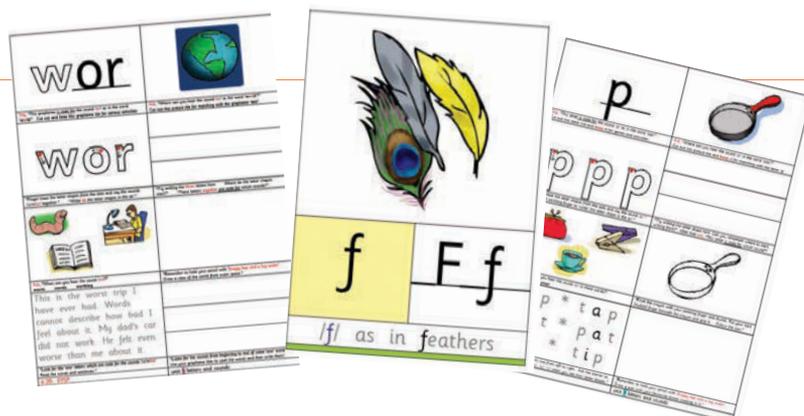


Phonics International

Contact: phonicsinternational.com

Reviewed by: John Dabell



If you are looking for a cute and cuddly comprehensive phonics programme then turn the page now. Phonics International (PI) is based on global research and innovative practice and has been magnificently designed and written by phonics polymath Debbie Hepplewhite. If you didn't know already, Debbie is the author and phonics consultant on the rather brilliant Oxford Reading Tree Floppy's Phonics Sounds and Letters. She is also high profile, well respected and not backward in coming forward.

So what is Phonics International? Well, it is a systematic, step-by-step and flexible synthetic phonics programme with cumulative teaching and learning resources designed for all ages and all needs. "Not another one," I hear you cry. Hold your horses though. This is the real deal and if you are looking to recommend a destination for anyone that wants to learn to read, write and spell then this is the number one hot spot.

When you access the website you get a YouTube greeting and introduction to PI from the brains behind this cracking programme who literally points out the pile of features available. I headed straight for the 'About the Programme' section to understand more. This contains some brief overviews and more detailed guidance, so take your pick. If you are up to your neck in jobs and just need a skinny latte to go, then the 'In a Nutshell' page is for you. Those with more time on their hands can print out the 34-page booklet, make a flask and absorb. Perfect for Inset. There are also three videos to watch if you like the personal touch.

The foundation of the Phonics International programme is this: to teach the letter/s-sound correspondence knowledge (letters, letter groups and sounds) of the notoriously opaque English Alphabet Code, and how to put this code knowledge into action using three skills. 1) All-through-the-word 'sounding out' and blending for reading (synthesising). 2) Segmenting for spelling. 3) Handwriting letter shapes appropriately.

The PI rolling programme consists of a dozen progressive units, the first of which is yours for nothing. That's right, 70 handsome resources for free - including various worksheets and lesson plans. Now that's a bonus. The heart of the programme is the

Alphabet Code: a colour coded chart of all 44+ phonemes and their many spelling alternatives split into 12 colours that correspond with the 12 downloadable units found in the 'Members' area. You can listen to Debbie Hepplewhite say each sound of the Alphabet Code in the 'Hear the Sounds' section, along with word examples. This would be a good place to direct parents and is perfect for a Reception 'how to help' at home meeting with new mums and dads.

A three-year multi-user license for schools is an incredible £99, which is an absolute bargain. I can't do my weekly shopping for that and it's so refreshing to see a company that isn't out to rip teachers off with overpriced materials and false promises. Oh yes, and it's DfE match-funding approved.

As a member you have access to a truly enormous amount of helpful, exciting and innovative material. I was blown away by the amount of learning resources available. This really is value for money.

Reeling off what you get in these units feels a bit like the *Generation Game*, but here goes: programme overview and guidance manual; sounds book sheets; teaching guidelines; picture cards; picture posters; audio and visual resources; useful assessments; class and group tracking registers; parent letters; charts and posters of the Alphabet Code; sounds book; flash cards; games and activities; word cards;



word lists; over 400 cumulative sentences and texts for reading, discussing and dictation; free email tutorials; and much, much more. Bumper.

Stepping out of the 'Members' section you can access the active message forum. This is a great place to share thoughts, ideas and trade punches. There are some fascinating topics under discussion with links to articles, FAQs, resource updates, training, chats and feedback. You'll learn a lot there.

One gripe. The 'Members' section of the PI website needs an overhaul to match the quality of materials inside. For starters, the font size of the text is too small. It would also benefit from being reorganised - there is simply so much on there that it needs to regroup. As it stands, this part of the website has a home-made feel, which does a massive disservice to the magnificent and highly practical resources contained within. A search facility would make the site a lot easier to use.

Recently, I asked a group of six-year-olds to write down what their favourite lesson was over the term and why. Art and PE topped the list, of course, but a close third was, as one child wrote, 'Foniks because we do lots of fun stuff'. He wasn't alone in this either. The programme his teacher uses is PI and he says it has transformed his teaching and confidence.

Verdict: Phonics hot spot

Back in March 2012, Sir Michael Wilshaw said that teachers must get specialist training in teaching phonics and I couldn't agree more. For me, there's one place schools should be looking to get that expert help. Pack your bags, head for Phonics International and if you can kidnap a 'foniks fobix' then take one along. Travel really does broaden your horizons. This is an extra special resource par excellence.

You might also be interested in the free alphabet and handwriting resources which can be found at debbiehepplewhitehandwriting.com