loud, modelling new language for children
- paying close attention to what the children say
- rephrasing and extending what the children say
- validating the children's attempts at using new vocabulary and grammar by rephrasing what children say if necessary
- asking closed and open questions
- answering the children's questions
- explaining why things happen
- deliberately connecting current and past events ('Do you remember when...?')
- providing models of accurate grammar
- extending children's vocabulary and explaining new words
- connecting one idea or action to another
- helping children to articulate ideas in well-formed sentences.

To develop and extend children's language takes careful, deliberate planning in each area of learning, with opportunities built in for plenty of repetition.

- What do we want children to know and think about?
- What vocabulary is associated with this knowledge and thinking?
- How can we engage the children in back and forth talk that supports their knowledge and thinking?
- What photos could we take that would reinforce the vocabulary and language after an activity or visit?
- Which books could be read aloud and shared before and afterwards?
- Which songs might introduce or reinforce the vocabulary?

For example, a class visit to a fire station might generate a range of vocabulary related to its different aspects – the semantic field or word field – such as the following.

⁵ Department for Education (2020). ['Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. EYFS reforms early adopter version. July 2020'](#) London: Department for Education

Semantic field	Examples
fire	blaze, flames, heat, smoke, plumes, extinguish
emergency	emergency, accident, harm, dangerous, trapped, (blue) light, siren
safety and rescue	protect, shield, escape, first aid, rescue, save, tackle
protective clothing	visor, helmet, gloves, soles, material
properties of materials	transparent, see-through, fire resistant, strong, tough, unbreakable, fireproof, protective, waterproof
equipment	fire engine, truck, reel, hose, ladder, turn-table, water, cutters, axe, air tanks, thermal imaging camera, torch
personal characteristics	brave, courageous, speedy, quick-thinking, daring, heroic

Following up the visit in the classroom, adults can reinforce the language and vocabulary: talking about the photographs taken on the visit, or recalling and naming specific features of the fire-fighters' clothes or the fire engine. For example:

'Do you remember why the firefighters have to wear special gloves? ... Yes, to keep their hands cool and protect them from the heat.

What did their gloves look like? ... That's right! That's a good word. They did look "stiff" but, actually, they said they were very comfortable.

Do you remember how they could bend their fingers easily in them? They could hold even the tiniest objects when they were wearing them.'

Once it has been introduced, opportunities arise to repeat and consolidate the vocabulary in different contexts, such as when describing the characteristics of a hero or heroine or exploring the properties of materials.⁶

⁶ The national curriculum year 1 programmes of study for science require pupils to be taught to 'describe the simple physical properties of a variety of everyday materials'.

The table above focuses on extending vocabulary related to a fire station visit. To give another example, on a woodland walk, adults might select from some of the following adjectives to focus on in back and forth talk with children: rough, bumpy, narrow, wide, curved, symmetrical, mottled, speckled, spiky, sharp, thorny, pointed, delicate, young. However, they might also make sure they use and reinforce specific prepositions, such as between, underneath, up, down, inside, around and over. For example:

‘The oak tree bark has bumps like long fingers. Can you feel the deep lines between each bump?’

‘What does the acorn feel like? ... Yes, it is smooth, but it’s rough underneath.’

‘Lift the log up gently. What can you see underneath it? Can you see anything inside it? Put it down very gently.’

‘Look, Harry is wrapping his arms around the huge trunk.’

‘Let’s climb over this big log. Who is going to climb over it first?’

Later, by making a book from the photographs taken on the walk, teachers can revisit the language used and the children can learn to describe the events in greater detail on each ‘reading’.

‘What did we do?’

‘What can you see in this photo?’

‘Do you remember when we all climbed over the big log?’

‘And here’s Miraj, running his fingers across the rough bark. Look, you can see that the large bumps had even more tiny bumps on them.’

