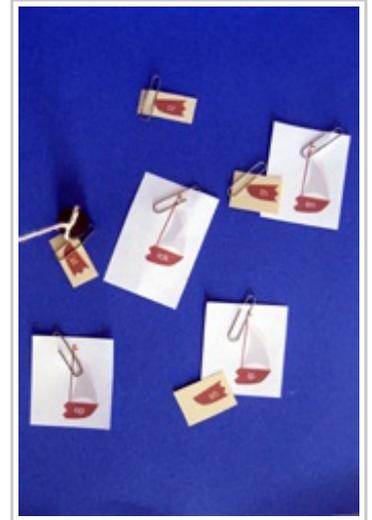


Word Family Game

Being able to recognize word patterns is an important part of learning how to read. In first grade, whenever possible, teachers try to help students see word patterns through the use of word families.

Word families, also known as phonograms or "chunks" of words, help kids recognize word patterns by highlighting how a specific group of letters is read. For example, if a child can read the word *shop*, then he'll likely be able to read other words in the *-op* word family such as *shop*, *mop*, *top*, and *cop*. First graders routinely study a variety of word families such as *-ick*, *-ng*, *-it*, and *-in*, to name a few.

Here's an activity to get your child working with and sounding out word families. Can he help Captain Letterman rescue his ships from the watery depths?



What You Need:

- Wooden stick
- Piece of string, at least 2 feet long
- Magnet ("U" or round, doughnut shaped magnets work especially well)
- Two sets of "Shipwreck" cards (1, 2)
- Paper clips
- Stopwatch or "Time Timer"

What to Do:

1. Prepare the fishing line and the "ships" for the game. Make a fishing line by tying a piece of string to the end of a wooden stick, leaving a tail of string about 2 feet long. Tie the other end of the string to the magnet.
2. Next, prepare the "ships". This game comes with four "fleets" of letter combinations. Start by printing out one fleet of "bow" pieces on one color of heavy paper, then print the "stern" set for that fleet on a different color of paper. Have your first grader help you cut the ships out, and put a paper clip on each one.
3. Determine which word family set you want to study, and have your first grader print letters and letter combinations onto each ship piece. It may be tempting to try to write these letter combinations in yourself, but letting your first grader fill them out will give them good, writing practice.
4. Set up the game by spreading the ship parts out on a clean floor. This floor will represent the "ocean bed."
5. Before playing, set the stage: Captain Letterman sent his fleet of Alphaships to sea in search of treasure, but a terrible gale caught them by surprise and down to the bottom of the ocean they went. Now, Captain Letterman needs a "Word Rescue Technician" to help him retrieve his ships from their watery depths and put them back together before they disappear for good.
6. To play, set the stopwatch, or timer, to a reasonable time. Shorten or lengthen the time limit as need be. The time limit should be short enough so that it is a challenge for your reader, but long enough so that it is not frustrating for him to play.
7. Then, challenge your Word Rescue Technician to fish out the ship pieces in pairs, one of each color. Have your child lay each one down to make a complete ship, and say the word it makes before a new gale threatens to wash everything away!

How fast can your child go? How many words can he learn? Keep at it, and before you know it you'll have an intrepid "Captain of the Reading Seas"!

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