

The Sound Shopping Trip

Listening for the first sounds in words is an important step in learning to connect language and reading.

What you'll need:

- * Magazines or catalogues with pictures of objects children know.

What to do:

- * Have your child choose a magazine or catalogue. Invite your child to go on a make-believe shopping trip. Tell your child you will make believe you are shopping for things in the magazine.

Have your child close his or her eyes. Point to an object on the page. Then have your child open his or her eyes. Ask "What are you going to buy?" If your child says, "A hat," ask, "What sound does hat start with?"

Then say, "Good. Hat starts with the sound h."

Repeat the steps, with each of you taking a turn shopping for something and then naming the first sound of the word that describes it.

Family Words Matter

Reading and writing can enable family members to share important life stories.

What you'll need:

- * Letters from grandparents or other family members.

What to do:

- * Select a family member whom your child knows well and likes. Ask the family member to write a letter to your child. The letter should tell a story, funny event, or something about your child.

When your child receives the letter, have the child read the letter. Ask your child to write a return letter to the family member, telling a story or something about the family member that the family has told the child.

- * Repeat the letter with another family member.

Journey Journal

A journal is an excellent way for your child to write about everyday events and to record thoughts. It is fun to keep a journal when on a special trip.

What you'll need:

* Journals or notebooks and pencils for you and your child.

What to do:

* Plan a special trip with your child to a museum, zoo, sports game, or other place of special interest to your child. Ask your child to take along a journal to use for noting interesting things seen or heard.

Tell your child you are taking a journal too, so that you also can write about your experiences. Compare your journals throughout the day, and especially at the end of the journey.

The Dictionary Game

Working with reference books like a dictionary is important to learning about words.

What you'll need:

* Paper, pencil, a dictionary, and the list of questions given below, each written on a separate piece of paper.

What to do:

* Fold each question in half and put them all in a hat. Ask your child to read a question and then use the dictionary to answer it.

- Is a burnoose the cousin of a moose?
- Can you bustle, hustle, and jostle at the same time?
- Is a hog likely to hog all the hogmeat?
- How much bread is there in breadfruit?
- Is it possible for a fowl to have a jowl?
- Can a gnu be a guru to a few?
- Is a lingbird likely to linger long on a clothesline?
- Are calligraphy and otopography the same?
- Can you abandon an abalone?
- Can an ermine be a hermit?
- Explain why we drive on a parkway and park on a driveway.
- Can a sphinx put a jinx on you?

* Once your child answers these questions, ask your child to develop some questions for you, using challenging words from the dictionary.

My Turn, Your Turn- -Our Story

Writing stories is fun, but it really comes alive when your child creates and writes a story with you.

What you'll need:

* Paper, pencil, and a story title.

What to do:

* Create or choose an exciting title for a story you would like to write with your child, such as "The Golden Eye" or "Suddenly Midnight and Silence." Write the title on a sheet of paper and invite your child to write the first sentence. You write the second line. Take turns writing sentences until the story is complete.

* When the story is finished, invite the family to a story-reading session, or read the story to the family during dinner.

The Moose Café

Opportunities for reading and writing are all around us--even when the subject is food.

What you'll need:

* Menus.

What to do:

* Go with your child to several restaurants to ask for free copies of their menus. Take them home. Ask your child to read several of the items on each menu with their descriptions.

Then ask your child to make up a menu for an imaginary restaurant--the Moose Cafe or the Tuna Bake Bistro--with creative descriptions.

Favourite Writers

Children who read a great deal often have favourite writers. These writers become favourites because of clever ways they use language or special story lines they develop.

What you'll need:

- * Several books by your child's favourite writer. A notebook.

What to do:

- * Have your child check out from the library several books by a favourite writer. As your child reads each book, have the child jot down in a small notebook interesting phrases, or sentences, and special observations the author makes.
- * Skim one or more of the books yourself, and read to your child some phrases you like in the author's words.

