



PODCAST LISTENING GUIDE:

Phonemic Awareness



Hi Teacher Friends!

Welcome to the Podcast Listening Guide!

We know the Science of Reading can sometimes feel big and overwhelming. That's why we started the Melissa & Lori Love Literacy podcast. Each week, we talk with researchers, teachers, and literacy experts who break down the research and share ideas you can try right away.

This guide pulls those conversations together around one focused topic. Use it for:

- **your own learning**
- **team discussions**
- **school-wide PD**

You'll find:

- **episodes grouped by theme**
- **conversation starters and classroom takeaways**
- **space to jot down notes or next steps**

There is never enough time in a teacher's day. Between lessons, kids who need you, and stacks of grading, it is a lot. Podcasts make learning feel doable. You can listen in the car, while setting up your room, or when you finally have a quiet moment to yourself at home.

However you use it, we hope this guide helps you feel encouraged, supported, and ready to try something new.

We can't wait to keep learning with you,

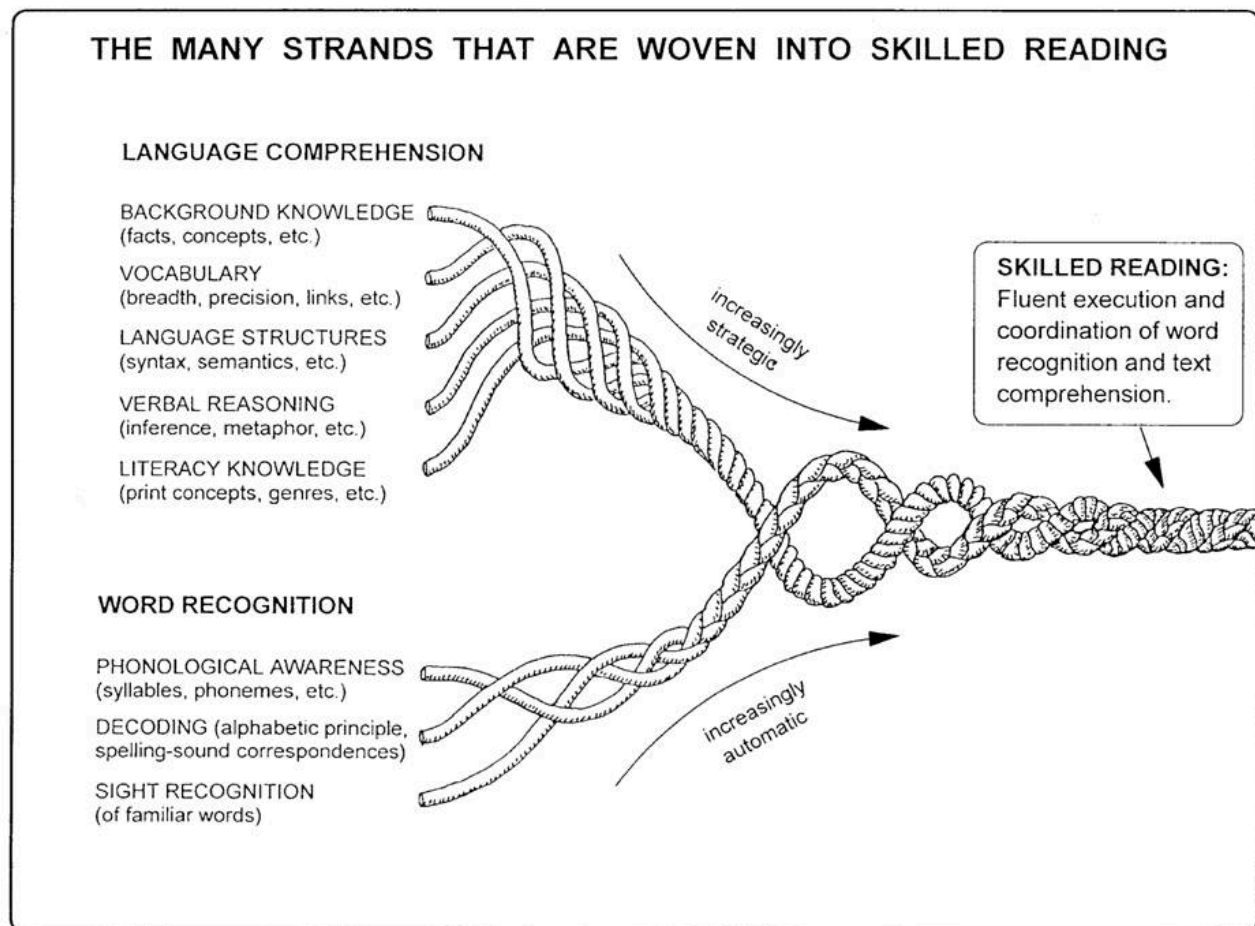
♥ *Melissa & Lori*



Phonemic Awareness

Why is phonemic awareness important?

Phonemic awareness is one of the foundational skills that makes reading possible. In Scarborough's Reading Rope, it falls under phonological awareness, which is the broader ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken language. Phonemic awareness focuses on the smallest units of sound, called phonemes, and it's the most critical skill for helping students connect what they hear to what they see in print.



LISTEN: [Ep. 178: The Simple View and Scarborough's Reading Rope with Hugh Catts](#)

Phonemic Awareness

Here are three big takeaways about phonemic awareness instruction from Melissa & Lori Love Literacy podcast straight from the voices of researchers and real classrooms:

1 Connect Sound to Print

Phonemic awareness is essential, but it's most effective when it's connected to print. Research shows that pairing sounds with letters, through Elkonin boxes, letter tiles, or blending and segmenting with print, helps students map sounds to spelling and set a strong base for future reading.

2 Teach with Intention

Forget "letter of the week" routines and isolated drills. Instead, weave letter names, sounds, and phonemic awareness together in meaningful, connected ways. Students learn best when alphabet instruction is integrated, interactive, and focused on patterns that matter for reading and writing.

