



READING ZONE

Junior & Senior Infants

A Note for Parents

Dear Parents,

Reading Zone is a language and reading programme which will be used to help your child to learn oral language, reading, and writing in school and at home.

The programme has many components which will be used in the classroom to develop confidence in receptive and expressive language skills, that is, to help your child speak with fluency and assurance, and to listen with understanding.

Your child will also learn to read. Six infant core reading books will be used over the two year infant cycle. The six books are carefully graded with a separate fun story in each book. The action centres on Kitty, her little brother Zack, her friend Max, her Teddy, and her endearing but mischievous dog, Finn. Kitty's Mum and Dad, and Max's Dad also weave in and out of Kitty's adventures.

Your child will learn to recognise the words in these books by sight, and will mainly rely on sight and memory for word recognition.

You can help your child to reach his or her full potential by taking an active interest in reading the books with your child, allowing your child to read to you, talking about the pictures together and what is happening on each page with each character, trying to guess what might happen next, or what might have happened if..., and discussing the story line, or story sequence.

You can also help by revising the words used in the book so that your child gets used to recognising the words when he or she sees them in other contexts or when the

word is seen alone, in no context at all.

If your child is having difficulty recognising or remembering the words there are games you can play to help.

Choose three or four words and write each one clearly on two or more pieces of cut out card or paper. Do not use capital letters unless there is one at the start of a particular word such as 'Kitty'.

Step 1: Lay out the words in a row and ask your child to match the words. As he or she matches each word to its partner say the word together.

Step 2: Ask your child to 'read' a word with your help. Now ask your child to find that exact word in the book and repeat it every time he or she sees it.

Step 3: As your child becomes more confident you can challenge him or her in two different ways, as follows.

Make some new word cards on which you have written the words with a mistake (change one letter in the word, or omit one letter in the word, but keep it very simple).

Use these in a new matching game where the child has to look very carefully to see:

- Which words really match the original word cards and which are a bit wrong.
- Which word cards really match the words in the book, and which are a bit wrong.

The Activity Book which corresponds with the reading book will also have activities which help children to remember and practise difficult words.

The reading sight vocabulary in the six core reading books is closely linked with the well known Oxford Reading Tree (Oxford University Press). This is a highly regarded series of reading books and a selection should be available in most public libraries. This ensures an almost endless supply of supplementary reading material for beginner readers. Outstanding advantages of this link are: a) children are practising their sight words in the core readers, and then again in different contexts, in the Oxford Reading Tree reading books; and b) many schools now already have a stock of Oxford Reading Tree reading books in their classrooms and school libraries.

The six corresponding Infant Activity Books closely support the reading material in the core readers. If your child needs extra help to learn to read you could talk to the class teacher about buying and using these activity books at home, as well as in school. The tasks and activities are carefully graded

to match age and ability, and your child will respond well to working with you on the colouring and reading tasks. The activity books are designed to help consolidate learning, extend the reading experience for the child, and to specifically target key words and difficult to learn words. Opportunities to revise will be a great advantage to children who find learning to read challenging.

The Supplementary Books or 'Oxford Reading Books' may be given to your child in between each of the core reading books. These books are designed to be read together for pleasure. Your child will know some of the words as he or she will have met them in the core reading books. Do not be worried if your child does not instantly know all of the words in the Supplementary Books or in the 'Oxford Reading Books'. Do not spoil the pleasure of the shared reading experience by trying to teach him or her all these new words. Read together and enjoy!



Introduction

The best gift we can give our children is time, especially quality time during their formative years. This is best spent developing their first language. For most children in Ireland, English is their first language, so developing the three strands and their supporting strand units is of the utmost importance.

The three strands are:

1. Oral language
2. Reading
3. Writing

These strands need to be developed through three areas:

1. Receptiveness to language — the child being ready to understand language
2. Competence and confidence in using the language — making the child confident enough to request what they want orally, and also to be able to read and write well
3. Developing cognitive abilities through language — learning about themselves and the world through asking questions, reading, and writing
4. Emotional and imaginative development through language — expressing their own personal ideas, feelings, etc.

Oral Language

Oral language is the first, most used means of communication. It is of vital importance to personal and social development. Children need a language structure to interact with their family at home, peers at play and in school, and with other people in their lives, e.g. teacher, doctor, nurse, librarian etc. Children need this structure to enable them to talk about their experiences, understand ideas, follow instructions, perform social functions using language, and to begin and conclude conversations.

Oral language is a prerequisite for reading and writing. If a child does not have a word in their vocabulary they will find it very difficult to read it, despite trying to figure it out through phonics and picture clues. Lack of vocabulary also hinders understanding of meaning. Oral language is essential for developing cognition.

If children have not acquired the necessary language to ask questions or to answer them, their learning will be delayed. They need to be taught how to:

1. Focus on detail and be exact about it.
2. To discuss solutions to problems in all areas of the curriculum.
3. To be able to argue points of view, justify opinions, and summarise.

Development of emotion and imagination begins with the child being able to express feelings and reactions. This develops into the child being able to formulate and express imaginative ideas, in response to personal experiences, fiction, and poetry.

