Building Children's Phonological Awareness

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Overview

*Silly Sounds Playground: Building Children’s Phonological Awareness* is a board game activity for two or more players. It reinforces phonological awareness skills that have previously been taught using a phonological/phonemic awareness program (e.g., Bryant, 1998). The activities are appropriate for children who are 5 to 10 years old (kindergarten to fourth grade).

The board game activity presents skills in a developmental hierarchy and focuses on five phonological awareness skills:

1. Syllable segmentation
2. Rhyming
3. Syllable and sound blending
4. Sound segmentation
5. Sound manipulation

These five skills are presented within a context children can relate to: a playground. The *Silly Sounds Playground* board game activity develops sound awareness, rather than sound-symbol relationships. In other words, children listen for, identify, blend, or manipulate sounds (i.e., phonemes) rather than respond with letter or grapheme names.

Children do not have to be readers to participate. The adult facilitating the activity reads the game cards to the children.
The object of the game is to collect the most Playground Passes in the allotted time. Children practice important phonological awareness skills as they make their way around Silly Sounds Playground.

**Target Users**

*Silly Sounds Playground* is appropriate for children, ages 5 to 10, who are in need of phonological awareness practice. These may be either children who are learning to read or children who are working to improve their speech intelligibility. The board game activity is appropriate for use by preschool or early elementary classroom teachers, speech-language pathologists, learning disabilities specialists, reading specialists, special educators, and families.

**Goals**

The overall goal of *Silly Sounds Playground* is to provide practice opportunities for phonological awareness skills in a relevant context. The following skills can be reinforced using *Silly Sounds Playground*:

1. Syllable segmentation for three-, four-, and five-syllable words or word combinations
2. Recognition and generation of rhyming words
3. Blending of two, three, and four syllables and three, four, and five sounds
4. Sound segmentation of words with two, three, four, and five phonemes
5. Sound manipulation, including deleting a sound and substituting a sound
Playing Silly Sounds Playground

2. Shuffle and place the deck of Pick or Skip story cards on the game board at the \( \equiv \) symbol.

3. Have each player select a pawn and place his or her pawn on Start. (If you have more than five players, you may wish to form teams.)

4. Players roll the die to see who starts play. Either the highest or lowest number rolled can designate the starting player. In the case of a tie, those players should roll again to determine the starting player. Play moves in a clockwise direction.

5. Before beginning play, determine and announce how long the game will be played.

**Beginning Play**

**BEFORE each player rolls the die, he or she chooses a Silly Sounds card, hands it to the adult to read, and performs the phonological awareness task specified.**

1. If the player’s response is inappropriate, his or her turn ends and play passes to the next player (i.e., the player does not earn a Playground Pass or roll the die).

2. If the player’s response is appropriate, he or she earns one Playground Pass, shakes the die, and advances on the board the number of spaces shaken. The player may choose to move in any direction on the game board.

   a. If the player lands on a Silly Sounds space (indicated by the \( \star \) symbol), he or she may choose another card and engage in the phonological awareness task specified on the card. If that task is completed successfully, the player earns a second...
Playground Pass, his or her turn ends, and play passes to the next player, to keep the game moving along and to keep all players involved.

b. If the player lands on a Pick or Skip space (indicated by the symbol), he or she may choose to either pick a story card or skip (i.e., end) the turn. If the child chooses to pick a story card, he or she draws a card from the Pick or Skip deck and hands the card to the adult, who reads the card aloud to the player. If the child responds correctly, he or she earns two Playground Passes and the turn ends. If the child does not respond correctly, he or she receives one Playground Pass, for attempting to answer (thus the child must say something), and the turn ends. If the child chooses to skip the turn, he or she does not receive any additional Playground Passes, his or her turn ends, and play passes to the next player.

c. If the player lands on a blank space, the turn ends.

d. If the player lands on any other space (e.g., Move Ahead 3 Spaces, Go to Any Space), he or she should follow the instructions on the space.

The following symbols are included on the game board:

- Roll again
- Pick a story card or end the turn
- Pick a Silly Sounds Card
- Receive 1 free Playground Pass
- Return your pawn to the Start space
Remember, each player FIRST responds to a Silly Sounds card and THEN rolls the die, if his or her response is appropriate. Players take turns responding to questions, rolling the die, and following the directions on the spaces of the game board. If a player lands on a space occupied by another player, he or she advances to the next available space. Again, note that players may move in any direction around the game board—meaning players may learn strategies for landing on certain symbols in order to earn or collect more Playground Passes.

**Winning the Game**

Play continues until the allotted time has come to an end. Players count their Playground Passes. The player with the most passes wins the game!

Other options for winning include the following:

a. Establish beforehand a winning number of passes to be earned by the group as a whole, and have the players combine their passes to win a group privilege or prize.

b. Have the players save their passes from one session to the next to win a weekly privilege or prize.

c. Keep track of the number of Playground Passes earned by each player, and then have the children compete against their old score to see if they can earn more passes than they did in the preceding game.