3 Make It Routine

Phonemic awareness grows through consistent, predictable practice. Short, daily routines, like quick blending and segmenting drills, help students internalize sound patterns and build lasting reading fluency.



Together, these practices help students connect spoken sounds to print, building a foundation for fluent reading and writing. The episodes feature insights from researchers and educators like Matt Burns, Mary Dahlgren, and Lindsay Kemeny. You'll find practical, evidence-based strategies you can try tomorrow, like integrating letters into phonemic awareness lessons and using sound walls and Elkonin boxes.

Episode 180

Teaching the Alphabet

with Shayne Piasta



EPISODE: 180

Teaching the Alphabet

with Shayne Piasta



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Shayne Piasta, professor at The Ohio State University, shares **research-based practices for teaching alphabet knowledge**, such as how to teach letter names and sounds, why “letter of the week” may not be the most effective approach, and ideas for a purposeful sequence of instruction. While the focus is on alphabet instruction, Shayne explains how learning letter names and sounds connects directly to phonemic awareness, which is the foundation for mapping spoken sounds to print.

Episode Resources

For a deeper look at the research behind effective alphabet instruction, read *The Science of Early Alphabet Instruction*, chapter 7 by Shayne Piasta.

Shayne challenges the old “letter of the week” routine. As you listen, ask yourself: What’s her reason for rethinking it?

How does your current alphabet routine compare? What’s one small shift you could make to bring her ideas to life?

Episode 181

What Research Says About Phonemic Awareness

with Matt Burns



EPISODE: 181

What Research Says About Phonemic Awareness

with Matt Burns



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Dr. Matt Burns brings much-needed clarity to **what phonemic awareness really is and how to teach it effectively**. One of our most-downloaded episodes ever, this conversation breaks down key research findings and emphasizes teaching for efficiency and effectiveness. Matt highlights blending, isolating, and segmenting as the foundational skills that matter most. He also explains why incorporating letters is essential for helping students connect phonemic awareness to real reading.

