Parent Guide to Reading Books – September 2025

In recent years we have invested in new reading books for children at Fairfield as some of our previous reading books didn't match our ELS Phonics teaching in class. Many of the books we have been using were written before Phonics was introduced and whilst these books are still worthwhile, and will still be used as 'shared reading' books, we have invested in more phonics-based books that will allow the children to practise and consolidate the sounds they have been learning with their teacher. They will be encouraged to read these with greater independence, fluency and expression.

At Fairfield, we follow Essential Letters and Sounds (ELS) for our Phonics teaching. From the ELS website, ELS is described as "a Systematic Synthetic Phonics (SSP) programme, validated by the Department for Education. By distilling Letters and Sounds to its purest form, we ensure every phonics lesson is taught to the highest standard. Essential Letters and Sounds is an SSP where only the essential elements are included". It is a simple and consistent approach. ELS is delivered whole class, provides interventions where needed, is engaging and rigorous, aligns with our reading books and supports the teachers to ensure the lowest attaining children keep up rather than catch up.

In the past we have called some words tricky words such as the and water. This is because the children cannot use their phonics to read and write these words correctly. In ELS, we now refer to these types of words as harder to read and spell words. Here is an outline of the words that your child needs to be confident with by the end of KS1:

I	buses	when	children	mouse	sugar
the	we	what	love	water	friend
no	me	said	oh	want	because
put	be	so	their	very	
of	push	have	people	please	
is	was	were	Mr	once	
to	her	out	Mrs	any	
go	my	like	your	many	
into	you	some	ask	again	
pull	they	come	should	who	
as	all	there	would	whole	
his	are	little	could	where	
he	ball	one	asked	two	
she	tall	do	house	here	

ELS Overview – Phase 1 to Phase 5

Phase 1*	Phase 2	Phase 3**
Nursery/Pre-School Seven aspects: • Environmental sounds • Instrumental sounds • Body percussion • Rhythm and rhyme • Alliteration • Voice sounds • Oral blending	*Reception/Primary 1 Autumn 1* • Oral blending • Sounding out and blending with 23 new grapheme-phoneme correspondences (GPCs) • 12 new harder to read and spell (HRS) words	*Reception/Primary 1 Autumn 2, Spring 1 and Spring 2* • Oral blending • Sounding out and blending with 29 new GPCs • 32 new HRS words • Revision of Phase 2
Phase 4**	**Phase 5 including alternatives and lesser-known GPCs**	**Beyond Phase 5**
Reception/Primary 1 Summer 1 • Oral blending • No new GPCs • No new HRS words • Word structures – cvcc, ccvc, ccvcc, cccvc, cccvcc • Suffixes • Revision of Phase 2 and Phase 3	*Reception/Primary 1 Summer 2* • Introduction to Phase 5 for reading • 20 new GPCs • 16 new HRS words *Year 1/Primary 2 Autumn 1 and 2* • Revision of previously taught Phase 5 GPCs • 2 new GPCs • 9 new HRS words *Year 1/Primary 2 Spring 1 and 2* • Alternative spellings for previously taught sounds • 49 new GPCs • 4 new HRS words • Oral blending • Revision of Phase 2, Phase 3 and Phase 4	*Year 1/Primary 2 Summer, Year 2/Primary 3 and Key Stage 2* • With ELS, phonics teaching does not stop at the end of Year 1, but continues as children move through the school, with links being made between their GPC knowledge and spelling • Revision of all previously taught GPCs for reading and spelling • Wider reading, spelling and writing curriculum

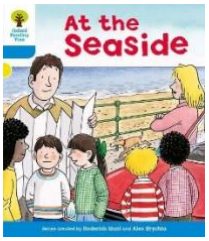
**Phase 1 of Letters and Sounds (2007) can be used in Nursery/Pre-School settings before starting ELS in Reception and can still be used throughout the school day in Reception. However, direct phonics teaching – the teaching of sounds, graphemes, word reading and vocabulary – must start from the very beginning of Reception.*

***Phase 3 of ELS covers more than just the Phase 3 graphemes – we introduce some challenge from Phase 4 (in the form of adjacent consonants) alongside the Phase 3 teaching to extend children's sounding out and blending skills.*

What does this mean in terms of reading books?

