



2.4 Using poems to teach prefixes and suffixes

Notes on the Phonics Focus

🔊 **What are prefixes and suffixes?**

An English word can consist of three parts: the stem, a prefix and a suffix. The stem is the part of the word that contains the basic meaning. Both prefixes and suffixes are word elements which change the meaning and, in some cases, the part of speech of the stem. Prefixes are placed in front of a stem whereas suffixes are placed after it.

🔊 **How do prefixes and suffixes help students tackle unfamiliar words?**

Prefixes and suffixes are always spelt the same in many English words and they have the same visual patterns, have the same pronunciation whatever words they are attached to and are usually syllables in their own right. For these reasons, it is important that students learn to recognise and respond quickly to these frequently occurring visual and audio patterns in English in order to develop an ever-improving capacity to unlock the sound, spelling and possibly meaning of unfamiliar words. For a list of frequently occurring prefixes and suffixes, please refer to the “Prefixes and suffixes” section of the *Useful Groups of Letter Sounds* card.

🔊 **What is a suitable language arts context for the learning and teaching of prefixes and suffixes?**

The following two activities are based on poems that involve the liberal use of suffixes, which make ideal materials for exposing students to the phonetic and visual similarity of words with the same suffix.

- The first activity (Section 2.4.1), based on a poem entitled *Ations* (written by Shel Silverstein), can be used for consolidating students’ knowledge about the form and function of the conditional structure, “If (the simple present tense), (the simple present tense)”, in addition to familiarising students with the use of the suffix “-ation” to form nouns.
- The second activity (Section 2.4.2) is based on a poem entitled *What a Wonderful Christmas!*. It can be used as an extension activity for any textbook units about festivals. The activity, which introduces the suffix “-ful” in words like “cheerful” and “beautiful”, can, in fact, be easily adapted for other festivals (e.g. the Chinese New Year, Mid-Autumn Festival) or activities (e.g. the school sports day, the school picnic) focusing on different prefixes (e.g. “be-”, “en-”) or suffixes (e.g. “-ish”, “-ment”). The activity design is particularly suitable for teachers who have difficulty finding rhymes specially written to introduce a specific prefix or suffix.