The Early Learning Goal, the Natural World, refers explicitly to children ‘drawing on their experiences and what has been read in class’.⁷

More generally, sharing and discussing pictures in non-fiction books offers opportunities to broaden children’s experiences beyond the immediate and the local. For example, books about space, other countries, animals, exploration, and

⁷ Department for Education (2020). [‘Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. EYFS reforms early adopter version. July 2020’](#) London: Department for Education

courageous people from a range of occupations and ethnic backgrounds are rich sources of vocabulary and knowledge.

As well as building important knowledge, this extends their familiarity with words that support understanding across domains. Enriching and widening children's vocabulary will support later reading comprehension.⁸

Extending children's familiarity with words across domains is particularly important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds who might not otherwise meet such vocabulary.

Listening

Children need to be taught when to listen, to know what good listening looks like, and they need praise. Ways of supporting good listening include:

- Deciding on a signal to alert children to listen.
- Showing children what good listening looks like through the teacher's own behaviour:
 - 'Wait a minute, I need to listen carefully.'
 - 'Let's be quiet so I can concentrate on what you're saying.'
- Reinforcing and praising good listening, with examples:
 - 'I could tell you were going to say something interesting: I could see you were listening carefully and concentrating.'
 - 'You must have listened carefully during assembly yesterday to have remembered that!'
 - 'Well done for telling everyone what your partner just shared with you – good listening.'
 - 'Well done for using that special word from the story yesterday. I am pleased you listened hard.'

Talking with a partner and giving feedback

Teachers need to help children articulate their ideas in well-formed sentences, by scaffolding, extending and developing their ideas.

⁸ Department for Education (2020). ['Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage. Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five. EYFS reforms early adopter version. July 2020'](#) London: Department for Education

They all need to practise their skills of listening to, talking with a partner and giving feedback to the group. Learning the routines of back and forth talk is particularly important for children who have not experienced such talk before they come to school.

Pairing children with their partners, ready for responding together, encourages them to discuss a question, problem or idea and agree on their joint response. Because their answer belongs to both of them and they will have practised it first, they grow in confidence when asked to respond in front of others. The teacher can observe the pairs talking and select those with helpful answers to develop the discussion.

If the teacher chooses which pair feeds back to the group, rather than responding only to pairs who might raise their hands, this can help to make sure that all the pairs are ready to contribute. If children think they might not be selected, they might not engage fully. By establishing strong routines for responding to questions and suggestions, children will be more likely to pay attention because they know they will be expected to respond; the teacher will know what they have understood, because they will have listened carefully to what the children have been saying and will have heard any misconceptions.

The following are suggestions for managing effective pair work.

Guidance for managing talk in pairs	
Sequence	Guidance
Ask a question.	Ask questions about what happened before asking questions about why.
Ask children to talk with their partners.	Listen carefully to identify which pairs might give feedback later and to pinpoint misconceptions.
Take feedback from one or two pairs.	Ask one partner to feed back to the group. Choose a different partner each time.
Repeat what children say and/or rephrase their response.	Make sure that all children know what was said. Take the opportunity to model correct grammar (see below).
Extend children's ideas.	Think aloud as you extend the idea, so the discussion moves forward.

Ask the children to repeat some sentences chorally.	As you extend the sentence, gradually add more detail and ask them to repeat the sentence at each step in unison.
Ask children, sometimes, to build on the ideas of others.	Repeat the child's idea and ask partners to turn to each other again to discuss the idea.
Model accurate grammar, particularly irregular past tenses and plurals.	Avoid correcting children in a way that makes them feel they have said something wrong. Model a correct response rather than asking them to repeat the correction.

Speech, language and communication needs

For children who have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), the strategies already described should be even more focused (see [Appendix 2: Supporting children's thinking](#)). In particular, noise should be reduced where possible and the children seated where they have the best chance of hearing and paying attention. Reducing noise is important for all children (see [Section 3](#)).

Help is available for schools to identify and support children who have speech, language and communication needs (see [Introduction](#)).

Practices that can reduce interaction with children

Collecting evidence

Teachers do not have to collect and record evidence of children's achievements for the Early Years Foundation Stage profile.

