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The Most Common Phonograms

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Figure 3
Student-generated resources

I know...	I want to learn...	Where I can learn this...	I have learned...
1. Oceans are salty.	1. Why are oceans salty?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • encyclopedia • ask a scientist • ask a marine biologist 	
2. Salt water burns your eyes.	2a. Why does salt water burn? 2b. Are there chemicals in the ocean? 2c. Are these chemicals harmful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask an optometrist • ask a scientist • ask a physician 	
3. Oceans have waves.	3. What causes waves?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • go to the library • ask a marine biologist • ask a weather person • create an experiment 	
4. There are more than 350 kinds of sharks.	4. Are all sharks dangerous?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask a marine biologist 	
5. Hurricanes begin over oceans.	5. How can we be safe from hurricanes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask a weather person 	
6. Oceans have fish.	6. Are sea monsters, like the one in Loch Ness, real?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surf the Internet 	
7. Oceans have shells.	7. Why do shells make the sound of the ocean?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask a scientist • create an experiment 	
8. The Beach Boys sing about oceans.	8. What are some surf songs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask the music teacher 	

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The most common phonograms

Edward Fry

There are a lot of phonograms. In a recent study (Fry, 1998) I found 353 different phonograms (rimes or word families) that were contained in between 2 and 26 relatively common one-syllable words for each phonogram.

The teacher's problem, and the curriculum developer's problem, is which

ones to teach first. One way to answer this question is to determine the phonograms that are the most common. That answer is given in the Table. The 38 most common phonograms are presented in rank order with rank being determined by the number of words in each phonogram family. Hence the phonogram family with the most words is -ay, which included such words as *say*, *day*, and *pay*.

In this study I defined phonograms or rimes as the vowel sound plus any

subsequent consonants in a syllable. Single vowels without any following consonants that could be made into a word, such as /o/ in *go*, were also considered phonograms.

Why teach phonograms?

The simple answer to this question is that it helps many students to learn to read and write better. Certainly, the phonogram approach is not a complete reading or spelling program, or even a complete phonics program. But it's a definite help in decoding.

For example, Marilyn Adams (1990) states:

As coherent psychological units in themselves, the onset and rime are relatively easy to remember and to splice back together. Yet another advantage of exploiting phonograms in decoding instruction is that they provide a means of introducing and exercising many primer words with relative efficiency and this, as we have seen, is in marked contrast to the slowness with which words can be developed through individual letter-sound correspondences. Again this advantage has long been recognized in many instructional programs. (p. 321)

Likewise, JoAnne Vacca, Richard Vacca, and Mary Gove (1995) state:

Phonics instruction needs to include the teaching of onset and rimes. Instead of teaching phonics rules, teach children to use onsets and rimes.... We can safely conclude that phonics information is much easier for young readers to acquire when phonograms are taught than when a one-on-one blending process is taught. (p. 287)

Utility of phonograms

I found that just 38 phonograms with added beginning consonants can make 654 different one-syllable words. These same phonograms can be found in many polysyllabic words as well. This finding is basically in harmony with an earlier study by Wylie and Durrell (in Vacca, Vacca, & Gove, 1995) that found that 37 phonograms could form nearly 500 primary-grade words.

In my study I went completely through two rhyming dictionaries (Alee, 1983; Webster, 1987) and one dissertation on the topic (Stanback, 1991), as a cross check, and selected all relatively common example words. All

Most common phonograms in rank order based on frequency (number of uses in monosyllabic words)*

Frequency	Rime	Example words
26	-ay	jay say pay day play
26	-ill	hill Bill will fill spill
22	-ip	ship dip tip skip trip
19	-at	cat fat bat rat sat
19	-am	ham jam dam ram Sam
19	-ag	bag rag tag wag sag
19	-ack	back sack Jack black track
19	-ank	bank sank tank blank drank
19	-ick	sick Dick pick quick chick
18	-ell	bell sell fell tell yell
18	-ot	pot not hot dot got
18	-ing	ring sing king wing thing
18	-ap	cap map tap clap trap
18	-unk	sunk junk bunk flunk skunk
17	-ail	pail jail nail sail tail
17	-ain	rain pain main chain plain
17	-eed	feed seed weed need freed
17	-y	my by dry try fly
17	-out	pout trout scout shout spout
17	-ug	rug bug hug dug tug
16	-op	mop cop pop top hop
16	-in	pin tin win chin thin
16	-an	pan man ran tan Dan
16	-est	best nest pest rest test
16	-ink	pink sink rink link drink
16	-ow	low slow grow show snow
16	-ew	new few chew grew blew
16	-ore	more sore tore store score
15	-ed	bed red fed led Ted
15	-ab	cab dab jab lab crab
15	-ob	cob job rob Bob knob
15	-ock	sock rock lock dock block
15	-ake	cake lake make take brake
15	-ine	line nine pine fine shine
14	-ight	knight light right night fight
14	-im	swim him Kim rim brim
14	-uck	duck luck suck truck buck
14	-um	gum bum hum drum plum