For those of you who have had children go through school previously, the reading books that we will be giving out will look very different to how it used to be. There will be a much wider range of books (both fiction and non-fiction) at each level so there will be less movement within levels whilst your child is in each year group. Your children will not be moved through levels as rapidly and will spend more time focusing on texts that have sounds from the specific phases they are learning in their class. This gives the children the time they need to learn, apply and consolidate their phonics sounds in different phases.

In Year 2, we have a comprehensive selection of books that will match their level of phonics appropriately and will be used to revise and embed all phases of Letters and Sounds.



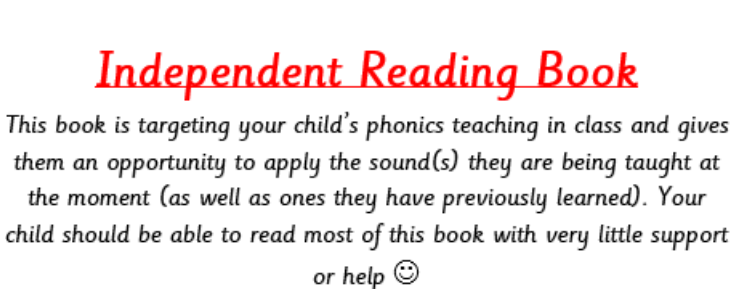
As a lot of our book stock was written prior to Letters and Sounds being introduced, the texts didn't always match our phonics teaching. An example of this is the text 'At the Seaside' which is a **Stage 3** text but contains lots of **Phase 5** sounds e.g. 'ea' and 'i-e'. We have reorganised our book stock so that the focus is on **phases** rather than **stages** as we move through the different **phases** of letters and sounds in our phonics teaching (as listed above).

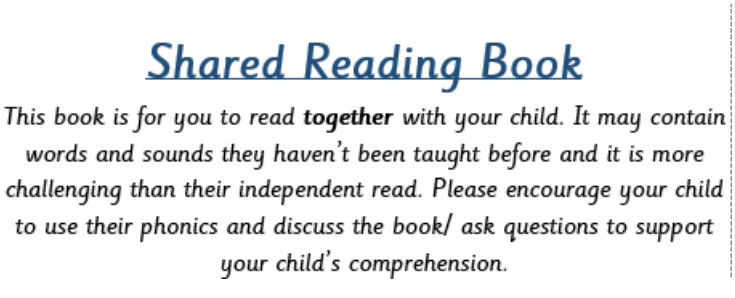
In your child's book bag they will now have a 'shared' read and an 'independent' read. Occasionally you may find that your child might have 2 of the same book (2 shared or 2 independent) and this will be due to your child's individual gaps that the teacher has identified.

In Reception, teachers will sometimes supplement their books with an additional phonics activity to embed sounds that have recently been learned.

What is the difference between a shared read and an independent read?

Each book will be clearly labelled as a shared or independent read. These have been stickered on the front with a little explanation to explain how much support you should be giving your child with that book. You will see the stickers below on the front of your child's reading books:





- **Shared read** – This is a book to challenge your child and that you will share with them. It can contain words and sounds they haven't been taught before in class and

so this book **could** be of a different level to their independent read. Lots of the Oxford Reading Tree texts will be used as shared reads (for example 'At the Seaside'- mentioned above) as they contain sounds and tricky words that can challenge your children.

- **Independent read**- this will be a book that will be given alongside their phonics teaching in class by their phonics teacher. It will be used to practise their phonic sounds that they are learning or have already learned. For example, if they are learning the consonant digraphs in Phase 3 phonics (ch, sh, th and ng) they will be given a book that contains these sounds where they can have a go at independently identifying the sounds and reading words that contain them (for example. chop, shop, thick and ring).
  You may find your children are on stages of books for longer as we will be tailoring books to match what your child has learned in class to ensure that we are securely embedding all of the sounds. They will move on to the next set or phase book when they have demonstrated they can apply those sounds in both their reading and writing.

Reading in the Early Years

In Reception children will begin their Essential Letters and Sounds journey starting with Phase 2. However it is important that the children continue to practise their Phase 1 skills throughout all of the Phases. We will send phonic games home which can be used to help develop these skills. The children will receive picture books, containing no words. This will help them to focus on the importance of developing their 'book talk' skills. For example, answering questions, looking at facial expressions of characters, sequencing the story and identifying key aspects of the story. Developing a child's speaking and listening skills is fundamental when learning to read and write.