Lessons Learned

An important part of reading is guessing what the lesson or theme of a story is.

What you'll need:

- * A collection of fables from the library.

What to do:

- * Choose a short fable to read to your child. Read the story but stop before you get to the moral at the end of the story. Ask your child to state what lesson the story has to tell. Then read the moral (usually the last line of a fable).
- * At the end of this game, talk to your child about the story. Were there any surprises in the story?

Word Webs

Words can be used to describe other words. Everyone likes to play with words and use words to talk about other words.

What you'll need:

- * Paper and pencil.

What to do:

* Choose a word such as vehicle and write it in the centre of a sheet of paper. Then ask your child to think of other words that tell more about the word vehicle. Children might think about types of vehicles (buses, cars, trucks, boats), uses for vehicles (transportation, recreation), and words describing how vehicles look and move (sturdy, fast, dangerous).

Then ask your child to write the words on the sheet and connect them to the main word vehicle. This will show your child how the words are linked to the main word and form a "word web."

Word Families

Words come in all shapes and sizes, but many words that children read and hear come in word families.

What you'll need:

- * Pencil and paper.

What to do:

* Give your child a word (such as add) that is found in many other words (such as addition and adding). Ask your child to think of other words that are "roots" for related words, such as compete, and ask the child to write out the related words (competition, competitor, competitive).

* Ask your child to keep a record of the "word families." See how many words made from root words your child can find in a month.

Tall Tale Retell

Children love to read and talk about tall tales--stories about events, people, and places that are bigger than life and not real.

What you'll need:

* A book of tall tales (ask your librarian for help in finding a tall tale book).

What to do:

* Have your child choose a tall tale to read. Ask your child to read it silently. Then ask your child to tell you how the tall tale reminds him or her of something that has happened in real life--at home, at school, or in the news.

* At another time, ask your child to tell you what the story is about--but ask your child to add something to the story that was not in the original story. Tell your child that you are going to be listening very carefully to guess the part of the story your child made up! Try to figure out the "tall tale" part that your child added to the story.

In Laughing Order: The Comic Strips

When children read about events, they must keep the major actions in order. Children can develop a sense for order while reading comic strips.

What you'll need:

* Your child's favourite comic strip.

What to do:

* Find a comic strip that you and your child enjoy. Before reading the strip, cut it out and separate the frames. Mix them up and ask your child to put the frames in the correct order. Once they are in order, have your child read the comic strip and tell you what the strip means or is saying.

Word Wizard

Learning about words is important to learning inside and outside school. The more words a child knows, the more the child will learn.

What you'll need:

- * A newspaper, magazine, or book. A notebook.

What to do:

- * Have your child find a word in a newspaper, magazine, or book that he or she does not know and has not seen before. For example, your child may not know the word foretell (meaning "to predict or tell beforehand," as in, "The woman in red could foretell the future").
- * Your child might also find a word that is familiar but used in a new way. For example, the word boat means a small vessel used for getting around by water. However, when boat is used in the sentence, "The people were all in the same boat," it means "faced with the same problems."
- * Ask your child to listen for a new word in everyday talk or look for a new word in the newspaper. Have your child find a new word or an old word used in a new way each day. Ask your child to keep track of the words in a special notebook.

The One-Minute Dash

Reading quickly and with ease is very important to successful reading, but, like running, it requires a lot of coaching and practice. To become a fluent reader, your child must practice reading quickly. Remember, however, that too much practice at one time is not helpful.

What you'll need:

- * A watch or clock with a second hand and a book. Your child must be able to read the book with little or no help.

What to do:

- * Tell your child, "Let's play a game called the one-minute dash. I want to see how many words you can read in one minute." (Point to a place in the book where the child should begin reading.)

Then, "When I say Go, I want you to begin reading. After one minute, I'll tell you to stop." When your child is ready to start, say, "Get ready. . . Set. . . GO!" Check your watch. After a minute, ask your child to stop reading.