Episode Resources

For more on why “in the dark” instruction may fall short, read [“They Say You Can Do Phonemic Awareness Instruction ‘In the Dark’, But Should You?”](#)

After listening, write:

one phonemic awareness
practice to stop



one phonemic awareness
practice to start



one phonemic awareness
practice to continue





EPISODE: 148

Should You Teach Phonemic Awareness 'In the Dark' or with Print?

with Marjorie Bottari

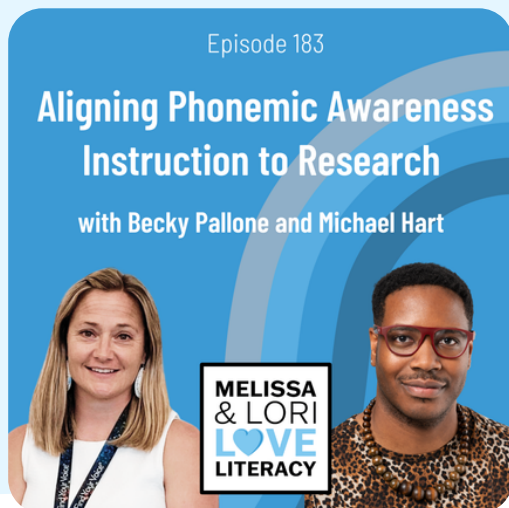
 **LISTEN TO THE EPISODE**

Marjorie Bottari, Director of Professional Development at Literacy Resources, clarifies one of the most commonly misunderstood areas in early literacy: phonemic awareness. She breaks down how **phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics** connect and explains what **effective instruction** looks like across these layers. With clear language and practical examples, Marjorie helps teachers strengthen their understanding of how students develop the ability to hear and work with sounds.

Episode Resources

Add a playful, hands-on element to your phonemic awareness lessons with the "Say It, Move It" mat from Reading Universe.

Make It Concrete: Download the "Say It, Move It" mat. As you listen, note which parts of Marjorie's discussion connect to this activity. Where does it fit within phonological awareness? How does it build toward phonics?



EPISODE: 183

Aligning Phonemic Awareness Instruction to Research

with Becky Pallone and Michael Hart

 **LISTEN TO THE EPISODE**

Two fantastic teachers, Becky Pallone and Michael Hart, discuss how their **approach to teaching phonemic awareness has changed** and strengthened over time. They emphasize blending and segmenting as the most essential skills and explain how incorporating letters helps students connect sounds to print. Becky and Michael also share **practical tips** and classroom moves teachers can use right away.

Episode Resources

Becky mentions the power of continuous blending. Learn more about this approach in "[The Power of Continuous Blending](#)" from Collaborative Classroom.

| Write down one thing Becky or Michael say that you'd like to borrow: a phrase, tip, or mindset shift. | Now, rewrite it in your own voice as you'd say explain it to a colleague. |
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Episode 185

Understanding the How and Why of Sound Walls

with Mary Dahlgren



EPISODE: 185

Understanding the How and Why of Sound Walls

with Mary Dahlgren



LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Mary Dahlgren, founder and president of Tools 4 Reading, introduces **the power of sound walls** and explains how they differ from traditional word walls. She unpacks why explicitly teaching all 44 English speech sounds helps students understand and navigate our complex language system. Mary shares practical guidance and classroom-tested steps for using sound walls as a tool to strengthen students' understanding of sounds and spelling.

Episode Resources

Learn how to set up and use a sound wall step by step in "[Building a Sound Wall: Where Do I Begin?](#)" from 95 Percent Group.

Sound walls link speech to print, making sounds visible for students. Which reason for using one resonated most? How could you apply that idea in your classroom?