What do we mean by **Independent Reading Book** in Reception?

In the Autumn term of Reception children are only beginning to be taught letters and their sounds and the skill of blending to read. This book will allow your child to practise the phonemes they have been learning in school as well as practising the skill of blending, initially with more of your support. As they become more confident to blend you will see they become more independent when reading these books. It is likely that your child will receive the same book more than once as repetition is an important part of developing reading skills. There will be regular Tapestry Memos to support you with this at home as well as the weekly phonics game/task.

Books will be labelled as Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 on the back of books but this is purely for stock organisation and space so don't worry what year group sticker it has. Children do also learn to read at different paces and it is natural that some children are on higher stages than others, this corresponds to their phonics teaching which is set to match their gaps and ability.

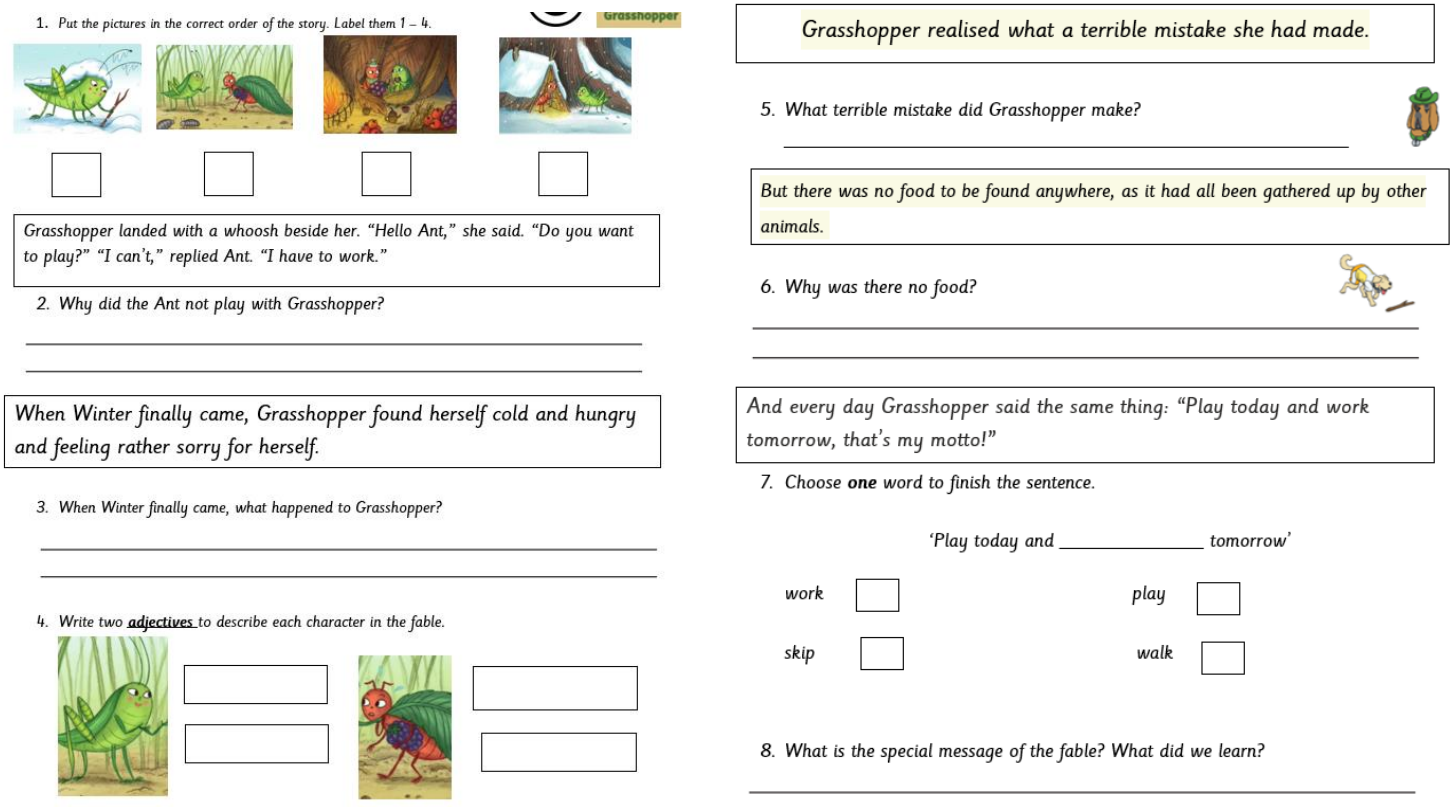
Each class are visiting our new library weekly and your child will therefore come home with a library book and this will be changed on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

The big focus on comprehension

A huge focus for us at Fairfield is comprehension which can be both verbal and written. We need to see that your child can talk about the book, can recall what they have read and can demonstrate their understanding through answering questions.

