

*Oral Language in Action  
for Pre-Schoolers and Pre-Readers*

An effective and language-rich learning environment is  
the key that unlocks the door to greatness.

High quality education takes place when a knowledgeable and  
meaningful person leads the way.

## Why is oral language so important in pre-school/pre-reading years?

- Oral language – i.e. speaking, understanding and using spoken language – is the most essential element in all communication.
- Thinking uses the words we know. If we don't know many words, our ability to manipulate thoughts, interact with others and make well-considered decisions is curtailed.
- In all our waking hours, we use our self-talking internal voice. Feeding and nourishing this internal voice is an essential human need. Our brains are built to self-talk.
- When speaking, we must first manipulate this self-talk into words. Good teaching provides daily opportunities for this to happen in all subject areas, from the first day in pre-school until the proud and glorious moments of the final graduation ceremony.
- Our self-talk can only use the words we know. A small vocabulary limits our potential to communicate with not just others but with ourselves in our all-important self-talking monologue. The better the vocabulary, the more agile and intricate the brain's synaptic connections become.
- Reading and listening to those with a good vocabulary – and then using these words – develops one's own word knowledge. This in turn enables the words that most accurately reflect a thought to be on duty in the wings of the mind, able to come in on cue to centre stage the moment they are needed. There is nothing quite as frustrating as wanting to express an idea but not knowing the words to do be able to so. Regardless of looks and physical attributes, how one speaks is the true signature of a person.
- The young child wants to learn. This is the time of immense growth in both stature and language development. Research has shown that sophisticated vocabulary and story analyses in preschool correlate strongly with print ability and reading skill in 'big school'. This early vocabulary exposure and the resultant better reading skills provide a positive influence throughout the later grades.
- The ears need to hear new words and the mouth muscles need to experience saying them in order to incorporate them with other known words. Thinking, reasoning and speaking with meaning will then be able to take place.

Face-to-face oral language interaction gives its speakers and listeners the opportunities to not only observe the speaker's mouth, face and body language as a part of the message, but to also hear the inflexions, syntax, meaning and non-verbal inferences involved.

## Tongue action and exhalation exclamations

Stories such as these are good for revisiting the day after a detailed discussion to quietly check how much is remembered. The tongue exercises are valuable for strengthening the mouth muscles. Awareness of the lips and mouth for these exercises can be even more fun when a mirror or 'mirror buddy' is used.

### Brooms

Your tongue is a broom. Sweep inside your mouth so that every part of it is spick and span. Keep your lips closed while you do this.

Don't forget to sweep the roof of your mouth and in front of your upper and lower teeth.

Push out the left/right side cheek from the inside as if you have a very bad toothache. Walk around the room and have a silent conversation with fellow-sufferers.

Teacher tip: This exercise strengthens the tongue muscles and helps teach the words **left** and **right**. It also stimulates the imagination.



### 'Oh no! Flat tyre!'

You are just about to go for a bike ride but you discover that one of your tyres is flat, so you must pump it up.

Blow with lots of air pushing. Make the sound of **ff ff ff** as you pump. Have a rest after each set of three pumps, count to five and then continue pumping.

Teacher tip: The **ff** sound is made by pushing air between the upper teeth resting gently on the top of the lower lip.

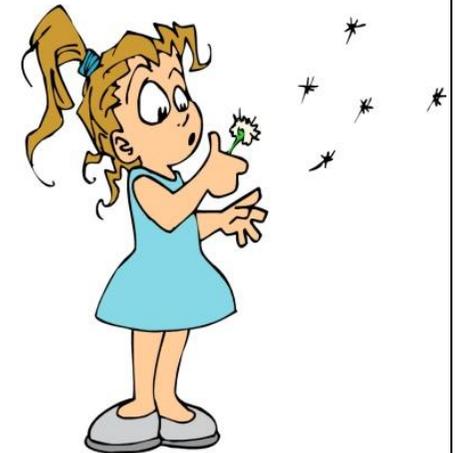
Ride your bike past some cows. Moo loudly.

Go over a bumpy bridge - rattle rattle.

Find some dandelions beside the road - blow them to tell the time. (The number of blows indicates the time e.g. five o'clock for five blows.)

The wind whistles through some trees. Make the sound.

At last you are home again. Have a long drink of water!



## Bins and pins

This sort of exercise has many benefits, including teaching left to right eye movement, reading along a line of items without looking back, training the eye muscles to move automatically from the end of one line to the beginning of the next line (often not taught), recalling and identifying and naming items, clearly enunciating similar sounds, learning fluency of speech, matching the visual with the auditory, and sorting items into similar/different, sharp/smooth etc.

### Soft and loud lip explosions

Say what each picture is in a left to right direction. Exaggerate the **b** and **p** sounds and their respective mouth movements.

