Shopping List Maths: Adding Coins to Pay for Two Items in Year 1

A simple guide to how Year 1 children learn to add the prices of two small items and identify the coins needed to pay for them.

What is shopping list maths?

In Year 1 (the first year of Key Stage 1, for children aged 5 to 6), children begin to use their maths skills in real-life ways. One part of this is learning how to add two small amounts of money together to find a total. This activity helps children move from simply recognising coins to using addition—the process of putting two numbers together to find a total—to solve a practical problem, such as buying two treats from a shop.

What happens in the classroom?

Children look at a small selection of items with price tags, usually within 20p. They pick two items and add the costs together. For example, if an apple is 5p and a pear is 10p, they work out that the total is 15p. Once they have the total, they look at real or play UK coins to see which ones they could use to pay the exact amount. This helps them understand that different combinations of coins can make the same total.

What this means for your child

This activity builds your child's confidence with numbers up to 20. It connects the abstract idea of adding numbers to a physical object they can hold, like a coin. Because every child learns at a different pace, some may find this easy, while others, including children with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) or those learning English as an additional language, may need more time or visual aids to recognise the coins and numbers.

Simple ways to help at home

You can make this a playful part of your day without any pressure. While at the supermarket or a local shop, you could point to two small items and ask, 'If this is 2p and this is 5p, how much are they together?' Let your child count on their fingers or use a few real coins on the table to find the answer. Keep it short and light; the goal is to show them that maths is a useful tool for everyday life.

Common questions

Parents often ask if their child needs to calculate change (the money you get back if you pay with a larger coin). In Year 1, the focus is mainly on finding the total and matching it to coins; calculating change is typically a Year 2 skill. If you are unsure what your child is currently working on, your child's class teacher is the best person to ask, as different schools may introduce these steps at slightly different times.

Sources

- Department for Education, National curriculum in England: mathematics programmes of study