



Decoding Activity: Recognizing Phonemes

Phonemes are the building blocks of language. Represented by letters of the alphabet, they are the component sounds of spoken words. Most people automatically hear, for example, that the word "goat" is made up of three sounds: "guh," "oh," and "tuh."

Reading requires the ability to map the phonemes we hear to letters on a page, and vice versa. But what happens when this basic skill, called **decoding**, doesn't come automatically? Imagine struggling to sound out every word because you can't distinguish among phonemes.

Take a few moments to familiarize yourself with this phoneme translation key. Then use it to read the passage on the next page.

Phoneme translation key:

When you see	Pronounce as
q	d or t
z	m
p	b
b	p
ys	er
a, as in bat	e, as in pet
e, as in pet	a, as in bat



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Passage:

We begin our quest for a familiar place, a party like yours and mine.
It contains a hundred million calls that work together by design.
Each within each one of these many calls, each one that has a tone,
The tone code is exactly the same, a test-procedure routine.
So the code in each call is identical, a randomized party line.
This means that the calls are nearly alike, but not exactly the same.
Take, for instance, the calls of the machines; they're very consistently
plain.
Now think about the way you would think if those calls were the calls in your
brain.



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Here is the translation:

We begin our trip at a familiar place, a body like yours and mine.

It contains a hundred trillion cells that work together by design.

And within each one of these many cells, each one that has DNA,

The DNA code is exactly the same, a mass-produced resume.

So the code in each cell is identical, a remarkable but valid claim.

This means that the cells are nearly alike, but not exactly the same.

Take, for instance, the cells of the intestines; that they're vital is certainly plain.

Now think about the way you would think if those cells were the cells in your brain.

(Excerpt from "Journey into DNA" on the "Cracking the Code" Web site, NOVA Online.)

So how did you do? Consider that this passage disguised only eight of the forty-four known phonemes in the English language. Now imagine if this weren't a game.