*For a complete list of all example words see Fry (1998).

of the 353 phonograms and their several thousand example words fill a small book (Fry, 1998). This article presents the most useful of those 353 rhymes.

Teaching phonograms

There are numerous ways to teach phonograms or extend reading and spelling vocabulary by using them.

The phonograms are incorporated in many basal reading series, phonics systems, reading readiness lessons, and

spelling series that are produced by commercial publishers.

Teacher-made materials can also be used. These include making word charts, word wheels, games, slip charts, or individual cards (onset on one card and rime on another—students match and blend).

When a student attacks an unknown word, or the teacher introduces a new word in reading or spelling, the teacher shows the similar pattern in a known word.

Special spelling lessons using word lists focusing on just one or two patterns can also be effective.

Conclusion

With just 38 rimes students can write, spell, or read over 600 relatively common one-syllable words. This is one reason to use the phonograms in the Table for reading and spelling lessons. These words suggest an important part of an effective beginning reading curriculum.

Fry is currently an author and publisher of reading curriculum materials. He resides in Laguna Beach, California, USA.

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Text sets: One way to flex your grouping—in first grade, too!

Michael F. Opitz

Grouping children to teach reading is one of the most prevalent practices in schools today. It's a good thing because grouping has several advantages. For example, it enables students to learn from one another as they discuss ideas

found in various texts. As a result of listening to and discussing with others, students often gain new insights. Grouping also better ensures that all students will participate. Because groups are usually small, students get the opportunity to share their thoughts.

While grouping in general is advantageous, sole use of ability grouping—the grouping of children according to like overall reading achievement levels—is not. In fact, this type of grouping yields several unintended consequences especially for the children viewed as “low” readers (see Opitz, 1997, for a full review of these consequences). For example, students in the “low” group are often asked to perform low-level tasks and have fewer opportunities to read and write. These students' self-concepts are lowered, and they often feel excluded from the class.

Fortunately, there are alternatives, and the purpose of this article is to explain one—text sets. I have deliberately chosen to focus on first grade because this is when most children begin to see themselves as readers. How important it is, then, to have all children experience the reading of real books right from the start. And how fortunate for the children that authors, illustrators, and publishers have made many excellent titles available for them.

Text sets

What are they?

Text sets are collections of books related to a common element or topic. Single copies of books are often used to create them, with each student reading a different book related to the topic. See the Figure for six sample text sets appropriate for use in first grade.

Why use them?

One of the main reasons for using text sets is that they enable all children to be exposed to “real” books right from the start. The result? Children see themselves as readers.

Moreover, using text sets enables children of different achievement levels to be grouped together to learn about a given topic, thereby warding

off the stereotyping and other negative consequences of ability grouping.

Not only do text sets allow for heterogeneous groups, but they also permit the limited resources to be spread further. That is, because only one copy of each book is needed, a variety of books can be purchased rather than multiple copies of a single text.

How are they used?

Text sets are used during guided reading instruction. Once students are grouped, the teacher provides each student with one of the books and conducts the reading lesson. As with any effective guided reading lesson, the teacher provides guidance before, during, and after the reading.

Here's a sample framework:

Before reading

1. Activate background knowledge.

“Today we're going to read some books about gardening. What can you tell me about gardening?” As students share their ideas, they are written on the chalkboard or on a chart for future reference.

2. Set the purposes for reading.

“I have a book for each of you to read. When I give you your book, read the title and take a picture walk through the book. Be ready to tell the rest of us what you think your book will be about.” Students are given a few minutes to complete this activity.

During reading

1. Explain to students what they will be doing.

“Now that you've had a chance to look through your book, please read it silently to see if you are right about your book. I'll be here to help you if you need it.”

2. Have students read silently to see if their predictions were correct. Provide help as needed.

Note: Because some of the books will take longer to read, students could be provided with some additional activities if they finish reading before others in the group. Writing in a journal, drawing about their favorite part of the book, or reading another book are all viable activities.