How can I, as a parent, help to develop my child's oral language?

1. By developing a good listener/speaker relationship with the child. Answering the curiosity questions — Why is that there? Where is it now? Why can't I? When can I go? Who is that? Where does the Milkman get the milk? Why are the leaves green? Which one do you like? Etc.
2. By reading to the child — their favourite stories (over and over again), and introducing them to new ones. Engaging in 'book talk' i.e. discussing the story, pictures, author, parts of the story the child liked/disliked, characters, alternative endings etc.
3. By talking about school and the reading material they are enjoying there and have been allowed to bring home.
4. Their favourite television programmes. (Be selective in the types of programmes you allow them to watch and for how long). Praise them for using new words they may have acquired through looking at the television. A reward system can work too — 'I will give you [appropriate reward] if I hear you using a nice new word today.'
5. By discussing their favourite DVD.

6. By role-playing certain situations: 'You are in a restaurant and I am the waiter/waitress'. Ask for a menu, order, pay, comment on quality of food. Then reverse the roles. This can be done for the shop or at school etc.
7. By encouraging the child to use the telephone: how to answer, pass on messages and explain why the parent can't come to the phone.
8. By encouraging the child to describe their favourite toy, and hidden toys or objects. What is in the box?
9. By encouraging the child to welcome and say goodbye to a visitor to the house.
10. By teaching the child how to thank somebody appropriately for a present using a variety of language: 'Granny, I was so pleased/ excited/ impressed with the unexpected/ surprise/ huge/ enormous present you gave me.'
11. Retell a favourite story or summarise a story that has been read.
12. By having fun with a word e.g. 'shoes' — styles and types of shoes, colours, noises made by shoes, decorations on shoes, when/why we wear shoes, history of shoes etc. Any word can be used to do this exercise, while walking with your child or driving along in the car. In Junior/Senior Infants we can do all these exercises on a small scale and then further develop them as the child gets older.

We must help children to expand their vocabulary as early as possible — without putting too much pressure on them, as the relationship between parent and child is still of paramount importance. Your child may tell you of the wonderful language charts and big books that his/her teacher has in school. Discuss these with your child as often as possible.

Reading

In order to attain success in reading a child needs to develop:

1. Good vocabulary: Oral language. Your child may bring home a picture or a book with no words at all in it. The use of such a book

will help the child to understand the basic ideas about a book i.e. the front cover, title, back cover. You can help your child to create their own story around the pictures in such books.

2. Good phonological awareness (awareness of rhyming patterns in words). This is achieved by introducing the child to nursery rhyme books or books with natural language rhythms in them. Your child may have already brought home such books from school or perhaps will do so in the near future. Ask your child to tell you about the 'Big Books' that have rhyming stories in them. Research has shown that the child with good phonological awareness, i.e. ability to rhyme words, and link rhyming words together, is most likely to be a good reader in the future (Adams 1990).
3. Good visual discrimination strategies (ability to pick out things that are the same or different on sight). This will be done through the use of pre-reading activity books and worksheets, which will have matching and sorting exercises in them:
 - (a) Matching picture to picture
 - (b) Matching picture and word to word and picture
 - (c) Matching word to picture
 - (d) Matching letter to letter; Finding the odd-man-out; Classifying objects by shape, size, colour; Doing jigsaws
4. Good visual sequential memory (ability to remember what they see and put them in the right order or position). This will also be done through pre-reading activity books and work sheets:
 - (a) Finish the pattern
 - (b) Sequence the pictures to make the story
 - (c) Games — recalling objects placed on the table and then hidden or removed
 - (d) Dot-to-dot exercises using letters and numbers.

A good visual sequential memory will be a great asset to the child when they begin to copy words from the printed materials around them — flashcards, blackboards, interactive whiteboards, books and also when they begin to learn about spellings.

5. Good Auditory Discrimination skills (ability to tell the difference between words that sound the same or are different, and also tell the letter sounds). This will be done through the use of a CD and activity book used in school. Other games to enable the child to acquire this skill will be:
- (a) 'I spy with my little eye' — words beginning with any one letter of the alphabet
 - (b) The Minister's cat is a — choose a letter e.g. 's' and list the words beginning with this letter or letter cluster — 'pr' words:
The Minister's cat is a sad cat — parent; The Minister's cat is a sick cat — child; The Minister's cat is a sorry cat — parent and so on
 - (c) The Clapping Game: Pick a letter — 'b', parent calls out a list of words beginning with 'b' and puts in one that does not: boy, biscuit, basket, car, bag. The child only claps for the 'b-words'; otherwise the parent wins the game.
6. Good Auditory Sequential memory (remembering what was heard and in the right order) is also very important for the child. This can be done through:
- (a) Saying nursery rhymes, especially the ones that repeat themselves and add on another part e.g. 'Old McDonald' or 'I know an old woman who swallowed a fly...'
 - (b) Following instructions given orally
 - (c) Telling a joke
 - (d) I went to the shop and I bought... each time the parent/tutor and child adds on a new item to their original one
 - (e) As I walked down the road I saw... this one can also be linked with the 'initial sounds' idea, or numbers e.g. I saw one dog, child says — I saw one dog, two cats etc.
7. Individual letter sounds/phonemic awareness is also a very important skill for the child to acquire. This helps greatly in the area of sounding out words. The exercises in point 5. above also help to develop phonemic awareness.