Count the total number of words your child read. If you like, make a chart to show how many words per minute your child has read in a week, two weeks, a month, or more.

Building Stories

Stories are built in much the same way that houses are. Just as houses have floors, walls, and a roof, stories have some basic parts. Every story has characters (the people or animals in the story), a setting (the time and place the story occurs), a problem (a difficulty that the character(s) have to overcome and solve), and a resolution (a solution to the difficulty or problem). Knowing the parts of a story helps children understand the whole story.

What you'll need:

- * A brief story or a fable.

What to do:

* Choose a short story, fable, or fairy tale for your child to read. You may want to read the story ahead of time to make sure it works for this activity.

- * Make an outline on lined paper with the following parts:

Title: _____

Main character: _____

Setting: _____

Problem: _____

Resolution: _____

* Ask your child to read part of the story and to identify the character(s). Say, "Is Molly a character in the story? Is she a main character? Yes, the story is mostly about Molly and her science project. Let's write that on the sheet where it says main character."

Story Sprint

After children can read words correctly, they can begin to work on speed.

What you'll need:

- * A story with words your child can sound out or read as whole words. A watch or timer.

What to do:

- * Tell your child, "In this game, you're going to read a story as if you're in a race. Each time you read the story, try to read it faster with fewer mistakes."

Set the timer for one minute. Remind your child to read as quickly and correctly as possible. Say, "Start." Begin timing. At the end of the minute, say, "Stop," and count the number of words read correctly.

- * Help your child with words he or she did not know. Have your child read the same story again for one minute. Count the number of words read correctly. Compare the number of words to the number read in the first reading. Have your child read the story a third time.

- * Say, "When you practice reading the same story again and again, you can read faster and faster. Good job."

* Then ask your child to tell you where and when the story takes place (a town or city, state or country, today or in the past). This is the setting of the story.

* Then, after your child reads about half of the story, stop and say, "What is the problem the main character of this story is facing or having? Let's write that on the sheet where it says problem."

* When your child finishes the story, ask the child how the problem in the story was worked out. Say, "That is the resolution of the story. Let's write that on the sheet."

Word Tag

It is important for children to read words in sentences and stories, so they realize that reading is about understanding.

What you'll need:

- * An easy-to-read story with many words your child can already sound out or read.

What to do:

- * Tell your child, "In this story, I'll read some of the words and you'll read some words. When it's your turn to read a word, I will tap your shoulder." Start reading. As you come to a word that your child can read, tap the child's shoulder.

- * Keep taking turns reading the story. You can go back and reread parts of the same stories for extra practice.

The Match Game

Some words cannot be read by saying the sounds in the word. Words like the, said, are, don't, have, one, two, love, and you must be learned as whole words.

What you'll need:

- * Ten pieces of paper or cards with one word written on each piece (start with the, said, are, etc.). Another set of 10 cards with the same words written on them.

What to do:

- * Mix the words together. Give your child five cards, and give yourself five cards. Put the rest of the cards in a pile, face down on the table.

Both of you pick up your cards to see if you have two words that are the same among all your cards. If so, say the word and put them down as a pair. Then pick two more cards from the pile.

If neither of you has a pair, draw a card from the pile. Take turns until all the cards have been drawn or one player has gotten rid of all of his or her cards.

The player with the most matching pairs is the winner.

Spell Down

After children know letter-sounds and can read short words, they can begin to write the words they read. Spelling out words strengthens children's reading skills.

What you'll need:

* A set of pictures of objects that are familiar to your child and have names that are easy to spell (sun, man, dog, cat, fan, rug). These can be cut from magazines. Colored markers, pens or pencils, and paper.

What to do:

* Put the pictures face down in the middle of the table. Your child selects the top picture, names the picture, and then spells the word.

If your child misses a letter, have him or her sound out the word and try again to spell it. You may need to write the word for your child before the child names the object and tries to spell the word for it again.

