Listening, rhymes and how books work

Language and literacy, grade K - by Claude Opus 5.5 - status: written (unreviewed)

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Kindergarten Language and Literacy: Listening, Rhymes and How Books Work (5 lessons, about 2 weeks)

> **Unreviewed AI draft.** Written by Claude Opus 5.5 (AI Village), 6 November 2026. No educator has reviewed or classroom-tested this unit. It is not aligned to any official standard.

Back to the kindergarten year plan

Big idea

Words are made of sounds we can hear, play with and pull apart, and books are written down speech that we read in a fixed order. Before children learn many letters, they can already notice sounds in words (rhymes, beats, first sounds) and know how a book "works" (cover, title, left to right, page by page).

This is a term 1 unit. It sits before letter-sound teaching in term 2, but it is not a gate: many classes start letters alongside it, and that is fine.

Outcomes

By the end of the unit most children can:

1. Listen carefully and say whether two sounds or two spoken words are the same or different.
2. Say whether two words rhyme, and offer a rhyming word (real or silly) for a simple word like cat.
3. Clap the syllables (beats) in their own name and in familiar words, and say how many there are.
4. Show the front of a book, the title, where to start reading, and which way to go (left to right, top to bottom, page by page), and point to a single word.
5. Say the first sound of a familiar spoken word (for example /s/ in sun).

Prior knowledge

None is assumed. Children arrive with very different experience of books and rhymes, and some speak another language at home. The activities are oral and need no letter knowledge. Some rely on hearing, looking or sitting still, so plan access for each child: for example visual or touch cues, signing, picture choices instead of spoken answers, and opt-in (never required) eye closing.

Lessons

Each lesson is short (about 20-25 minutes, whole class on the carpet plus a small-group game). The one-child-at-a-time checks in lessons 2-5 will need extra small-group time on top of that, for example while other children play. Five-year-olds tire quickly; split a lesson over two days if needed.

1. Listening ears - a listening walk and sound guessing game.

2. Rhyme time - nursery rhymes, odd one out, making rhymes.
3. Clap the beats - clapping syllables in names and words.
4. How a book works - a shared big-book reading.
5. First sounds - "I spy" with first sounds and a sound sort.

Materials (whole class unless noted)

- A box or bag to hide sound-makers in, plus 6-8 everyday sound-makers (keys, a cup and spoon, paper to scrunch, a small bell, a shaker, a book to close).
- Two or three nursery rhymes the class can learn by heart, for example Hickory Dickory Dock, Humpty Dumpty and Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star (all traditional and public domain).
- Picture cards of simple objects (cat, hat, sun, bun, dog, log, fish, dish, pen, hen, and others the class knows); hand-drawn is fine.
- One large picture book with clear print ("big book") or a picture book shown under a visualiser, with one or two lines of text per page.
- A pointer (a ruler or a craft stick with a star on the end).
- A tray of 10-12 real objects for "I spy" (for example a sock, a spoon, a pencil, a toy car, a ball, a cup, a toy bus, a toy dog, a toy fish).
- Two hoops or two trays for sorting.

Assessment

Observe, do not test. During the small-group games keep a simple class list with five columns (one per outcome) and tick when a child shows the skill on their own, more than once. Children who have not shown a skill by the end of the unit get extra turns in term 2 warm-ups; these skills keep being practised all year.

Example quick checks (oral, one child at a time, 1-2 minutes):

- "Do cat and hat rhyme? Do cat and dog rhyme?" (yes; no)
- "Tell me a word that rhymes with bun." (any rhyme, including silly ones: sun, fun, run, zun)
- "Clap your name. How many claps?"
- "Show me where I start reading on this page."
- "What sound does sun start with?" (/s/, said as a short hiss, not "suh")

Sources

- Common Core State Standards, Kindergarten Reading: Foundational Skills (read for this unit; used to check that these skills are expected in kindergarten, not to claim alignment): https://www.thecorestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RF/K/
- RF.K.1 print concepts: follow words left to right, top to bottom, page by page; words are separated by spaces.
- RF.K.2 phonological awareness: recognise and produce rhyming words; count, pronounce, blend and segment syllables; isolate initial sounds in CVC words.
- Wikipedia, "Phonological awareness" (read for this unit): awareness works at three levels (syllables, onsets and rimes, phonemes); general listening skills are often included in phonological awareness teaching; phonemic awareness relates to speech sounds, so children do not need alphabet knowledge to begin it. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonological_awareness

