

What do words and toys have in common? They're both fun to play with! Wordplay builds children's vocabulary and helps them learn to read, write, and spell. See how with these fun activities.

Word bank

A homemade piggy bank is a fun place for your youngster to save words from his favorite books. Have him make the bank by decorating an empty tissue box. Then, let him cut four "coins" from gray or brown paper. Now it's time to collect words. Before you read aloud to him, ask him to choose a type of word (five-letter words, words that start with his favorite letter). As you read, he can pick out words from the book that fit his criteria and write each one on a coin. Then, help him read each word aloud as he "feeds" it to his bank. He can cut out more coins and give the pig new words each time you read together. When his bank is full, let him dump it out—how many words can he read all by himself?



Letter escape

Can your youngster figure out which letter has escaped? This multiple-choice activity will help her become a better speller. Ask her to cover her eyes while you spell a word with Scrabble tiles. Leave one letter out and set it aside with two other letters. For example, you might spell *g_ing* and lay out *p*, *t*, and *o* as possible missing letters. When your child

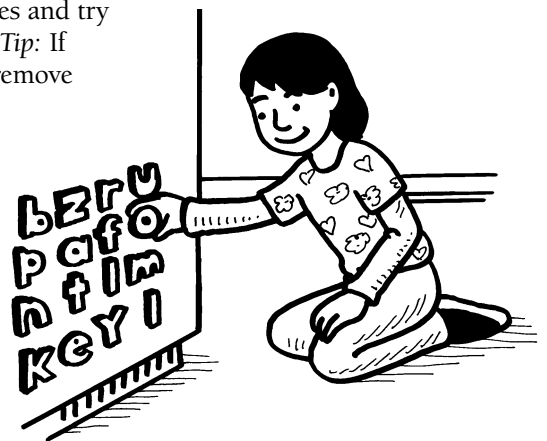
uncovers her eyes, it's her job to look at the word and choose the escaped letter from the options on the table. Help her sound out each choice. ("Gping?" "Gting?" "Going!")

Word switcheroo

Your youngster can play with word families to learn the sounds that letters make. A word family includes words that share the same ending sound (*hug*, *mug*, *rug*). Together, choose a word (*bit*), and write it down. Ask him to replace the first letter and say the new word he has made (*sit*). Take turns changing the first letter until neither of you can make another word. Then, choose a different word family to play with. A few to try include *-an*, *-ing*, *-ill*, and *-ake*.

Refrigerator word search

This hands-on word search can increase the number of words your youngster recognizes. Have her close her eyes while you use magnets to spell a three- or four-letter word (*key*, *ball*) on the refrigerator. The word can be vertical or horizontal. Surround it with random letters so that your word is hidden. Then, have your child open her eyes and try to find the word. *Tip:* If she's struggling, remove one letter at a time from the refrigerator—she may be able to spot the word with fewer letters around it. After she finds it, let her hide one for you.



continued

Alphabet actions

Try this silly way to pass time in a waiting room while boosting your child’s knowledge of verbs, or action words. He can start by saying, “I _____ a worm,” filling in the blank with a verb that begins with *a* (*ate, attacked, answered*).

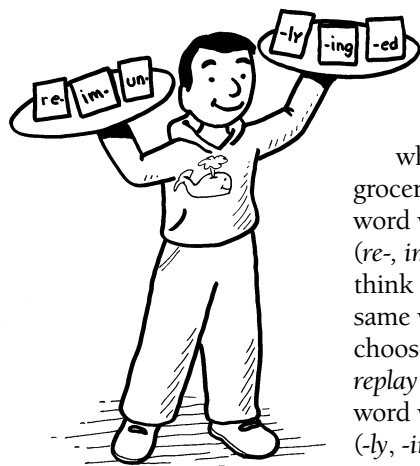
You repeat his sentence, but replace the verb with one that starts with *b* (“I *battled* a worm”). Keep working through the alphabet to see how many words you can come up with. If either of you is stumped, brainstorm a verb together.



coming up with funny things that household items might say. Start by having her choose an object and brainstorm a list of three words that are related to it. For a refrigerator, she might write *cold, food, and freezer*. Then, help her use one or more of the words to write dialogue for the fridge. (“Don’t worry. I’ll keep your food cold for you.”) *Idea:* She can write the phrase in a word balloon on a sticky note and put it on the item.

Vowel pictures

A *mnemonic* is a device that can help your child remember something more easily. Here’s one that she can use to learn vowel sounds. First, help her think of a word for each vowel (*a, e, i, o, and u*). Then, have her illustrate the word, making sure to include the actual letter somewhere in her drawing. She might draw a *cat* with *a*’s in place of its ears and nose and an *umbrella* with a giant *u* in the curved handle. When she’s sounding out a word while reading, she can remember her drawings. (“The letter *u* makes the *uh* sound, like in *umbrella!*”)



Beginnings and endings

Your youngster can explore prefixes and suffixes while waiting in line at the grocery store or bank. Pick a word with a common prefix (*re-, im-, un-*), and ask him to think of words that begin the same way. For example, if you choose *rewind*, he might say *replay* and *redo*. Next, pick a word with a common suffix (*-ly, -ing, -ed*), and have him come up with three words

that end the same way. For *quickly*, he could say *quietly, carefully, and slowly*.

Talking objects

If your refrigerator could talk, what would it say? Your youngster can build her vocabulary and practice writing by

Made-up definitions

Your youngster can practice reading and writing definitions while building his vocabulary. Pick three words from the same category (baby animals). Write a simple definition for each word—but make one of the definitions false. *Examples:* “A fawn is a baby deer.” “A calf is a baby horse.” “A chick is a baby bird.” Help your child read each sentence aloud, and ask him to figure out which one is fake (a calf is a cow, not a horse). Then, let him pick words from a new category (planets, colors) and make up three definitions for you. He can write them down or dictate them to you, and you point to the false one.

Syllable snakes

Here’s a colorful way for your child to practice breaking words into syllables—a skill that can help her sound out long words. First, have her cut circles from several different colors of paper. (*Tip:* She can trace around a soup can to make circles.) Look in a magazine for a word with several syllables (*television*). Read the word to her, and then say it together slowly, clapping once for each syllable (*te-le-vi-sion*). Help her print the syllables on individual circles and glue them on paper to make a “snake.”

Encourage her to find more words and make other snakes.