Ofsted reported in 2017 that some leaders and staff during the course of its survey were spending teaching time 'on collecting and recording children's achievements, often through photographs, captions and written notes'. Inspectors found that:

... with the exception of literacy and numeracy, many teachers were devising tasks simply to tick off and record elements of the early learning goals rather than developing a proper plan that focused on progression in learning.⁹

⁹ Ofsted (2017). ['Bold beginnings: The Reception curriculum in a sample of good and outstanding primary schools'](#) Manchester: Ofsted

Observation puts the adult in a state of judgement rather than interaction. Every moment spent in observing, recording, collecting and compiling evidence takes teachers' time away from teaching, including talking.

'Hands up'

Asking children to respond to 'hands up' is a common part of schools' teaching but it can cut down opportunities for learning and talk.

It might be beneficial to reflect on 'hands up' because children from families who are accustomed to talking already have the confidence and oral skills to grasp opportunities to speak, and will engage themselves readily in questions and answers. Other children, however, might hold back from responding, including shy ones, those who are new to learning English and those whose oral skills are less well developed. As a result, the language gap widens further.

If six children raise their hands and only one is chosen to answer, the other five are excluded, even if they had something worthwhile to say, while 24 further children may stay silent altogether (see page 6, [Talking with a partner and giving feedback](#)).

Noisy environments

When children are learning to read and write, a noisy environment makes it difficult for them to hear what the teacher and other children are saying, particularly for those who have hearing difficulties or impairments, those with speech, language and communication needs and those who find it difficult to pay attention. If these children cannot hear clearly, their chances of responding are immediately limited. Calm classrooms give them the best chance to interact and make progress in reading and writing.¹⁰

¹⁰ As well as teacher experience reflecting this, there is some research about the impact of noise on learning in these two studies: Erickson LC and Newman RS (2017). ['Influences of background noise on infants and children'](#) and Marsh JE and others (2017). ['Failing to get the gist of what's being said: background noise impairs higher-order cognitive processing'](#) Frontiers in Psychology: volume 6.

Audit: Language comprehension

	Current practice
A clearly defined curriculum extends children's language and vocabulary in each of the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning, and in year 1 for each subject.	
Children are taught routines for back and forth talk.	
Activities are used effectively to develop children's language.	
Non-fiction books related to experiences and activities are read with children and made available for them to share at school and at home.	
Effective procedures identify and support children with speech, language and communications needs (see Appendix 2: Supporting children's thinking).	
Teachers are aware of practices that could reduce interactions with children.	
Actions to be taken (by term)	

Storytimes

Choosing books to read aloud to children

The decisions we make about how we educate our children are rooted in our beliefs and attitudes. The challenge is to reflect them in the stories and non-fiction children listen to and, later, in what they read for themselves.

Literature is probably the most powerful medium through which children have a chance to inhabit the lives of those who are like them. All children need to imagine themselves as the main protagonist in a story: celebrating a birthday, going shopping, being ill, having a tantrum, having their hair cut, worrying about a new sibling, being the superhero, going camping, visiting the seaside and having adventures.

Children also need to learn about the lives of those whose experiences and perspectives differ from their own. Choosing stories and non-fiction that explore such differences begins to break down a sense of otherness that often leads to division and prejudice.

The challenge is to make sure that the right books support all children to thrive, whatever their background. Teachers need to choose those that will engage all of them emotionally. As Maryanne Wolf wrote:

We know that emotional engagement is the tipping point between leaping into the reading life or remaining in a childhood bog where reading is endured only as a means to other ends.¹¹

Teachers are the best people to promote a love of reading because children, particularly young children, care what their teachers think about the stories they read aloud. If teachers show they love the story, the children are likely to respond in the same way. However, this does not mean that teachers should choose only the books they loved as children.

These are suggested questions to help choose suitable books for reading aloud. A single book is unlikely to meet all the criteria below, although a full selection should do so.

¹¹ Wolf M (2008). 'Proust and the squid. The story and science of the reading brain' Cambridge: Icon Books

Choosing books

Does the book:

- elicit a strong response – curiosity, anger, excitement, laughter, empathy?
- have a strong narrative that will sustain multiple readings?
- extend children’s vocabulary?
- have illustrations which are engaging and reflect children from all backgrounds and cultures?
- help children connect with who they are?
- help children to understand the lives of people whose experiences and perspectives may be different from their own?

