

The Sights and Sounds of Words

Your youngster plays with words all the time. He might make toy cars go “vroom” or “beep beep” or have his stuffed animals say “oink,” “moo,” or “neigh.” He probably enjoys silly songs and nursery rhymes, too.

All that play boosts reading skills. Making the connection between the sounds he hears and the letters he sees is an important step for reading. Use these ideas to help your child practice.



Picture match

This card game will help your youngster identify beginning sounds and the letters that make them. First, let him cut 12 pictures from old magazines and glue each one on an index card. Then, help him make another set of cards—one with the first letter of each picture. (Example: For a picture of a cow, he would write a “C” on a separate card.) Deal out the picture cards, and put the letter cards in a pile facedown. Take turns drawing a letter card. If the letter matches a picture in your hand, lay the two cards down for everyone to see. If not, return the letter card to the bottom of the pile. Keep playing until all the letter cards are used. The first person to match all his pictures wins.

Rhyming clues

Show your youngster how changing just one sound can make a whole new word. Hide an object in a pillowcase and say a word that rhymes with it. For a spoon, you might say, “There’s a moon in my pillowcase.” Ask your child to guess what item you chose. When she guesses *spoon*, let her put an object in the pillowcase and give you a rhyming word. Playing with rhymes teaches your youngster how language works—and it’s fun!

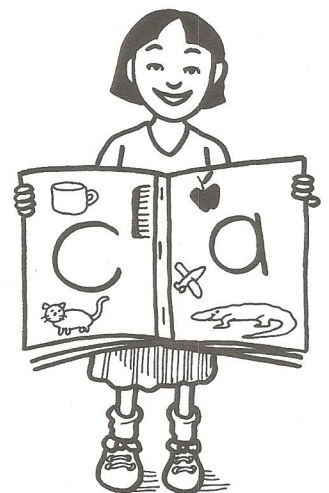


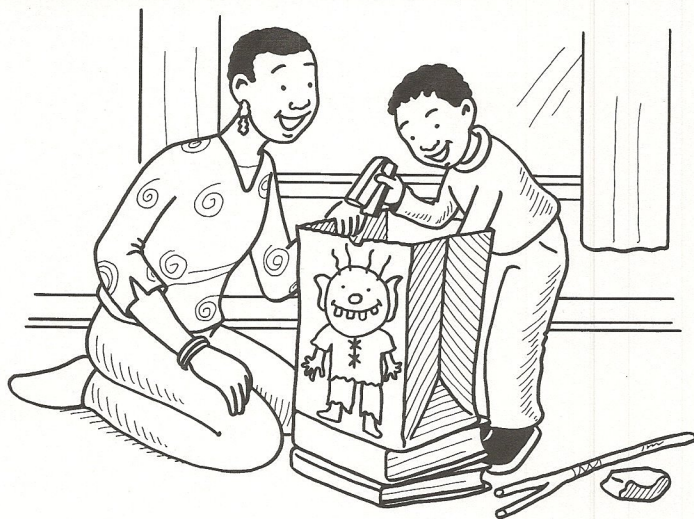
A handful of words

As your child learns to hear rhymes, help him see them, too. In this activity, he will spot letter combinations that rhyming words share. Have him trace his hand on a sheet of paper. Then, print a short word (*hat*) in the palm and help him write a rhyming word on each finger (*mat*, *rat*, *bat*, *cat*, *pat*). When he’s finished, read the words together, and ask him to point out the letters in each word that are the same (*at*).

Name book

Here’s a project that will give your child plenty of practice connecting letters and sounds. Have her print each letter of her name on separate sheets of paper, and staple the pages together to make a book. Then, let her fill the pages with drawings of objects that begin with each of the letters. Carly’s book might have a cat, comb, and cup on the first page, and an alligator, airplane, and apple on the second page, for example.



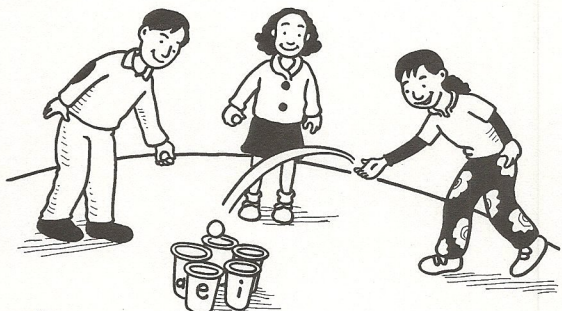


Monster blend

Use this fun monster to help your child explore *blends*, or consonant combinations, like *th*, *bl*, and *ch*. Let him draw a silly monster on a paper bag. Explain that the monster can only “eat” things that start with a particular blend (say, *st*). Then, have him “feed” the monster by filling the bag with objects that start with the blend (stapler, stone, stick). When he can’t find more items, give him a new blend. *Examples:* *br*, *ch*, *cr*, *gl*, *sp*, *th*, *tr*.

Last letters

This game teaches your youngster to hear the last sound in a word. Write each letter of the alphabet on a separate slip of paper, and mix them up in a bowl. On each turn, a player draws a slip and says a word that ends with that letter. For example, she might say “zebra” for “A.” She keeps the letter if she’s correct, or returns it to the bowl if she’s not. *Exception:* If she draws J, Q, U, or X, she can steal a letter from another player. She does this by naming a word that ends with the letter she’s trying to steal. When all of the letters have been claimed, count to see who has the most.



Vowel cups

Vowels are important letters—after all, every word has at least one! Here’s a game that will teach your youngster to hear vowel sounds in words. First, use a marker to write each vowel

(a, e, i, o, u) on a paper or plastic cup. Then, set the cups in a circle so they’re touching one another. Give each player a Ping-Pong ball or a piece of paper crumpled into a ball, plus a pencil and paper for writing words. To play, take turns tossing your ball into a cup. If you make a basket, say and write a word that contains that vowel. For instance, if your ball lands in the “o” cup, you might choose “dog.” The game ends when each person has at least one word for every vowel.

Sound it out

Your child can practice sounding out words with this game. Borrow tokens and a game board (with a path) from any game. Then, help him write 20 different words on index cards and place them facedown in a pile. *Tip:* Use words from the titles of favorite books. To play, take turns drawing a card. Say the word slowly, and count the number of letter sounds you hear. For instance, “red” has three sounds (r-e-d). Move your token one space for each sound. The first player to the finish line wins.

Everyday word play

Here are some quick ideas to build your youngster’s word skills:

- Let your child hear the rhythm of words by learning clapping games and jump rope rhymes. Try a book like *Miss Mary Mack and Other Children’s Street Rhymes* (Joanna Cole and Stephanie Calmenson).

- Find letters everywhere. Encourage your child to spot them on street signs, labels, and billboards. (“Can you find a Z?”) *Tip:* Each day have him look for a different letter all day long.

- Together, make up long sentences of words that all begin with the same letter. *Example:* “Sister Sally saw six silly seahorses seesawing Sunday.”

- Make a sound, and have your child press the letter on a computer or cell phone keypad. Can she say the letter sound as she presses it?

- Say a word, and ask your youngster to tell what it would sound like if you took one of its sounds away. For example, “lick” without the “l” sound is “ick.”

- Use magnetic letters to spell a word on the refrigerator, but leave out a letter (*ba* _). Ask your youngster to fill in the blank with a letter that would make a word (*bag*).