EPISODE: 186

Top Tips for Using Sound Walls

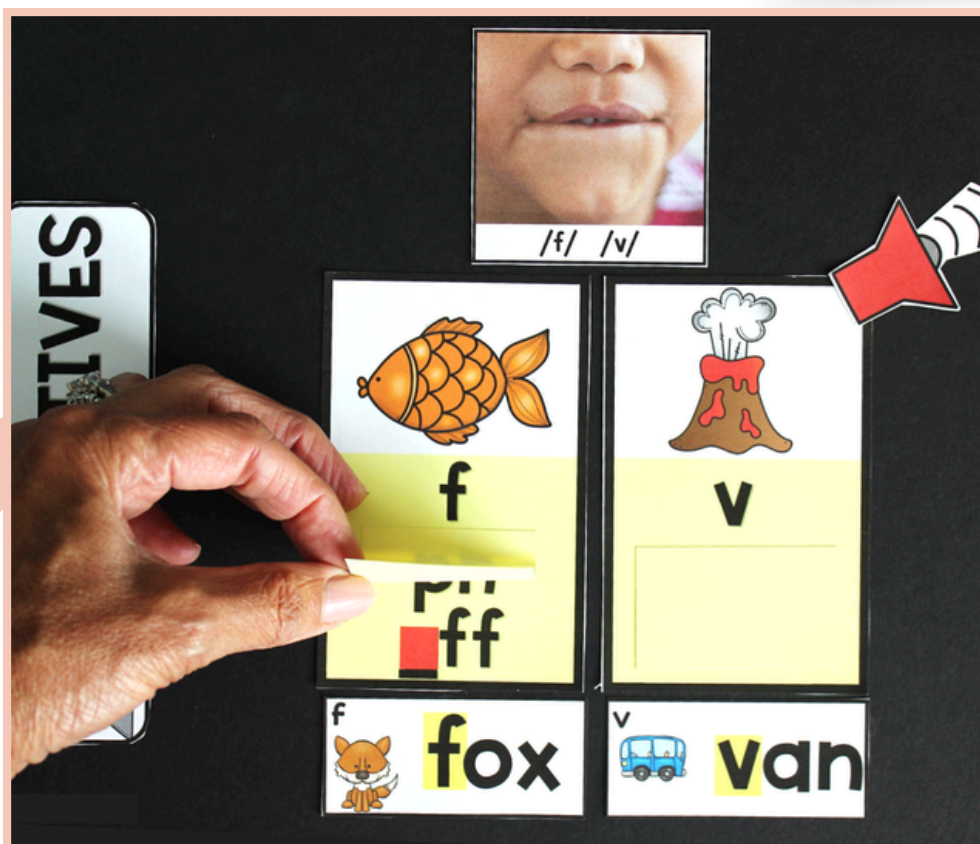
with Christina Winter

 LISTEN TO THE EPISODE

Christina Winter, former first-grade teacher and founder of Lead in Literacy, shares **practical, classroom-tested strategies for using sound walls** to strengthen phonemic awareness and support early readers. She addresses common teacher questions and offers clear guidance for introducing, organizing, and using sound walls effectively. Her tips make it easy to bring this powerful tool to life, no matter where you are on your sound wall journey.

Episode Resources

Explore concrete tips for implementing a sound wall in your classroom at Lead in Literacy's ["Everything You Need to Know for Using a Sound Wall in the Classroom."](#)





EPISODE: 80

A Primary Teacher's Perspective on Science of Reading, Small Group Instruction, and Sound Walls

with Lindsay Kemeny

 [LISTEN TO THE EPISODE](#)

Lindsay Kemeny, a primary teacher and author of *7 Mighty Moves*, shares her evidence-based approach to small-group instruction in K-2 classrooms. Lindsay takes a close look at how she and her students **use sound walls as a key tool to reinforce phonemic awareness**. Her practical, classroom-tested strategies offer a clear and relatable perspective that teachers everywhere can apply to boost early literacy through structured small groups and purposeful use of sound walls.

Episode Resources

Check out Lindsay's book *7 Mighty Moves* for more actionable phonemic awareness routines.



Imagine you're explaining Lindsay's sound wall routine to a new colleague. Write (or record) a 30-second summary of how she uses it and why it works. The goal: capture the essence of her approach in your own words.

Bringing It All Together...



1 What role does print play in effective phonemic awareness instruction?

2 How can tools like Elkonin boxes and sound walls support phonemic awareness?

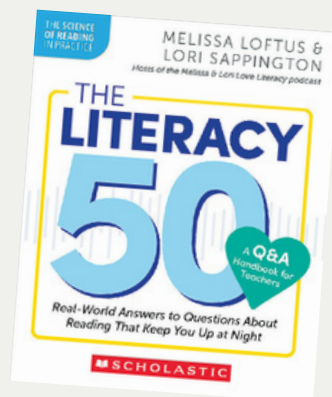
3 What's one small shift you can make this week to strengthen your students' phonemic awareness?

Learn More: Phonemic Awareness



The Literacy 50 Book

Check out our book,
*The Literacy 50: A
Q&A Handbook for
Teachers.* We've
devoted an entire
chapter to phonemic
awareness.





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[The Literacy 50 Book](#)