Children's book reading skills are often higher than their comprehension skills and we need to make sure that their comprehension skills match their sound recognition and fluency. In Reception children's comprehension will be assessed through verbal questions and discussions around the book.

We have reading assessments in Year 1 and Year 2 that compare data nationally with other schools. A huge part of this is written comprehension and I have attached a snapshot of a reading comprehension sheet that the children in Year One would be expected to complete



1. Put the pictures in the correct order of the story. Label them 1 – 4.

Grasshopper landed with a whoosh beside her. "Hello Ant," she said. "Do you want to play?" "I can't," replied Ant. "I have to work."

2. Why did the Ant not play with Grasshopper?

When Winter finally came, Grasshopper found herself cold and hungry and feeling rather sorry for herself.

3. When Winter finally came, what happened to Grasshopper?

4. Write two **adjectives** to describe each character in the fable.

Grasshopper realised what a terrible mistake she had made.

5. What terrible mistake did Grasshopper make?

But there was no food to be found anywhere, as it had all been gathered up by other animals.

6. Why was there no food?

And every day Grasshopper said the same thing: "Play today and work tomorrow, that's my motto!"

7. Choose **one** word to finish the sentence.

'Play today and _____ tomorrow'

work ☐ play ☐

skip ☐ walk ☐

8. What is the special message of the fable? What did we learn?

fairly independently by Summer term

Being able to read their book and apply their phonics is a really important skill. However, their demonstration of comprehension is equally as valuable and is something the children can often find quite tricky, even in our most fluent and expressive readers. A good way to practise comprehension skills at home is to complete the quizzes on Oxford Reading Buddy. Your child needs to be able to read these questions independently and have a go at

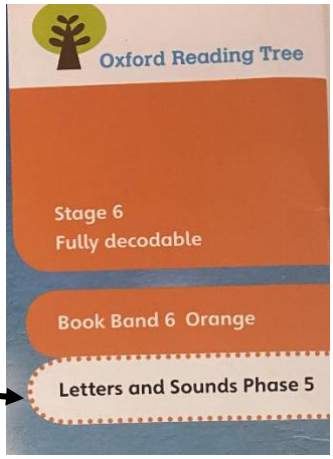
answering these themselves. You can also refer to The Totally Pawsome Gang and ask your own verbal or written questions once your child has read their book.

What can you do once you have read the book?

- Read it at least twice so your child has time to process and understand what they have read
- Ask questions e.g. from the Pawsome Gang to check your child's comprehension of what they have read
- If their verbal comprehension is really strong, write down a question e.g. What happened first in the story? and get them to write a full sentence.

Can you give me a quick summary?

- Children will get a shared text and an independent text in their bag. The independent text is a book that has sounds they are currently learning which they should be able to read with very little support. The shared text will be more challenging and will be used to challenge your children as it will contain words and sounds they may not have learned.
- The focus is on **PHASE** and not **STAGE. There are some books which have different stages and phases listed on them – we are focusing purely on phase teaching so ignore what stage your child is on.** For example, the book The Frog Prince in Year One is a stage 6 book but is Letters and Sounds Phase 5. Whilst they are in Year One and learning Phase 5 sounds, they will be getting Phase 5 books which may include stage 5 or 6 interchangeably. This is because the stages are no longer relevant and we are looking purely at Letters and Sounds Phases.



- In your child's bag they should have 1 shared read, 1 independent read, 1 library book (this will be changed in line with the class library slot). **This may look slightly different for children in Year Two as they will have moved through Phases 1-5 phonics teaching.**
- A huge part of a child's reading progress is their ability to show their understanding of what they have read (both written and verbally) so please discuss the books with your child and ask them questions.

Happy reading! ☺