



Word Families California Kindergarten Association



Help young children develop literacy by using Word Families, which are, in effect, spelling patterns. An example is mat, cat, hat, and fat, all of which have the same rime (-at) but a different onset (m, c, h, f). Word Families also are useful in vocabulary development for English speakers and English learners.

Children's Development of Literacy and Phonemic Awareness

- Children's language and literacy development grows from infancy onward. Oral language (listening and speaking) is the first stage. When well supported by adults, young children's interest in language leads to an interest in vocabulary, phonological knowledge, book reading, and writing.
- Phonological knowledge expands as children listen to sounds around them, sounds of words, and wordplay. While awareness emerges in a fairly predictable and regular developmental sequence for most children, not all reach these achievements at the same time.
- An early stage of phonological knowledge is recognizing that multisyllabic words can be broken into smaller units, or syllables – this typically occurs between 2 and 4 years of age.
- Phonological awareness progresses from an understanding of larger units of sound, such as whole words, to an understanding of smaller units of sounds, such as phonemes.

- Understanding of rhyming and alliteration enables older children to manipulate syllables based on onset-rime distinctions or on beginning sounds.

Research

- To develop skills in connecting sounds and symbols, and in blending and segmenting to decode whole words, young children need systematic, step-by-step instruction followed by multiple practice opportunities ([Adams 1990](#)).
- For a Literature Review of Word Families by Laura Torsey, go to <http://lauratorsey.wordpress.com/literature-review/>.
- A thorough list of rimes – and words using those rimes – is found in [Pinnell & Fountas](#) (1998). The book also contains many strategies for interactive word walls, charts, and other classroom activities. We have a partial list under “Resources.”

Adams, M.J. (1990). [Beginning to read: Thinking and Learning About Print](#). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
 Pinnell, G.S. & Fountas, I.C. 1998. [Word Matters: Teaching Phonics and Spelling in the Reading/Writing Classroom](#). pp 95, Appendix 15.
 Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Lesson Plans & Activities

- [Preschool](#)
- [Transitional Kindergarten](#)
- [Kindergarten](#)
- [First Grade](#)

Resources

- Preschool Foundations in Language Arts & Literacy
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/documents/preschoollf.pdf>
- Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/elaresources.asp> to download a copy
- Professional Organizations
 International Reading Association – www.reading.org
 National Association for the Education of Young Children – www.naeyc.org
- [Most Common Onset/Rime Word Families](#)
- [Letter to Families about Word Families](#)

- [Outstanding Children's Books that Use Word Families & Rhymes](#)
- [Print & Web Resources on Word Families](#)

Videos

- A kindergarten teacher's use of an interactive white board with her class helps them build a knowledge of word families. It is found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYuIh2IduDk> .
- YouTube video for preschool through Grade 2 on Word Families is available from Dr. Jean Feldman at http://youtu.be/_Z753SITeq0.



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