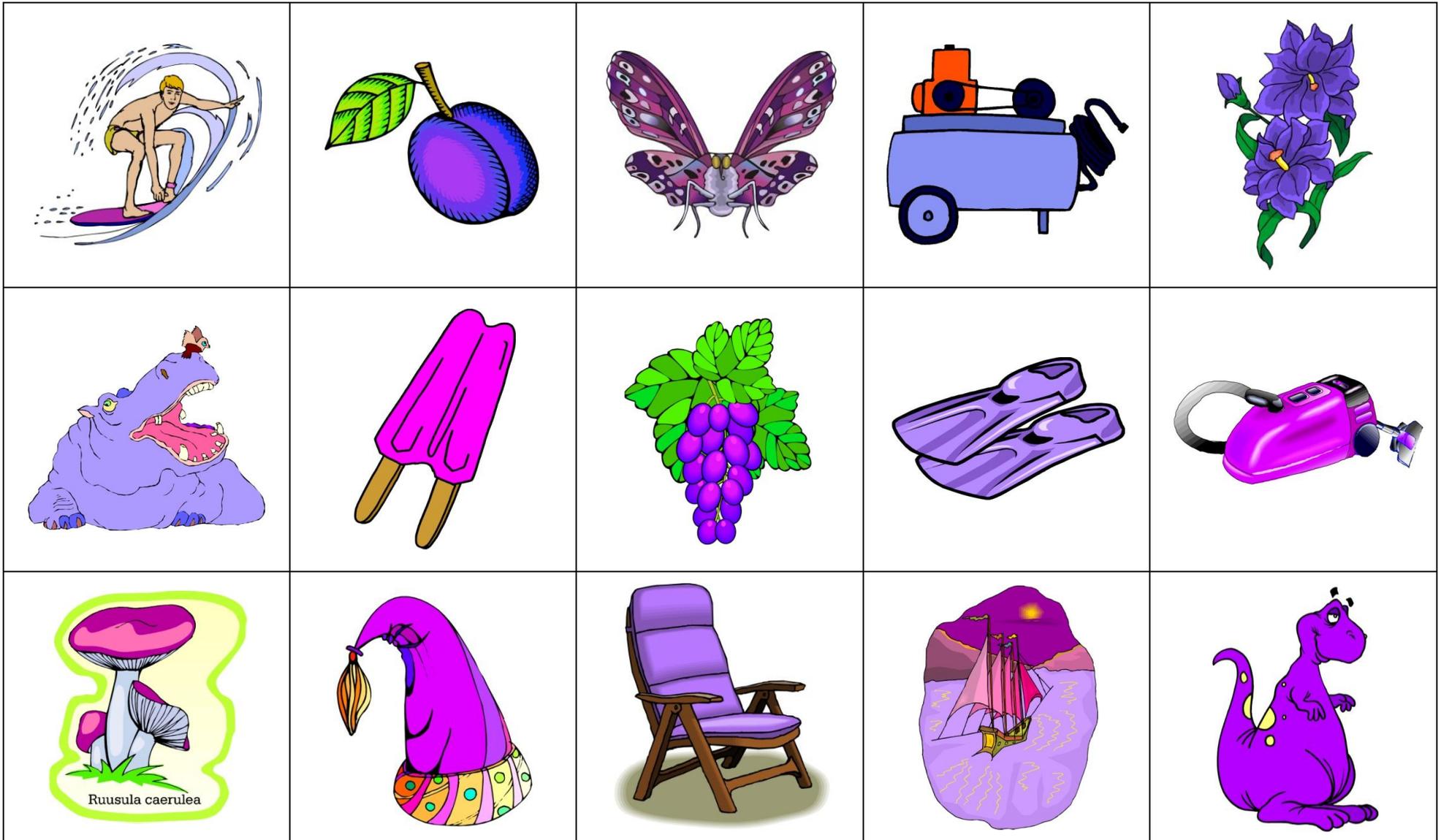
*Answers can be shouted, whispered, said with stretched out vowels, clipped and short, said in high, low and middle-range pitch, with body percussion etc*

**Method:** The lips come together for a moment to hold back air being pushed from the lungs and then released as the air pushes the lips open to make the **p** sound. **Teacher info:** The **p** sound is unvoiced. The **b** sound is a gentler version of the **p** sound, but **b** is voiced. Voiced means the sound is made by the vocal cords in the throat. Feel the throat to feel vibrations or no vibrations.



### All about purple

The **p** sound needs to be pronounced correctly so that the breath is firstly blocked and then pushed out through closed lips. Holding the fingers in front of the mouth while saying this sound is important to point out and practise. (Contrast **g** and **b**.) For variety, read the columns left to right as well as the rows L-R. Do group and partner work on this, giving **p** a lot of puff, for example: a purple surfboard, a purple plum etc. Note also the two **p** sounds in *people* and *paper*.



### At the beach pick-a-box

Pick a box and describe in words its position plus three things, such as: 'In the second row, third box, I can see two feet, one head and a red bucket.' After all pictures have been described in general detail, less obvious details can add to the fun, as: 'In the second row, third box, I can see two big toes, a brown handle on the bucket, and sand-sculptured arms.' Colour, shape and position words are the aim here. The words *foreground* and *background* are also good to introduce.