Core ‘read aloud’ stories and non-fiction

Use ‘Choosing books’ (above) as a guide.

- Identify a core set of stories for each year group.
- Consider a range of stories set in the UK and around the world, both traditional and modern, as well as non-fiction.
- Refresh the list regularly, at least once a year, as new books are published, and new teachers arrive, to avoid its being set in stone.
- Encourage teachers to familiarise themselves with the stories their class will know from previous years.
- Supplement the core ‘read aloud’ stories with others of the teacher’s choice.
- Consider sharing the list with parents, and explaining its purpose, so they could buy or borrow the books.

Living the story

Everybody loves a good story. Even small children who have difficulty focusing in class will sit with rapt attention in the presence of a good storyteller. But stories are not just fun. There are important cognitive consequences of the story format. Our minds treat stories differently than other types of material. People find stories interesting, easy to understand, and easy to remember.¹²

¹² Willingham D (2017). ‘The reading mind’ San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

When teachers read aloud to a class, they try to replicate for children what it feels like to have someone's undivided attention while sharing a story. This is why reading aloud should be a priority.

Thriving on repetition

It is not just the number of different stories children listen to that matters. On each re-reading, their familiarity with a story deepens and, with that, comes a greater emotional engagement. Wolf quotes the writer Ann Fadiman when she reflects on what re-readings bring:

‘the former [reading] had more velocity; the latter had more depth.’¹³

When children ask for a story to be re-read, in effect they are asking for another chance to explore the language, the characters and their feelings, and to relive the emotions they felt on the first reading. They hear the same words read in the same way and gain a sense of comfort in knowing what follows. They wait for their favourite bits, ready to join in or ready to be scared, even when they already know what happens. Their attachment to the story equips them to retell it and, when they have learnt to read, encourages them to read it for themselves.

Preparation and practice

The main aim of storytelling is to breathe life into the words, capturing children's attention rather than simply entertaining them.

Reading aloud therefore requires preparation. How to emphasise particular words, phrases and sentences needs planning so that the children understand the story as a whole. Rehearsal and frequent practice also improve the story-teller's confidence.

Consider the following in preparing a reading:

- voice(s)
- pauses
- word meanings
- asides
- memorable words and phrases.

See 'Appendix 3: For teachers preparing to read a story' in [The reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy](#) which contains further guidance on preparation.

¹³ Quoted in Wolf M (2018). 'Reader, come home. The reading brain in a digital world' New York: HarperCollins

Filming some reading aloud can be helpful, because teachers are often their own best critics.

First and subsequent readings

Before a first reading starts, the teacher can build up children's anticipation during the day: 'I've got a new story by Elizabeth Laird. It's called "Gobblechops"¹⁴. I'm really looking forward to reading it with you'; 'Let's clear up a bit earlier today, so I've got time to read the new story.'

Once the children have been told the name of the author and the title, and the story has been introduced, the reading should start: 'This is a story about Amir, whose dad gives him advice on how to deal with a monster under his bed.' The first reading should be left to weave its own magic, with no questions, no explanations and no requests for the children to predict what might happen.

On the second reading, asides, voices and actions can explain the meanings of new words in context.

If the story is read aloud in a similar way each time, the children can gradually join in with particular words and phrases, and even respect the pauses.

When children know the story well

Dramatising the story can be motivating, once the children know it well, and it can hold their interest and focus.

Dramatization of stories is unique in that it requires the basic teaching skills of listening, observing closely, and harnessing the imagination of everyone in exploring new ideas.¹⁵

Role play can also help children to reflect on how a character might think, feel and behave at key moments, and explore motives and intentions. Asking all the children to adopt the same role at the same time is an opportunity for everyone to participate. For example, saying 'Hello, wolves! Show me your paws, show me your twitching nose, show me your sharp pointy teeth...' puts all of them quickly into role as the wolf, not just wondering about pretending to be one, which might be the case with simply saying, 'Imagine you are the wolf'.

