What is Phonemic Awareness?

Phonemic awareness is an awareness of *individual* sounds/phonemes in a spoken word. It represent the most precise subcategory of phonemic awareness. Because letters are to represent spoken phonemes, phonemic awareness is the type of phonological awareness that is essential for reading.” (Dr. David Kilpatrick 2015)

So what does this mean?

Words are made up of sounds represented by letters (also called graphemes). For example, a squiggle line (“s”) has 2 sounds. It can say /s/ or /z/ depending on the placement in the word. The combination of ea has 3 sounds (long e as in eat, short e as in bread, and long a as in great). Knowing what the graphemes say is called **phonological** awareness.

**PHONEMIC** awareness is being able to identify what sound is said **without looking** at it. For example, what is the first sound in past? (/p/ - we identify the sound NOT the letter name) Or what is airplane without plane? (air) Or say boat, change /b/ to m and what do you have? (moat)

The two best predictors of early reading success are alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness. (Adams, 1990) All children benefit from being taught directly how to break up (segment) spoken words into smaller units and how letters represent sounds. (Shaywitz, 1999)

There are eight phonemic awareness skills: rhyming, onset fluency (what is the first sound(s) of the word before the vowel. Ie. **b**-at, or **cl**-ap), blending, isolating final or medial phonemes, segmenting, adding phonemes, deleting phonemes, and substitution of phonemes.

What can you do at home to help with phonemic awareness?

Read and recite nursery rhymes, ask your child to identify the first, middle or last sound of a word, or ask them to tell you what is left if you take part of the word away (“What is meat without /m/?”). Remember, one doesn’t need to see the word to answer; phonemic awareness is manipulation without print.

As always, if you have questions or want to learn more about this topic come and ask. I’d love to share more about the science of reading.