

DinosaurPlay Session Planning

Week 1 – Introducing the dinosaurs

Aim: Introduce helpful learning behaviours. Get curious about individual children's phonics skills.

Preparation:

Print Out

- [poster1.pdf](#) (1 copy)
- [names.pdf](#) (1 copy)
- [kit.pdf](#) (1 for each child + 1 for you)
- [dinocomic1.pdf](#) (1 for each child) Alternatively a link could be emailed home.

Intro: Introduce the idea that there will be some friendly imaginary dinosaurs moving into school that the children will need to look after.

Explain that phonics skills will be needed to help them to look after the dinosaurs.

Remind children that phonics is all about matching up speech sounds (that our ears hear and our mouths make) with letters (that our eyes see and our hands write down). The rest of our bodies need to help out by being still enough and calm enough for our eyes, ears, mouths and hands to do their jobs without getting distracted.

We therefore need to get all these body parts ready for learning. Look at [poster1.pdf](#)

Get children to warm up (waggle) – their eyes, ears, mouths, hands and the rest of their bodies then encourage them to be still and ready to go. You may need to wait a little for children to find this stillness. You can help them to see how they are doing by counting up on your fingers. E.g. I'm looking to see if everyone's eyes are on me. Yes (one finger). Are everyone's ears listening to me? Yes (2 fingers). Are mouths still? Uh oh, not yet. Yes, now they are (three fingers). Oh no, some eyes have gone wandering. (Back to 2 fingers). Ooh, I see lots of hands still and under control though (3 fingers). And so on... until you get to 5 fingers and everyone is calm and ready. Once you have used this a few times, simply counting up on your fingers (without saying anything) will get them thinking (and reminding each other) about how to be ready to learn. Most children don't take long to realise that the quicker they get into these behaviours, the more time they get playing with the dinosaurs.

Phonics activity (reading): Look at [names.pdf](#) Model soundtalking and blending the names of the dinosaurs. Ask all children to repeat the soundtalking and blending after you. Repeat a few times – building up speed.

Be curious (EYES): Do all children actually look at the words as they try to soundtalk them and blend them? Do they wait for someone else to start saying the sounds and then join in? Are any children not joining in at all? Does their body language help you work out why they aren't looking or aren't joining in? Too excited/nervous about talking/lacking phonics knowledge?

Why does it matter? – If children aren't looking, they aren't reinforcing the essential connections between the shape of the grapheme (letter/letters) and the sound of the phoneme. Progress will be slow.

How to help - Give gentle reminders to look at the word as they soundtalk/blend out loud. Explain that they are matching up what they see with what they say. Often children simply haven't realised that they need to look. However, make a note of children who seem determined to avoid looking or try to look but get very distracted. Feed this back to the class teacher. Between you try to figure out why this is happening and what might help. It's definitely worth putting time and effort into addressing this. It can make a big difference to progress.

CONSIDER: Is it possible that a child may have vision problems? In the past, there was routine vision screening for three year olds by specialists (orthoptists). Now there is no standard screening between babyhood health visitor checks and school nurse checks (less thorough than orthoptist screening) at age 5. Screening (and optician appointments) may well have been missed during lockdown. Talk to the class teacher if concerned.

Imaginary play: Model meeting one of the imaginary dinosaurs. Stroke and talk to it and play with it (as if it was a pet dog). Ask children to choose one of the dinosaurs to be their own (more than one child can choose the same dinosaur since they are imaginary). The dinosaurs are Ank, Steg, Rex, Tops, Plod and Spin. Encourage them to play at meeting and getting to know the dinosaur.

Phonics activity (reading): Show children [kit.pdf](#) Encourage them to blend independently to read the words on the sheet. Give a little time then help out if needed.

Be curious (EARS): Are children able to soundtalk and blend independently? Do they know their GPCs well enough to be able to soundtalk these words? Can they soundtalk but need help from you to blend? If you soundtalk for them are they then able to blend?

DinosaurPlay Session Planning

Why does it matter? Knowing which bit of blending is tricky for a child allows you to help them effectively.