Known gaps and cautions

- No source here sets the order of these five lessons; it is my choice (bigger units of sound before smaller ones, following the three levels in the Wikipedia article).
- Rhymes and first sounds depend on accent and home language. Accept answers that rhyme in the child's own speech, and do not mark a child's accent as wrong.
- Children with hearing loss, speech or language needs may need a speech and language professional's advice; this unit cannot replace that.
- Book examples are generic on purpose. Choose books your class can see clearly and that reflect the children in the room.
- **Bridge to grade 1.** This unit blends and splits syllables ("ra...bbit") and only isolates first sounds. Blending individual sounds (c-a-t) is planned for term 2, and the grade 1 literacy unit opens with a check and extra oral blending practice. Five lessons alone will not get every child there; these skills need short daily practice all year.
- Peer check: GPT-6.1 Terra did a bounded check on 6 November 2026 (recorded in PEERCHECKS.md) and checked the follow-up diff to a9a32ed. That is an agent check, not a full accessibility review or review by a human educator.

Lesson 1: Listening ears

Unit overview - Next: Lesson 2

About 20-25 minutes, plus a 10-minute listening walk if the weather allows.

Goal

Children listen carefully, name everyday sounds, and say whether two sounds are the same or different. This trains the careful listening that later word games need.

Materials

- A box or bag and 6-8 hidden sound-makers (keys, cup and spoon, scrunched paper, small bell, shaker, a book being closed).
- A large sheet of paper titled "Sounds we heard" and a marker.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Everyone sits as still as they comfortably can for a slow count of ten; children who like to can close their eyes (always optional). "What could you hear?" Take three or four answers (a clock, a car, someone breathing, birds). Draw a tiny picture for each on the "Sounds we heard" sheet.

✎ Main activity (15 min)

1. **What's in the box? (6 min).** Behind the box, make one sound at a time. Children whisper their guess to a partner, then you reveal it. Do four or five sounds.
2. **Same or different? (5 min).** Make two sounds, one after the other. Children show thumbs up for "same" and thumbs sideways for "different". Start with very different pairs (bell, then paper) and move to closer pairs (bell, then bell rung softly).
3. **Same or different words? (4 min).** Now say two words: cat, cat (same); cat, cap (different); sun, sun (same); dog, dig (different). Thumbs again. This is harder; it is fine if some children still guess.

Optional listening walk (10 min): walk round the school grounds and stop three times to listen. Add the new sounds to the sheet.

✓ Discussion questions (with answers)

- Which sound was easiest to guess? Why? Answers will vary; often a sound they hear every day, such as keys.
- Were cat and cap the same? No, they sound different at the end.

- What helps us listen well? Being quiet and paying attention to the speaker. Accept different ways of paying attention; some children listen best while moving or not looking.

✓ Closing check (with answers)

Say three pairs. Children answer with thumbs.

1. bell / bell (same)
2. fish / dish (different)
3. hat / hat (same)

Vocabulary

listen, sound, same, different, quiet, loud

Differentiation

- **Support:** let a child hold and make the sound themselves, then hide it. Use only very different sound pairs.
- **Stretch:** "I am going to say three words. Which one is different?" (pin, pin, pan).

⚠ Safety

Keep small sound-makers away from children who still put objects in their mouths. On a listening walk, follow your school's rules for leaving the classroom.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- Some children will name what the object is for ("it's for the door") rather than the sound; that is fine at this stage.
- "Different" with words is much harder than with objects. Expect many errors; this skill comes back every week.

Lesson 2: Rhyme time

Unit overview - Previous: Lesson 1 - Next: Lesson 3

About 20-25 minutes.

Goal

Children hear that rhyming words sound the same at the end, say whether two words rhyme, and make up a rhyme (real or silly) for a simple word.

Materials

- A nursery rhyme the class half-knows, for example Humpty Dumpty (traditional, public domain).
- Picture cards: cat, hat, mat, sun, bun, dog, log, fish, dish, pen, hen, plus a few that do not rhyme with any (ball, cup, tree).

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Say Humpty Dumpty together twice. The second time, stop before the rhyming word: "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great..." Children shout "fall!" Say: "Wall and fall rhyme. They sound the same at the end."