Many of the skills mentioned will be developed and acquired by the child at the same time.

We can help the child to become a good reader by:

1. Reading aloud to the child
2. Encouraging the child to partake in the games and exercises outlined earlier
3. Encouraging the child to read with us as tutors and allowing them to point out and to say words they begin to recognise
4. Guiding the child to do more reading on their own and do not worry if the reading is not word perfect. It doesn't matter at this stage if the child substitutes words like 'mummy' for 'mother' or 'sad' for 'crying', as long as the sentence makes sense. Also, help if your child asks you to help. Don't make them feel that they must read on. Don't force participation. As your child's skill and confidence grows, you will find that he/she is reading to you more and more, and getting better at it. Keep in mind that many children take a couple of years to begin this stage. Be patient — it will happen unless the child has a reading difficulty which will be recognised and you will be made aware of it by the child's teacher.
5. Your child is now becoming 'an independent reader,' so you have to continue to be supportive and listen to your child reading to you as often as possible. Encourage your child to engage in 'book talk' as outlined under Language Development, though not with every book he/she reads or you will make them resent reading to you. Reading must be a pleasurable exercise at all times.

Writing

The first time writer must be allowed to experiment with print. To know, for example, that the word 'dog' starts with a 'd' is a great achievement and must be encouraged. Parents can help to develop writing skills by using magnetic letters on a magnetic board to form the word d-o-g and

then the child can copy the letters onto paper, emphasising the fact that when we write, we go from left to right on the page. The correct way to make letters is important from the early stages but must be sensitively addressed or the child may feel that the end product is more important than the way they do it and become reluctant to engage in the activity at all. The school will advise you on how they guide the emergent writer to successfully form their letters. Remember 'practice makes perfect,' so at every available opportunity allow your child to scribble, draw, form patterns, paint, use scissors, paste etc., to help develop their hand movements. Such experimentation pays dividends later on and helps the child's confidence when they become good at writing words. Once the child gets the idea of word formation and spelling they will become confident in the whole area of writing as a means of communication. Then, as parents, we can encourage them to write:

1. Notes for us, and we can write back
2. Lists of things we need to buy (copying from, for example, cornflake boxes, toothpaste, etc.)
3. Cards for other children's birthdays, Christmas, Easter
4. Menus for what they would like for lunch
5. A simple diary
6. Telephone messages

Remember, spelling is something that develops gradually, and for some children this happens quicker and more easily than for others. The use of approximation in spelling is part of this development for children, as they become established spellers, e.g. Kat (cat), Shu (shoe), and Frnd (friend). Spelling is a very different skill from reading- a child who is a good reader is not necessarily a good speller, nor are they being lazy — they need to be encouraged and given definite strategies to cope with any difficulties that may arise. Some are 'catchers' of spelling, but many are 'non-catchers'. Spellings need to be practised in the way in which they are used, that is, written.

Here are some spelling ideas that will provide support for the spelling beginner:

1. Apply the L-S-P-C-W-Ch method:

- (a) Look at the word to be learned
- (b) Say the word out loud
- (c) Picture the word in your head
- (d) Cover the word
- (e) Write the word
- (f) Check the word

If incorrect, repeat the procedure until the word is mastered.

2. Use a magnetic board and letters

- (a) Arrange the letters to form the word to be learned
- (b) Note the number of letters in the word (some children who have difficulty with spelling can have strong mathematical ability)
- (c) Name the first letter, last letter
- (d) Does any letter repeat itself more than once? E.g. yellow
- (e) Can you see another word(s) within this word?
- (f) Parent/tutor removes one or more of the letters from the word. Push the remaining letters together.
- (g) Invite your child to tell you how many letters are missing and name them
- (h) The child then puts the letters into the correct position on the board
- (i) Disarrange the letters and the child must then rearrange them to form the word
- (j) The child should write down the word three times using the LOOK-SAY-PICTURE-COVER-WRITE-CHECK method

3. Some children need to use their tactile (touch) sense to help them to remember their spellings. To use this medium, you need: a piece of carpet, approx the size of an A4 sheet of paper.

- (a) Look at the word to be learned
- (b) Using their first finger, saying each letter aloud as they do so, and the entire word when finished —repeat this three times

(c) Write the word using the L-S-P-C-W-Ch method as shown in (j) above.

Always remember spelling is a visual exercise. As adults we generally ask ourselves 'Does it look right?' whenever we are unsure about the word we have written.

As with all aspects of English, children will only acquire the skills used to spell correctly when they are ready, so don't force participation in any of the above methods or be critical of your child's ability to retain a spelling learned, or attempt new spellings.

Suggestions compiled by Joan Boland