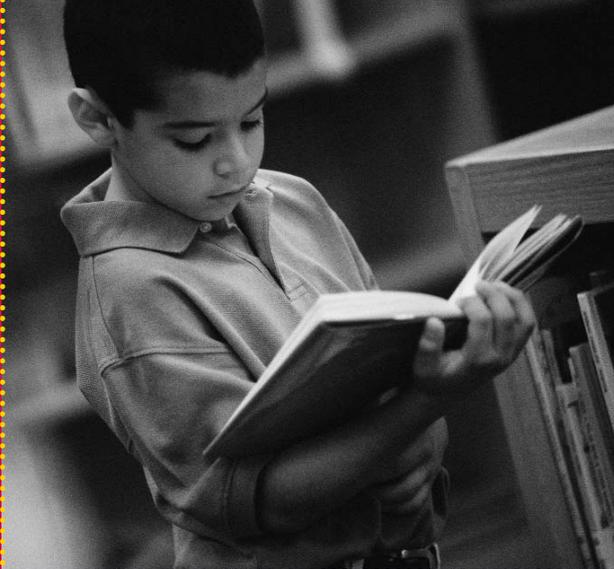


# First Grade



## WHAT TO DO AT HOME

### The top three

- Talk often with your child to build listening and talking skills.
- Read to and with your child—often. Talk to him about the words and ideas in books.
- Ask your child’s teacher how you can help your child practice at home what he is learning at school.

### Support what your child is learning in school about relationships between letters and sounds

1. **Listen to your child read books from school.** Be patient as your child practices. Let him know you are proud of his reading.
2. **Say the sounds of letters and ask your child to write the letter or letters that represent the sound.**
3. **Ask your child to point out the letter-sound relationships he is learning in all of the things you are reading together—books, calendars, labels, magazines, and newspapers.**
4. **Play word games.** On cards, write words that contain the letter-sound relationships he is learning at school. Take turns choosing a card and **blending** the sounds to make the word. Then use the word in a sentence.

*If your child needs help with developing **phonemic awareness** or identifying and naming letters of the alphabet, read the suggestions in the kindergarten section of this booklet. Remember that these two skills are very important in helping children learn to read and write.*

## Encourage your child to spell and write

1. **Say a word your child knows and have him repeat the word.** Then help him write the word the way he hears it.
2. **Write a word on paper and cut the letters apart (or use plastic or foam letters).** Mix the letters and have your child spell a word by putting the letters in order.
3. **As you are reading with your child, point out words that have similar spellings, such as *hop* and *pop*.** Ask him to write similar words, for example, *top*, *mop*, and *cop*.
4. **Encourage your child to write often—for example, letters and thank-you notes, simple stories, and grocery lists.**

## Help your child build vocabulary, knowledge of the world, and comprehension

1. **When you read together, stop now and then to talk about the meaning of the book.** Help her make connections between what's happening in the book and her own life and experiences, or to other books you've read together. Ask her questions so that she talks about the information in a nonfiction book, or about the characters or events of a fiction book. Encourage your child to ask questions. Ask her to explain what the book was about, in her own words.
2. **Before you come to the end of a story, ask your child to predict what might happen next or how the story will end.**
3. **Talk about new words and ideas that your child has read or heard.** Ask her to make up sentences with the new words or use the words in other situations. Help her to find out more about new ideas by using appropriate web sites.
4. **Read magazines and newspapers together.** Get him interested in what's happening in other parts of the world.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN FIRST GRADE CLASSROOMS

In effective first grade classrooms, you will see literacy instruction that focuses on:

### Developing talking and listening abilities

**The teacher** helps children use language that is appropriate for different audiences and purposes.

**The children** use speaking and listening for many purposes, including getting and giving information, giving opinions, and talking with teachers and classmates. They talk about what has been read to them or what they have read. They retell stories that they have heard read aloud. They make up and tell stories based on their own experiences. They use the more formal language expected at school, such as complete sentences.

