



SOUND SPELLING...

Thinking about spelling from a sound perspective



THE /L/ SOUND CAN "FLAVOUR" VOWELS!

I was sitting in an early literacy class one day and the teacher was presenting the sound /a/ to the class. These kids were in their first year of school and increasing sound awareness was the goal of the session. The teacher read the Andy Apple story (from The Speech Sound Set) and demonstrated his sound and did his hand cue. She then explained how the sound was usually written with the letter "a" and showed the kids how she would sound out and write the word "at". All was good. She then had children come up with words of their own that start with the target sound. She told them to get their mouths into the /a/ position and to see if they could start a word with it. The children enthusiastically put up their hands with words like "ant", "apple" and "Abbie". You could see some of them silently mouthing to themselves "/a/ /.../a/..." Then a child put his hand up and said "elephant". "No!" the teacher said, "That's starts with the /e/ sound!" The child looked confused. I wished the teacher had read The Making Sense of Spelling section of the Speech Sound Set more thoroughly! She would have understood that this child had actually come up with a great word!

TASK: Have a think about the vowel sounds in the following words... Be careful not to let your knowledge of the spelling influence which vowel sound you identify. We need to be thinking from



In **bag**, you should be able to identify the short /a/ sound (which is the Andy Apple sound in the Speech Sound Set), in **bed**, you should be able to hear the short /e/ sound (which is the Energetic Edna sound in the Speech Sound Set), but what sound can you hear in the word **bell**? For those of you who answered /e/ (as in Energetic Edna), I ask you to now to say the word "bed" without saying the /d/ sound. That is...say the word but stop before you say /d/. Now, repeat this segment again "be..." but when you get to the end sound, say /l/ instead.

Did this sound like the way you usually say "bell?" Probably not if you grew up in Victoria! This is because an /l/ sound can "flavour" how we say some vowel sounds, particularly if you have a Victorian accent. Put differently, when E is followed by L Victorians often say the vowel sound as being closer to an /a/ sound than an /e/ sound. "Pal" rhymes with "bell" in many Australian speakers' speech. (Folks from South Australia and New South Wales tend to pronounce vowel sounds a little differently to the rest of Australia, so this issue is less obvious with speakers from these states).

This is why you will sometimes see children writing *fal*, *halp* (for fell, help). In response to this, listen to how a child says each of these words and then give them feedback such as "It sounds a lot like an /a/ sound, but we use the letter e in these words when a /l/ sound comes next. Look at how I write it..."

This is the reason I dislike phonics charts or early alphabet charts that show an "elephant" as the picture for E. The /e/ in elephant is not a good example of the sound.

I much prefer an egg! **BAN THE ELEPHANT!**

