

## WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

### SPOT: Mother Goose *Jumping Into Genre: Folklore* (developing wide reading)



### What are Phonemic Awareness and Phonological Awareness?

Phonemic awareness is the ability to notice, think about, and work with the individual sounds in spoken words. Before children learn to read print, they need to become aware of how the sounds in words work. They must understand that words are made up of speech sounds, or phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest parts of sound in a spoken word that make a difference in the word's meaning. For example, changing the first phoneme in the word *hat* from /h/ to /p/ changes the word from *hat* to *pat*, and so changes the meaning.

A child who possesses phonemic awareness can take apart (segment) sounds in words (for example, pronounce just the first sound heard in the word *top*), and put together (blend) strings of isolated sounds tighter to form recognizable words (for example, put the sounds /c/, /a/, /t/ together to say "cat"). Phonemic awareness is part phonological awareness, which is the ability to understand larger units of sound such as syllables and rhymes. The terms phonemic awareness and phonological awareness are often used interchangeably.

### Why is Phonemic Awareness Important?

Children who have developed phonemic awareness skills are likely to have an easier time learning to read and spell than children who have few or none of these skills. In fact, research indicates that phonemic awareness abilities in kindergarten appear to be the best single predictor of successful reading acquisition; better than nonverbal intelligence, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. Phonemic awareness correlates more highly with reading acquisition than IQ tests or reading readiness tests.

### Mother Goose and Phonemic Awareness

Researchers suggest that it is best to read regularly to young children and encourage them to play with spoken language. Nursery rhymes, such as the Mother Goose rhymes, riddles, songs, poems, and books, such as Dr. Seuss and others that manipulate sounds of the spoken language help children develop phonemic awareness naturally.

### Older Children and Mother Goose

Older children return to Mother Goose to explore the historical and social contexts of the rhymes and in doing so, discover references to real people and real events. They also explore how Mother Goose rhymes convey cultural values over time by tracing how some of those values have changed by comparing earlier Mother Goose editions with current publications.

Examining the political protest, commentary, and criticism of Mother Goose rhymes often fascinates adolescents. The thinly veiled references to the faults and foibles of European royalty in some of the original rhymes have inspired similar disagreement with more recent social and political policies. Teens often enjoy writing their own parodies of these familiar verses.



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