## Teaching about books and print

**The teacher** reads aloud to the children often, sharing many different types of books and other print materials. She shows her enthusiasm for reading and her eagerness for the children to learn to read. As she reads, she shows the parts of print such as the beginnings and endings of sentences, new paragraphs, and different punctuation marks.

**The children** are excited about being read to and about learning to read. They recognize the titles of books and ask the teacher to read their favorites. They spend part of the day looking at books or **pretend reading** books of their choice.

## Teaching about the alphabet

**The teacher** makes sure that children can recognize and name all of the letters of the alphabet, both uppercase and lowercase.

**The children** can quickly name the letters of the alphabet in order and recognize all letters. They use their knowledge of letters when they write.

## Teaching phonemic awareness

**The teacher** provides explicit instruction in phonemic awareness. She shows the children

### PHONEMIC AWARENESS

#### ***Awareness activities that you may see in first grade classrooms***

**Phoneme deletion:** Children recognize the word that remains when you take away a phoneme.

Teacher: What is *space* without the /s/?

Children: *space* without the /s/ is *pace*.

**Phoneme addition:** Children make a new word by adding a phoneme to a word.

Teacher: What word do you have if you add /p/ to the beginning of *lace*?

Children: *Place*.

**Phoneme substitution:** Children substitute one phoneme for another to make a new word.

Teacher: The word is *rag*. Change /g/ to /n/. What's the new word?

Children: *Ran*.

how to do phonemic awareness activities and helps them with feedback. The activities are short and fun. (See the next page for examples of each activity.)

**The children** practice a lot with phonemes. For example, they clap out the sounds they hear in words (**segmentation**), put sounds together to make words (**blending**), add or drop sounds from words (**phoneme addition** and **deletion**), and replace sounds in words (**phoneme substitution**).

## Teaching phonics and word recognition

**The teacher** explicitly teaches the children letter-sound relationships in a clear and useful sequence. The teacher also teaches children **irregular words** they will see and read often, but that do not follow the letter-sound relationships they are learning. These are often called **sight words**—words such as *said, is, was, are*.

### PHONEMIC INSTRUCTION

Although there are several different approaches to teaching phonics, here are some activities that you are likely to see in first grade classrooms.

- Children sort out objects and pictures by the beginning sounds they have studied such as /b/, /c/, and /t/. They put the objects in baskets labeled with the beginning letter. "I have a *turtle*. It goes in the T basket." "This *cup* goes in the C basket."
- The teacher teaches the *-ing* spelling pattern and sounds, pointing out *-ing* words in books. The children look for examples of *-ing* words in books in the classroom library. "I found *singing!*" "This book has *wing!*" They copy the words on index cards and add them to the **word wall** under the heading "*-ing* words."
- The teacher helps children use plastic letters to spell out words containing sounds they have studied. She starts with two letter words and moves on to longer words. "Find two letters and make the word *in*. Now add one letter to make the word *pin*. Now add a letter to make the word *spin*. Using those same letters, change the word to *pins*."
- The teacher reads a poem written on chart paper to the class, pointing to each word as he reads. When he's done, he invites children to circle the words beginning with the /p/ sound, saying the word as they circle it.

**The children** learn to blend sounds to read words—first one-syllable words and, later, words with more than one syllable. They read easy books that include the letter-sound relationships they are learning as well as sight words that they have been taught. They recognize and figure out the meaning of compound words (words made of two words put together, such as background). They practice writing the letter-sound relationships in words, sentences, messages, and their own stories.

## Developing spelling and writing

**The teacher** provides opportunities for children to practice writing skills independently in both whole group and learning center settings. She makes spelling a part of writing activities. She helps children begin to think through their writing efforts—planning, writing drafts, and revising.

**The children** use writing more and more as a way to communicate ideas. They begin to organize their writing by planning, writing a draft copy, and editing it. They continue to use some invented spelling, but are learning the correct spellings of most of the words that they write.