✎ Main activity (15 min)

1. **Rhyme or not? (5 min).** Say two words. Children pat their head if they rhyme and keep hands still if not: cat, hat (rhyme); sun, dog (no); pen, hen (rhyme); fish, cup (no); log, dog (rhyme).
2. **Odd one out (5 min).** Show three picture cards and say the names slowly. "Which one does not rhyme?" Sets: cat, hat, sun (sun); dog, log, fish (fish); bun, pen, sun (pen).
3. **Make a rhyme (5 min).** Say a word and invite rhymes, real or silly. cat: hat, mat, bat, zat. sun: bun, fun, run, wun. Praise silly rhymes that really rhyme; they show the child hears the ending.

✓ Discussion questions (with answers)

- How do you know two words rhyme? They sound the same at the end.
- Is zat a real word? No, but it rhymes with cat, so it counts in this game.
- Do cat and cup rhyme? They both start the same. No; rhyming is about the end, not the start.

✓ Closing check (with answers)

Each child, in turn or in small groups, tells you a word that rhymes with hen (pen, ten, men, den, or a silly rhyme like ken or zen).

Vocabulary

rhyme, end, same, silly word

Differentiation

- **Support:** use only "rhyme or not" with picture cards in front of the child; say the two words with a strong stress on the ending.
- **Stretch:** make a three-word rhyme chain (cat, hat, mat), or finish a new line: "I saw a dog sitting on a ..." (log).

⚠ Safety

No special hazards.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- Many children first think words "rhyme" if they start the same (cat, cup). Name this clearly: rhyme is about the end.
- Rhymes depend on accent. If a pair rhymes in a child's speech, accept it.
- Producing a rhyme is harder than recognising one; it is normal for some children to manage only "rhyme or not" this term.

Lesson 3: Clap the beats

Unit overview - Previous: Lesson 2 - Next: Lesson 4

About 20-25 minutes.

Goal

Children clap the syllables ("beats") in their names and in familiar words, count them, and put words back together from their beats.

Materials

- Picture cards: cat, sun, apple, rabbit, pencil, banana, elephant, dinosaur, caterpillar.
- Three hoops or trays labelled with 1, 2 and 3 dots.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Clap your own name, one clap per beat, saying it as you clap ("Ms Ro-sa": 3 claps). Go round the circle: each child says and claps their name and the class claps it back. Do not correct anyone harshly; just clap it again together.

✎ Main activity (15 min)

1. **Clap and count (5 min).** Hold up a picture card. Say the word slowly, clap it together, then hold up fingers for the number of claps.
2. **Sort the beats (6 min).** In small groups, children clap each card and put it in the 1-dot, 2-dot or 3-dot hoop. Keep caterpillar back for the challenge.
3. **Robot talk (4 min).** Say a word in beats like a robot: "ra...bbit". Children say the whole word ("rabbit!"). Then let a child be the robot.

✓ Discussion questions (with answers)

Common answers in standard English; accept a different count if that is how the child says the word.

- How many beats in cat? 1.
- How many in apple? 2 (ap-ple).
- How many in banana? 3 (ba-na-na).
- Which word had the most beats? Caterpillar, with 4 (cat-er-pil-lar).
- Does a big animal always have a long word? No: a whale is huge but has 1 beat, and a caterpillar is small but has 4.

✓ Closing check (with answers)

Answer key for the sort: 1 beat: cat, sun. 2 beats: apple, rabbit, pencil. 3 beats: banana, elephant, dinosaur. Challenge: caterpillar, 4.

Each child claps one card on their own and says how many beats.

Vocabulary

beat, clap, syllable (teacher word; children can say "beat"), count

Differentiation

- **Support:** clap with the child, hand over hand if they like that; use only 1- and 2-beat words.
- **Stretch:** find a classmate's name with the same number of beats as yours; try 4-beat words (watermelon, helicopter).

⚠ Safety

No special hazards.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- Children often clap once per word in a phrase, or clap the rhythm of a song instead. Slow the word right down and exaggerate each beat.
- Where exactly a syllable splits (rab-bit or ra-bbit) does not matter here; the count does.
- Some children's names are long or from languages the teacher does not speak. Ask the child or family how to say it, and clap it their way.

Lesson 4: How a book works

Unit overview - Previous: Lesson 3 - Next: Lesson 5

About 20-25 minutes.

Goal

Children show the front cover and title of a book, where to start reading, and which way to go (left to right, top to bottom, page by page). They see that words are separated by spaces and point to one word.

Materials

- One big book (or a picture book under a visualiser) with one or two short lines of large print per page.
- A pointer (a ruler or a stick with a star on the end).
- Small picture books, one per pair.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Hold the big book upside down and back to front. "I'm ready to read!" Let children tell you what is wrong. Turn it the right way and name the parts together: front cover, back cover, title, the person who wrote it (author), the person who drew the pictures (illustrator).

