

What is the 'look and say' method?

This method teaches children to learn words as a whole, using flashcards and repetition. It focuses on children memorising whole words, rather than looking at the individual letter-sound relationships and blending them together.

There are many irregular words that cannot be decoded using synthetic phonics that children already have to memorise at school. These are sometimes referred to as common exception words.



Examples

Some of the year 1 common exception words are:

said the was they

Some of the year 2 common exception words are:

again climb because half

The only way children are expected to learn these is through repetition because they cannot be decoded.

Comparing Synthetic Phonics to the 'Look and Say' Method

Synthetic Phonics

- This method teaches individual letter-sound relationships.
- Children blend individual sounds together to make words.
- Children are taught to recognise the sounds represented by individual letters or groups of letters before they start to look at whole words.
- Children are taught letter sounds before they learn to read and potentially before they are introduced to books.

Look and Say

- This method focuses on whole words.
- Children learn individual words through repetition.
- Children are encouraged to look at whole words and say them aloud over and over again.
- Flashcards and repetitive books are used a lot.



Advantages

This method takes into account how irregular the English language is - in theory, every word can be learned using the 'look and say' method. Repetitive books with phrases or words that are used over and over again can be great for supporting your child with their reading.

Disadvantages

It would be difficult to learn every word this way, due to the amount of words to learn and retain; the human memory does not have the capacity for this. It also moves children away from noticing patterns or letter-sound relationships, which can be useful when encountering new words.

It is worth noting that several methods might be used alongside each other to teach a child to read. This is sometimes called a balanced approach.



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