¹⁴ Laird E and Lucander J (2019). 'Gobblechops' London: Tiny Owl Publishing

¹⁵ Cremin T, Flewitt R, Mardell B and Swann J editors (2017). 'Storytelling in early childhood: Enriching language, literacy and classroom culture' Abingdon: Routledge

The following questions for role play are designed to explore a character's motives. With minor adaptations, they can be used for any story and directed to any character in it.

Role play – example questions
(Little Red Riding Hood)
OK, wolves. Little Red Riding Hood is coming towards you...
What do you want?
How will you get it?
What are you thinking?
How do you feel?
What are your options?
What will you do?
What will you say?

Using stories and rhymes to develop vocabulary and language

Stories are a rich source of language – vocabulary and syntax. Good writers know how to entice young children into their texts. Through listening to repeated readings, and talking about what they have heard, the children have multiple exposures to vocabulary and the language of stories. Continued talk about words, as well as opportunities to use them, helps children to absorb the language. Teachers can also emphasise memorable words and phrases (see 'Appendix 3: For teachers preparing to read a story' in [The reading framework: teaching the foundations of literacy](#)).

Through stories, children encounter vocabulary that they are unlikely to hear in everyday conversation but will come across in writing, once they can read for themselves. Isobel Beck has called such vocabulary 'second tier' words.¹⁶ All the following vocabulary, for example, occurs in a single picture book:

bellowed, startled, barged, sneaked, grinned, dreadful, stomped, refused.¹⁷

¹⁶ Beck IL, McKeown MG and Kucan L (2013). 'Bringing words to life: robust vocabulary instruction' New York: The Guilford Press

¹⁷ Willis J and others (2017). 'I'm in charge' London: Nosy Crow

Similarly, another story uses all the following:

explore, discovered, wondered, enormous, barely, unexpected, shrink, tumbled.¹⁸

A robust approach to vocabulary involves directly explaining the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful, and interactive follow-up.¹⁹

Teachers can explore these words and explain them – not just in the context of the story but also as children might use or hear them in their own lives, as in these examples of ‘startled’, ‘barge’ and ‘bellowed’:

Everyone was startled when the balloon popped at her party.

Tanim was startled by the lion’s roar at the zoo.

It is always startling when the fire alarm rings in school.

Don’t barge past your sister, please – there are plenty of biscuits.

Don’t barge past those younger children, please.

My mum bellowed when she saw the paint on the carpet.

The team bellowed when Jodie deliberately pushed Anya over.

Mr Banks bellowed at the children when they ran next to the swimming pool.

Book corners

The books themselves are the most important aspect of any book corner. It should be the words of the stories and not the props that transport children to different worlds: the mysterious forest, the dark and dripping cave, the moated castle. Well-chosen books should capture children’s imagination to such an extent that they become unaware of whether they are sitting on a beanbag, an ordinary classroom chair or a bench in the book corner. Time might therefore be better spent on selecting, displaying and promoting the books in the book corner than on decorating it.

Ideally, every book corner should be a mini-library, a place for children to browse the best books, revisit the ones that the teacher has read to them, and borrow books to read or retell at home. Every child should be able to spend time in their book corner. Children will want to share books with others, especially if they are ‘books in common’ that they know their friends have heard before. They will also be interested

¹⁸ Percival T (2018). ‘Ruby’s worry’ London: Bloomsbury

¹⁹ See, for example, the activities described in Chapter 4 of Beck’s ‘Bringing words to life’.

to look at books which feature well-known fictional characters or are new and tempting.

Every book in a book corner should be worth reading aloud. The focus should always be on what would make the biggest difference to children's reading habits, including:

- not displaying too many books at once
- refreshing the display
- making the books attractive and easy for children to find.

The more choice that is presented, the less children are likely to engage. Bookshops, for instance, reduce the number of books on display by using outward-facing shelving and tables, so customers can find new books easily. They also refresh their displays to highlight topics, titles or authors they hope will attract customers.