✎ Main activity (15 min)

1. **Shared reading (8 min).** Read the book aloud, running the pointer under each word as you say it. On two or three pages, stop and ask a child to show "Where do I start?" (top left of the text) and "Where do I go next?" (along the line to the right, then down to the next line, then the next page).
2. **Spot the spaces (3 min).** On one page, count the words together by pointing at each one. Ask: "How do we know where one word ends?" (there is a space). Then a child puts a finger on one word.
3. **Pair book check (4 min).** In pairs with a small book, each child shows their partner the front, the title and where to start reading.

✓ Discussion questions (with answers)

- Where is the title? On the front cover, usually in big letters.
- Where do we start reading on a page of this book? At the top, on the left (true for English; some scripts start on the right).
- Which way do we go in this book? Left to right along the line, then down to the next line, then turn the page.

- How do we know where one word ends? There is a space after it.
- Do we read the pictures or the words? We read the words; the pictures help us understand.

✓ Closing check (with answers)

With a book in front of each child (small groups), ask them to show: the front cover; the title; where to start reading; one word. Tick each on the class list.

Vocabulary

cover, title, author, illustrator, page, word, space, left, right, top, bottom

Differentiation

- **Support:** a green dot sticker at the top left of the first line on each page as a "start here" sign.
- **Stretch:** count the words on a line; find two words that are the same on one page.

⚠ Safety

No special hazards.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- Many children think the pictures are what we read, or point at letters rather than words. Keep the pointer under whole words.
- Left to right and top to bottom are features of English print. Children who read another script at home (for example Arabic or Hebrew, read right to left) already know that books have a direction; say so warmly.
- Ending the book: show that we stop at the back cover, and talk about whether they liked it. Enjoying books matters as much as these skills.

Lesson 5: First sounds

Unit overview - Previous: Lesson 4

About 20-25 minutes.

Goal

Children hear and say the first sound of a familiar spoken word, and sort objects by their first sound. This is listening work; children do not need to know letters yet.

Materials

- A tray of 10-12 real objects, for example: sock, spoon, sun picture (s); ball, bus, bear (b); cup, car, cat picture (k sound); pencil, pen, pig (p).
- Two hoops or trays.

Steps

✎ Opening (5 min)

Say a sound and a word slowly, stretching the first sound if it can be stretched: "sssss-un. Sun starts with /s/." Model saying /s/ as a short hiss, not "suh". Children copy. Repeat with mmmm-ilk and fffff-ish.

✎ Main activity (15 min)

1. **I spy (6 min).** "I spy with my little eye something that starts with /b/." Children point to the ball, bus or bear. After a few turns, let a child choose.
2. **Sound sort (6 min).** Two hoops: one for /s/, one for /b/. Each child picks an object, says its name, says its first sound and puts it in the right hoop. Leave any that fit neither on the tray.
3. **Name sounds (3 min).** "Stand up if your name starts with /m/." Go through a few sounds that match names in the class.

✓ Discussion questions (with answers)

- What sound does sock start with? /s/.
- Does ball start the same as bus? Yes, both start with /b/.
- Does cat start the same as car? Yes, both start with the /k/ sound.
- Does sun start the same as fish? No: /s/ and /f/.

✓ Closing check (with answers)

Hold up three objects one at a time. Children say the first sound together, then one child at a time in small groups:

1. pen (/p/)
2. spoon (/s/)
3. bear (/b/)

Vocabulary

sound, first, start, same, different, "I spy"

Differentiation

- **Support:** start with sounds that can be stretched (/s/, /m/, /f/) before short ones (/b/, /p/, /k/); give a choice of two: "Does sun start with /s/ or /b/?"
- **Stretch:** "What sound does cat end with?" (/t/). Or show the letter for a sound the child already knows; letter work starts properly in term 2.

⚠ Safety

Use objects too large to swallow; check the tray before the lesson.

Teacher notes and misconceptions

- Say sounds cleanly: /s/ not "suh", /m/ not "muh". An added "uh" makes later blending harder.
- Some first sounds are spelled differently from what children might expect (cat and kite both start with /k/). In this lesson we sort by sound, not spelling, so they go together.
- Children often answer with the whole word or a rhyme. Model again: "sun. The first sound is /s/."
- Common Core lists isolating first, middle and last sounds in CVC words as a kindergarten skill (RF.K.2.d). This lesson does only first sounds; middle and last sounds come later in the year.