## Building vocabulary and knowledge of the world

**The teacher** talks with the children about important new vocabulary words and helps them relate the new words to their own knowledge and experience. He makes a point of using new words in classroom discussions. He urges the children to use these words when they talk and write.

**The children** talk about the meanings of words and use new words when they talk and write. They begin to recognize words that are alike (synonyms) and words that are opposite (antonyms). They also begin to recognize the roles of different words in sentences—words that name (nouns) and words that show action (verbs). They understand that the language they use in school is more formal than the language they use at home and with friends.

## Building comprehension

**The teacher** reads aloud to children often and discusses books with them before, during, and after reading. The teacher listens to children read aloud, corrects their errors, and asks them questions about what they are reading. He shows children how to use mental plans, or strategies, to get meaning from what they read.

**The children** read aloud with accuracy and show that they understand what they're reading. They read books (fiction, nonfiction, and poetry) that are appropriate for the time in the school year. They make connections between what they already know and what they are reading. They pay attention to their reading and recognize when something doesn't make sense. They summarize and discuss what they read with classmates and their teacher. They choose to read on their own and enjoy reading.

## **WHAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO BY THE END OF FIRST GRADE**

The following is a list of some accomplishments you can expect of your child by the end of first grade. This list is based on research in the fields of reading, early childhood education, and child development. Remember, though, that children don't develop and learn at the same pace and in the same way. Your child may be more advanced or need more help than others in her age group. You are, of course, the best judge of your child's abilities and needs. You should take the accomplishments as guidelines and not as hard-and-fast rules. If you have concerns or questions about your child's reading development, talk to his teacher.

### **Books and print**

#### **By the end of first grade, a child:**

- Knows the difference between letters and words
- Knows that there are spaces between words in print
- Knows that print represents spoken language and contains meaning
- Knows some of the parts of print, such as the beginnings and endings of sentences, where paragraphs begin and end, and different punctuation marks
- Begins to understand why people read—to learn and enjoy

### **The alphabet**

#### **By the end of first grade, a child:**

- Can recognize and name all of the letters of the alphabet

### **Sounds in spoken language**

#### **By the end of first grade, a child:**

- Can count the number of syllables in a word
- Can put together and break apart the sounds of most one-syllable words

### **Phonics and word recognition**

#### **By the end of first grade, a child:**

- Can show how spoken words are represented by written letters that are arranged in a specific order
- Can read one-syllable words using what he knows about phonics
- Uses phonics to sound out words he doesn't know
- Can recognize some irregularly spelled words, such as *have*, *said*, *you*, and *are*

## Reading

### By the end of first grade, a child:

- Reads aloud first grade books and understands what they mean
- Can tell when he is having problems understanding what he is reading
- Reads and understands simple written instructions
- Predicts what will happen next in a story
- Discusses what she already knows about topics of books she is reading
- Can ask questions (how, why, what if?) about books she is reading
- Can describe, in his own words, what he has learned from a book he is reading
- Can give a reason for why he is reading a book (to be entertained, to follow directions, to learn about a nonfiction topic, for example)

## Spelling and writing

### By the end of first grade, a child:

- Uses invented (or developmental) spelling to try to spell words on his own
- Understands that there is a correct way to spell words
- Uses simple punctuation marks and capital letters
- Writes for different purposes—stories, explanations, letters, lists
- Writes things for others to read (by thinking of ideas, writing draft copies, and revising drafts)

## Vocabulary and knowledge of the world

### By the end of first grade, a child:

- Uses language with more control (such as speaking in complete sentences)
- Understands that the language used in school is more formal than the language used at home and with friends
- Talks about the meaning of words and uses new words when he speaks and writes
- Begins to see that some words mean the same thing (synonyms) and some words have opposite meanings (antonyms)
- Begins to recognize that words play different roles in sentences (for example, some words—nouns—name things and some words—verbs—show action)

*The main source for the list of accomplishments is Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. For more information about this book, see Bibliography in the back of this booklet.*