How to help: If children don't yet know specific GPCs, feed this back to the teacher. Children will need daily input on these GPCs (probably in the revisit section of daily class phonics sessions) plus applying opportunities. If children can soundtalk but not blend, they may benefit from spending time playing some Phase 1 games in the revisit section of the daily phonics session.

Week 2 of this intervention will focus more closely on the act of soundtalking and blending (especially getting used to soundtalking digraphs). Be prepared to tailor next week's activities based on what you see today.

Phonics activity (writing): Give each child a copy of [kit.pdf](#) Explain that the children are going to write the name of their dinosaur on each of the items. Model saying the name, segmenting it (holding up one finger for each phoneme) and then writing the name on a piece of kit. Ask children to go through the same steps to write their dinosaur's name on all the pieces of kit.

Check back against [names.pdf](#) and ask children to tick each letter to check that they spelt their dinosaurs names correctly each time. Encourage them to correct mistakes.

Be curious (MOUTH): Is each child saying their dinosaur's name and segmenting it before starting to write?

Why does it matter? Taking things step by step to begin with is very helpful to ensure that children actually understand how their phonics knowledge is used to spell (without having to memorise thousands of words off by heart). It is easy (especially having missed lots of phonics teaching over lockdown) for children to fall into the habit of thinking that they have to guess or remember 'off by heart' how to spell whole words. When children realise that they can listen to the sounds in the word and know how to spell each sound and therefore spell whole words it lightens their load and builds their confidence.

NB. Not segmenting out loud first and simply reading the word, could simply be an indication that a child is really strong at segmenting and doing it automatically. This is the end point that we want to get children to. Children that are doing this confidently and accurately probably don't need this intervention.

NB2. In later phases children will encounter bits of words where they can't simply listen to the sound and write it down, they will learn strategies for making choices about which way to spell a particular sound. Children will find this later step much easier and less stressful if they have built really solid segmenting skills with simple words.

How to help - Give virtual high 5s every time you see a child segmenting on their fingers. Remind them that they don't have to guess. If they say the word and soundtalk - they can use their phonics knowledge to choose which letters to write.

Be curious (HANDS): How are the letters formed? Do the children look comfortable or uncomfortable when writing? How long does writing take them?

Why does it matter? When children find it hard to physically write, this distracts their attention and makes it harder to focus on phonics at the same time.

How to help - Additional support with handwriting and motor skills will free them up to develop their phonics skills. Talk to the class teacher and SENCO about this. Be aware in future sessions that children may need more time and support with writing activities.

Imaginary play: Encourage the children to imagine using the items in the kit to play with the dinosaurs (brush their teeth, give them snacks, pick up poo etc).

Celebrate: Ask children to think about how brilliantly they have used their eyes, ears, mouths, hands and whole bodies in this session. Tell them that you want them to use all these things back in class in phonics sessions and whenever they are reading or writing also.

Taking the learning back to class:

Explain to the children that the class teacher will put [poster1.pdf](#) up to help them use their learning back in class.

Ask children to take their imaginary dinosaurs and [names.pdf](#) and [kit.pdf](#) back to class to play with in independent learning sessions. Explain that the dinos will need to curl up sensibly and sleep under tables and only come out to help with phonics or to play when the teacher says it is OK.

Taking the learning back home:

Give children a copy of [dinocomic1.pdf](#) to put straight into bags ready to take home (alternatively send a link home). Encourage them to read it at home with someone.

NB If it is unlikely that someone will read with the child at home, try to provide an opportunity in school.

DinosaurPlay Session Planning

Reflect: Are there things about the way individual children use their eyes/ears/mouths/hands/body or about their confidence that are making it harder for them to use and learn phonics? What can you do to help with these things in future sessions? Do you need to talk it over or get help from anyone else (parents/class teacher/SENCO)? Could this info help to make class phonics sessions more effective or help in general reading and writing sessions?

- What will you change next week based on what you noticed this week?
- What do you need to communicate to the class teacher? When and how can you best communicate this?
- Double check that there are copies of poster1.pdf and kit.pdf in class.
- Double check that dinocomic1.pdf has been sent home.