Teachers might consider displaying only the books that have been read aloud to children, such as 30 or 40 storybooks. Some children in the class will only be able to retell the story; others will be able to re-read it for themselves. Different books can be introduced gradually, including those the children will have heard during story-time. Ideally, books the children have listened to recently should be displayed at their eye level on outward-facing shelves. At the start of the school year, it is also worth including around 20 of the children's favourites from the previous year. These can occupy lower shelves or boxes. Books that have been previously read could be stored in extra boxes for children to read and retell again, at school and at home.

Children could be involved in returning books to the central library or other area, so that they can see that their book corner is being refreshed and replenished. A book that is dull and dog-eared should be removed, unless it is particularly well loved.

The 'decodable' books (see [Section 3](#)) matched to the school's phonic programme are best stored separately so that teachers can select from them, both for children's reading in class and to take home.

Reading with children at home

Children benefit hugely from listening to family members reading aloud to them. Teachers might consider making a film for parents to illustrate the benefits of sharing and talking about stories aloud and how teachers read stories aloud to their own class.

Audit: Storytimes

	Current practice
The daily time for stories is a priority. Teachers prepare the story reading so they can capture children's attention.	
Extra small-group storytimes are timetabled for children with speech, language and communication needs.	
Staff have a wide knowledge of traditional and contemporary children's literature.	
High-quality stories to read aloud to children, including traditional and modern stories, are organised, listed and shared.	
In stories and other books, children encounter others whose experiences and perspectives are both similar to and different from their own.	
Teachers re-read stories and talk with children about them to build familiarity and understanding.	
Some stories are dramatised with children when they know the story well.	
'Second tier' vocabulary is explored in wider contexts, once children know a story well.	
Books are made available for parents to share with their children at home.	
Teachers explain to parents the benefits of reading aloud at home.	
Book corners are appealing to children and uncluttered.	

Children have time to browse, and re-read or retell stories that have been read to them.	
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Actions to be taken (by term)

Poetry and rhymes

Through enjoying rhymes, poems and songs, and reciting poems or parts of longer poems together as a class, teachers can build children's strong emotional connection to language.

Poetry in language-rich classrooms builds shared memories for all children.

The predictability of rhymes in poems and songs also helps children to memorise and re-use newly acquired words and phrases.

Learning poetry and songs using 'call and response' allows children to join in gradually. Each repetition strengthens their vocabulary, embedding new words.

Word knowledge exists on a continuum. As each word is acquired in the young child's lexicon, it moves from the barest familiarity to an in-depth knowledge of that word, with all manner of associations and contexts.

As the children say each word of a poem, the cadence of the lines helps to convey the meaning and the mood. Children pick up the rhythm and, by speaking more slowly, gain awareness and control of their voices.

Learning rhymes, poems and songs is an end in itself. However, learning poems including traditional nursery rhymes such as 'Hickory Dickory Dock', 'Little Jack Horner' and 'Baa Baa Black Sheep' can also heighten children's awareness of the individual sounds within words through alliteration, assonance and rhyme. For instance, because rhymes share the same end sound, they alert children to the

contrast of the phonemes at the start of each word, as well as the repeated phonemes at the end, as in 'dock'/'clock', 'Horner'/'corner' and 'Incy'/'Wincy'.²⁰

Choosing poems

Teachers should identify a core set of poems for each year group, including rhyming poems, poems where alliteration is a strong feature, word games, traditional songs and rhymes, nonsense rhymes, and poems that are particularly rhythmical. Those chosen should be able to withstand a lot of repetition, elicit a strong response and extend children's vocabulary in different areas of learning.

Audit: Poetry, rhymes and songs

	Current practice
The daily poetry, rhyme and singing session is a priority.	
Poems, rhymes and songs for each year group are listed.	
Actions to be taken (by term)	

²⁰ In 'Incy'/'Wincy', the rhyme is made by adding a phoneme (/w/) to the start of the second word rather than by contrasting the two initial sounds. Other examples of rhymes made by adding one initial phoneme are 'argy-bargy' and 'okey-dokey'.



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