

The Wonder of Words

Words, wonderful words! We need them to have conversations, tell jokes, send birthday cards, and write stories and poems. They're fun to play with, too.

Here are some games and projects that will build your child's vocabulary—and help her learn to love words.



Fishing for letters

Your youngster is sure to get hooked on this spelling game, which will remind him that every word has a vowel. While he isn't looking, use magnetic letters to make five words. Bury the letters in a large bowl of dry beans or rice.

To play, take turns "fishing" out one letter at a time using kitchen tongs. When a player can arrange his magnets to spell a word, he reads it out loud. Continue until all the letters have been pulled out. The player with the most words wins. *Tip:* Point out that A, E, I, O, U, and Y are valuable—he'll soon realize he can't make a word without at least one of them!

Word scrapbook

This project will build your child's phonics skills and stretch her creativity. Together, cut common consonant combinations from magazine headlines. *Examples:* sh, bl, st, cr, th, gl, sp, tr, ch. Glue each one on a different page of a notebook or photo album.

Then, let your youngster find magazine pictures to put on the appropriate pages (a tree under tr; a child under ch). Encourage her to add stickers, words, photos, and drawings to her scrapbook. A star sticker, for instance, could go on the st page, or she could doodle a spiral on the sp page.



Finding nouns

What better place to look for words than in books? Here's an activity that will help your child listen closely to words while you read. Before you open a book, ask him to look at

the cover, and help him jot down five nouns (people, places, or things) he thinks might be inside. For example, if you're reading *The Napping House* (Audrey Wood), he might list bed, dog, sleep, and rain.

As you read aloud, he can check off each word he hears. How many did he predict accurately? After you read, have him make up several sentences using the words on his list.

Guess my word

This game inspires creativity while encouraging children to think about what words really mean. Take turns looking around the house for a word to act out. Your youngster might find one on a food label, a message board, or a toy package.

Players should try to make others guess their words through gestures only. For example, if your child finds the word elephant on a toy zoo package, she might bend forward and walk while clasping her hands together and swinging her arms like an elephant's trunk. How would she act out hot or library? The first person to guess the word goes next.

Alphabet cards

This hide-and-seek game gives your child practice with beginning sounds. Start by having him write each letter of the alphabet on a separate index card.

Let your youngster choose a card, and ask him to look around the house for an object beginning with that letter. For example, if he picks an E, he might find an envelope or an eraser. Keep the cards in a shoebox so he can play anytime. *Idea:* Take the box along in the car so he can look for objects as you drive. (Ask for "stop sign" or "sub shop.")



Pour-a-poem

Turn a poem into a word puzzle. Ask your child to pick a short poem from a book such as Jack Prelutsky's *A Pizza the Size of the Sun* or a Web site like www.poetry4kids.com. Help him write each word on a separate slip of paper. Then, have him put the slips in a container with a lid, shake it up, and dump them out. Can he put the poem back together?

Variation: For a fun twist, your youngster can create his own version of the poem by replacing some of the words. *A Pizza the Size of the Sun* might become *A Garden the Size of the Galaxy* or *A Baseball the Size of the Moon*.



Make a bingo card for each family member: divide sheets of paper into three rows and three columns. Each person copies the names of the objects in random boxes on his or her card. Using the extra set of index cards, the caller announces each item. Players cover the words with pennies on their bingo cards as they're called out. If your youngster isn't

sure how to read a word, he can go look at its label and find the word on his card. Three in a row wins.

Best Word Award

Encourage family members to nominate words for a household Best Words Award. First, come up with categories such as longest, most unusual, coolest sounding, and silliest. Your child will need to do a lot of reading to find the best words!

Each time she reads a story, have her choose a word for one of the categories. Encourage other family members to nominate words, too. You can post a sheet on the refrigerator where everyone can write words under the category headings. At the end of the week, discuss your nominations and vote. Then, have your youngster make certificates for the winning words.

Labeling the house

Help your child write the names of nine household objects on two sets of index cards. Tape one set of cards to the appropriate items (sofa, dresser, refrigerator). Then, play bingo to help him memorize the words.

Rhyming dominoes

An old set of dominoes is perfect for working with rhymes. Cover one side of each domino with a piece of masking tape, and draw a line across the center. On both halves, write a word containing one of these sounds: *at, an, et, it, in, ot, un*. For example, you might write *pat, bat; pan, tan*. (Be sure to have eight of each sound. Repeat words as needed.)

Put the dominoes facedown. Let each person draw five, and turn one faceup in the center. On each turn, a player tries to match one of her dominoes to a rhyming word on the table. For instance, she could play "pot" or "lot" next to "dot." If she can't make a match, she draws a domino, and her turn is over. The first player to use up all her dominoes wins. *Variation:* Use paper rectangles instead of dominoes.



Create a word-making station

Set aside a spot in your home where your child can play with words. Get started with these suggestions:

- Fill an ice cube tray with letter beads from a craft or dollar store. Place two to three letters in each section. Include string so your child can make word necklaces and bracelets.
- Keep index cards, an alphabet stencil, and colored pencils in a zipper bag. Your youngster can use the stencil to make words.



- Collect old board game pieces that have letters (tiles, letter dice, cards). Store them in a large envelope, and encourage your child to spell words with them.
- Put paints, thin brushes, and construction paper in a box for her to paint words.
- Provide a children's dictionary so your youngster can look up words.