**Suggestions to Adults**

1. Involve the players waiting for their turn in active listening. For example, have them give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down signal to indicate if a player accurately
responds to the task on the game card. If they are working as a team, any player who can give additional information can earn a Playground Pass for the group.

Another option is to randomly call on another player to listen to and repeat what a player answers, if the player answers appropriately. In doing so, that player can earn the same number of Playground Passes as the answering player. This random opportunity to earn additional Playground Passes may improve motivation to listen during other players’ turns.

2. When a player is struggling to perform a phonological awareness task, provide as much scaffolding and cuing as needed to help him or her succeed in the task. The following are examples:

a. Repeat the text on the card that contains the important information. For example, for the card that reads “Look at the train. Point to the character wearing g • l • o • ve • s,” repeat to the child, “What word does g • l • o • ve • s make?” instead of rereading the entire card.

b. Provide manipulatives that can support the child's performance. This could include tokens or small wooden blocks. For example, when asking a child to tell how many parts (i.e., syllables) are in a word, have him or her use small wooden blocks to represent and count the word parts.

c. Provide visual and/or kinesthetic support for the child. For example, have the child watch your mouth and tell the beginning sound he or she hears in the word box.
d. Have the child repeat slow, segmented productions of sounds or syllables following the model provided on the card. For example, when asking the child to tell the number of word parts in the word *popsicle*, have him or her repeat *pop • si • cle* several times while you model tapping out the number of syllables.

e. Change the task to reflect a more dramatic contrast between the target words. For example, if a card asks whether *warm* and *horn* rhyme, you may want to ask whether *warm* and *wart*, or *warm* and *paint*, rhyme.

f. Prolong continuant sounds while producing the model for the child (Lewkowicz, 1980). For example, when asking the child to substitute the *d* sound for the *s* sound in the word *sing*, prolong the *s* sound.

g. Use repetition of noncontinuant sounds (e.g., *p, t, k*) while producing the model on the card (Lewkowicz, 1980). For example, when asking the child to tell if the word *build* starts with a *b* sound, say “*b-b-b-build.*” (Do not use repetition if the child shows signs of being disfluent.)

h. Provide multiple choices for the child. For example, if a card asks the child to tell the number of parts in the word *pepperoni*, ask the child if *pepperoni* has two, three, or four parts.

i. If the children do not understand the term *rhyme*, for the rhyming cards, provide three words that rhyme and have them generate the fourth word. For example, say, “*Rain, pain, cane*—what word could come next?”

3. Stop play a few minutes before you want the activity to end, to allow time for the players to determine a winner.
1. Syllable Segmentation

You know all the names of the Silly Sounds characters. Now tell your first name. Then tap out the parts in your first name.

Kindergarten is so much fun. In kindergarten, children learn all about letters and sounds. How many parts are in the word kindergarten? Tap out the parts with your foot.

When musical instruments are played at the same time, they make beautiful music. Are there 2, 3, or 4 parts in the word music?

Robby likes to run, and he is really fast. He can run around the entire playground in just three minutes. How many parts are in the word playground?

2. Rhyming

Selena added too much water to the sand and it turned to mud. Does mud rhyme with nut?

When Robby is done playing the piano at his recitals, he always takes a bow. Say 2 words that rhyme with bow.

3. Blending

You can get hot when you play hard. Blend the parts lem • o • nade to tell what kids like to drink when they get hot at Silly Sounds Playground.

Remember to pronounce the sounds in the word (rather than saying letter names) for the child to blend.

Marching bands have lots of instruments. Look at the marching band. Point to the character holding a f • l • u • Ie.
4. Sound Segmentation

If you listen to the drum keep the beat, you might start to march with your feet. What are the sounds you hear in the word feet?

5. Sound Manipulation

Remember to pronounce the two letters in italics by the sounds they make (rather than saying their letter names).

The train goes fast. Hold on! Say fast. Now say fast with an l instead of a f sound.

Pick or Skip

One day the class was talking about the zoo. The teacher asked the children, “Who can tell me two zoo animals that start with the p sound?” Blaire answered, “Pig and bear both start with p.” The teacher said, “Pig starts with p, but bear starts with b.” Oops!

Name 2 animals that start with the p sound.

Pick or Skip

Robby’s teacher asked him to say the sounds in the word baby. He said, “b • a • b • y.” Wow! Way the hear the sounds in a word!

Tell the sounds you hear in this word: man.

Pick or Skip

Wally was shopping with his father when he noticed the word Jell-O on a package. Wally said, “Dad, Jell-O has two word parts. Listen, Jell • O.” Wally was right!

Now you tell how many word parts are in the word potato.

Pick or Skip

Blaire’s older sister Bekah likes to think of rhyming words when she’s riding in the car. Bekah asked Blaire to think of a word that rhymes with the word table. Blaire guessed castle. Sorry, Blaire, not quite!

What could have Blaire said?