

Phonimoes: Ideas for Classroom Application



Overview:

The English Raven Phonimoes cards are designed for basic applications of the classic 'dominoes' game, except that instead of matching numbers end-to-end the object is to match sounds that occur in words in initial and final position. Two sets are available for download (Set A and Set B). Set A depicts the vocabulary items at the center of the card and shows the letters/sounds that start and finish the word on either side. Set B is identical, except the letters have been removed and require students to articulate them from memory in order to make judgments as to which cards can be matched to which. Set B represents a more advanced version, suitable for application once students have become familiar with version A.

These cards/activities are perhaps best suited to learners aged 6-12 who are also engaging in some sort of systematic phonics study. They would make an excellent game accompaniment for English Raven's Kidzfoniks Phonics Builder series (see <http://www.englishraven.com/Phonics.html>).

The Phonimoes cards correspond to a regular domino set called 'double nines', featuring 55 cards in total. Where a regular domino set would feature blanks (zero number), the Phonimoes set features vowel sounds, clearly depicted in red squares. The other numbers (1-9) in a dominoes set each correspond to a particular consonant sound (not letter, as it is not uncommon for sounds to be depicted in written English with a variety of letters).

There are two particular cards in the Phonimoes sets that require some specific clarification. The 'double vowel' card (corresponding to domino '0|0') is actually designed to be an interjection: "aha!" (meant to sound special because this particular card will look rather special to children compared to others). The card featuring 'G' in initial position and 'K' in final position depicts a cute alien/monster called "GAK", mainly because I could not for the life of me think of a vocabulary item starting with a hard 'g' sound and ending in a 'k' sound (other than "geek" and "gawk", neither of which I particularly wanted featured in an ESL card set!).

Basic Application

For very young learners or beginners, the Phonimoes cards can be used as a simply 'guess and flip' or 'flip and name' game, not involving the rules of Dominoes at all. It is for this purpose that the Phonimoes have a colorful card backing (so that students can not see through the cards they are thinking about flipping). This can be a valuable precursor to applying the cards in a game with standardized rules, as it will help familiarize the students with the range of vocabulary featured.

Dominoes-Style Application

There are actually a few varieties of Domino Games, with more or less complicated rules. To explore these rules and variations, you may like to take a look at the following link:

<http://games.yahoo.com/games/rules/dominoes/gameplay.html?page=do>

The approach recommended here is rather more simplified, with the intent of providing clear rules that are easy to apply and free students' attention for more focus on phonemic awareness and language use. It is suitable for between 2 and 12 players (though it becomes a little more frustrating and prolonged when played with more than 8 players - for larger classes I recommend dividing the class into two groups, each with their own set to play with), and the basic objective is to win by getting rid of all of one's cards by playing them into/onto the domino chain on the table.

Start by 'dealing' 4-7 cards to each student. Place the remaining cards in a bag or container (these representing 'the boneyard' of traditional domino games). Have the students play rock/scissors/paper to decide who gets to put down the first phonimo, or choose one at random from those left over after the deal. Each student then takes a turn trying to place one of their phonimoes onto the chain by matching one of the letter/sounds on a card to the initial or final letter/sound of the card on the table. If they are not able to do so, they should pick up another card and add it to those in front of them. Continue turns until one person has placed all of their cards onto the chain and has none in front of them. That person is proclaimed the winner of that game and earns a number of points corresponding to the number of cards still possessed by all the other students in the game collectively.

An important rule in this application is that while consonant sounds must match consonant sounds, any red letter (vowel) can be joined to any other red letter. Thus the initial "ow" sound in 'owl' can be matched end-to-end with the initial "e" sound in 'eat'. Cards can be placed any way up in order for sounds to match (meaning, all of the pictures do not need to be the same way up and there is no need to require that final sounds always match up with initial sounds - it will make the game too restrictive).

Phonimoes Set A will involve the students using letter recognition more, but they may still make mistakes by confusing letters and sounds. It is worthwhile encouraging the students to sound out the words on the cards before and during their decision to try and make two cards match. Phonimoes Set B will require the students to know the sounds in words much more accurately, and it will also encourage them to test hypotheses. Set B will be the version wherein you hear more vocalizing of the words from the students in order to help themselves make educated decisions as to which cards they should try to match.