Letter Swap

Good readers learn to recognize and make new words by swapping letters within words. In this activity, children build new words by swapping letter-sounds.

What you'll need:

* Two words written in large print. The first word is a whole word (such as sat). The second word has a blank for the first letter (_at). A set of letters (g, s, t, m, p, r, h, f, k, l) with each letter written on a separate piece of paper.

What to do:

* Sit beside your child. Put the large-print words in front of your child.

sat

_at

Say, "We're going to see how many words we can make like sat. I'll pick a letter from the pile. My sound is r. I can change sat to rat. Put the r in the blank space in front of at."

* Have your child do this again, picking different letters and making new words. Change to a new word such as map or fill.

* Do this activity often with new words.

In the News

Once children learn to read words, it is important for them to practice reading those words again and again. Children soon learn that words they know are in many things we read.

What you'll need:

* A newspaper or magazine. A colored marker or highlighter. Scissors, a piece of paper, and paste or glue. A blank piece of paper.

What to do:

* Pick a page in the newspaper. Go through the page circling or highlighting words your child can read. Tell your child, "Today, we're going to find words so that you can make your own newspaper of words on this paper."

"In this game, you read the words I've marked. Each one you read, you cut out and glue onto this blank piece of paper. We'll add more words each day. Soon you'll have a full page of words you know from the newspaper."

Words I've Heard and Silly Words

When children learn to read, they use the letter-sounds they already know to make new words. In this game, children make words, some familiar and some not.

What you'll need:

* Three containers (small boxes or margarine tubs). Small pieces of paper with letters that have sounds your child knows. Make several copies of the letters that are used often in words, such as a, s, t, r, e, n, i, g.

What to do:

* Sit beside your child. Put the three containers in front of you. Place vowels in the middle container. Put consonants in the first and last containers.

Tell your child, "We're going to make words using letters in these containers. Some will be words you've heard, and some will be silly words. I'll show you how to make a word."

Pick a letter from the first container and say its sound (for example, t). Pick a letter from the next container (for example, i). Pick a letter from the last container (for example, g). Now, I'll put the sounds together, tttiiig. The word is tig.

Ask your child, "Is that a word you've heard or is that a silly word? That's right, it's a silly word."

* "Okay, it's your turn to make a word." Have your child select a letter from each container and make new words.

Word Snakes

Children become excited about reading when they begin to use the letter-sounds they know to read words. An important part of reading words is learning to blend the sounds to make a word.

What you'll need:

* A list of easy words that have letters with sounds your child knows. Some good words to start with are :

Sam rag fin man mad fan ran sit fat tan sat fit am dig dim

A piece of paper with a wavy line on which you can write words.

What to do:

* Ask your child, "Do you know how snakes can make the sssssssss sound for a long time? We're going to say the sounds in words just the way a snake does. We'll stretch out the sounds. Let me show you how."

Write a word on the snake line. "I'm going to say the word fan the way a snake would--fffffaaaaaannnnn." As you say each sound, trace your finger along the snake line. "The word is fan."

* Invite your child to say a new word the way a snake would. Draw a new snake and write three new letters on it (run). "Good, you read run the snake way."

* Then write the word run on a straight line and have your child read the word the fast way--run. Do this again with other easy words. First, have your child read the word the snake way, then read it the fast way.

The Colour of Sounds

Knowing the sound of a letter is one of the most important steps before learning to read words. Here's a game to practice the sounds of letters.

What you'll need:

* A picture from a colouring book, a blank sheet of paper, and crayons.

What to do:

* Sit beside your child and say, "I'll write a letter on this paper. If you can tell me the sound of the letter and two words for things that start with that sound, you get to colour one part of the picture."

"Let's try one." Write a letter on the paper. Start with one you are sure your child knows. Have your child name the sound. "That's right, the sound is t. Can you name two things that start with t? Very good, table and turtle start with t. Pick a part of the picture to colour."

If your child does not know the sound, say, "This sound is t. Let's try another." Write another sound and come back to the t the next try.

* Do this again with other sounds until all parts of the picture are colored.

Letter-Sound Grab Bag

Here's another way to practice the sounds of letters. In this game, children practice naming letter-sounds correctly and quickly.

What you'll need:

- * A set of cards on which you've written some letters of the alphabet. (Start with just a few letters; add more letters as your child learns more.) A small paper bag. A timer or watch with a second hand.

What to do:

- * Put a few letters having sounds your child knows into a paper bag. Tell your child that you want to see how many sounds he or she can name in one minute.

"When I say Start, you reach into the bag and pull out one card. Say the sound and then reach in to get another. Keeping picking out the cards until I say Stop. If you don't know a sound, I'll tell it to you, and you put it back in the bag."

At the end of the minute, count the number of sounds your child named correctly.

If your child does not know a sound, say "This sound is s."

- * Do this game again. Encourage your child to name more sounds than the last time you played together.

Same Sounds Game

Before children can read words, they need to know the sounds of letters. This game gives children practice in matching sounds and letters.

What you'll need:

- * A set of index cards or pieces of paper on which you've written a few capital letters of the alphabet--one letter on each card. Make another set with the same letters. Start with 8 to 10 letters. Add more letters as your child learns more.

What to do:

- * Mix up the alphabet cards and place them face down on the table.

Tell your child, "We're going to play a game in which you try to find two of the same sounds. When you find two that are the same and you say the sound, you get to pick up the cards. Let me show you how."

Turn over one card (for example, T) and say the sound t. Turn over another card (for example, S) and say the sound s. Ask, "Are the sounds the same?" Your child says no. "That's right, they are not the same, so I don't get to pick them up."

"It's your turn to find the ones that are the same." Your child turns over one card and says the sound, then picks a second card and says the sound. If they are the same, your child gets to keep the cards. Then your child gets to pick two more cards. If the cards are not the same, turn the cards face down and have your child try again.

If your child does not know the sound, say "This sound is s."

The goal of the game is to pick up all the cards.

1-2-3

Each sound in a word is important. To help your child begin to read, practice this game of listening and naming each sound in a word.

What you'll need:

* Pictures of objects that are familiar to your child cut from magazines or newspapers. The names of the objects should have three sounds such as s-u-n, m-a-n, d-o-g, c-a-t, p-i-g, and c-o-w.

What to do:

* Sit across from your child at a small table or on the floor. Put the pictures face down in the middle of the table.

Tell your child, "Let's play a game called 1-2-3. You pick a picture. When I hold up one finger, you say the first sound of the word describing the picture. When I hold up two fingers, tell me the next sound. When I hold up three fingers, tell me the last sound."

"Let me show you how." Select a picture and say the word, for example, sun. Hold up one finger and say s. Hold up two fingers and say u. Hold up three fingers and say n. "The sounds in sun are s-u-n."

"Now, you try it." Your child picks a picture and names the picture. "Good, that is a dog. Tell me the sounds in dog." Hold up one finger for the d. Then, hold up two fingers for the o. Then, hold up three fingers for the g. "Good, the sound in dog are d-o-g."

* Do this again with other words. If pictures with three sounds are easy for your child, you may want to find pictures with four sounds.

Now You Hear It, Now You Don't

Hearing and saying the parts of words help prepare children to learn to read.

What you'll need:

* A list of words with two parts, like baseball, raincoat, sunshine, and motorcycle.

What to do:

* Sit beside your child. Tell the child that you will say a word and then you will leave off part of the word. Ask your child to tell you what part you left off.

For example, tell the child, "Let's say sunshine without sun; what part is left? That's right, shine." Repeat this activity with another word: "Let's say motorcycle without motor; what part is left? That's right, cycle." "Now you try it. Say 'manhole' without man."

* As your child learns this game, try leaving off the last part of words (manhole without hole is man; motorcycle without cycle is motor).