

Play Beanbag Letter Blend Toss

Back in kindergarten, kids did lots of work with single letter-sounds like the “t” in turkey or the “d” in dog. Now that first grade’s here, they’re also going to need to be adept at recognizing lots of letter blends, such as “ch” or “sh.” Sounds like these probably seem like a cinch to you, but for little kids they can be tough. The sound of “ch,” for example, sounds so unlike either “c” or “h” that lots of justice-minded kids will complain that “it’s just not fair!” Fortunately, you can help make the rules of the game a lot easier to take. The key is familiarity, and practice really helps. Want a memorable and hilarious way to practice letter blends? Try this “Beanbag Letter Blend Toss.”



What You Need:

- A flat wood or cardboard rectangle, about 2 feet by 4 feet, marked into eight squares.
- Eight pieces of white paper
- Magic Markers
- 3-4 bean bags
- A couple of eager first graders

What You Do:

1. Set it up. Start by drawing eight different letter blends in big, strong block letters on your eight pieces of paper. Choose among first grade “greatest hits” such as: ch, th, sh, wh, oo, ee, ing, tion, and str, among others.
2. Explain to your child that the aim of the game is to hit the sound you hear. Each child gets 3-4 tries (depending on the number of beanbags available).
3. Draw a line for contestants, and place the board on a floor or smooth backyard surface.
4. Now, as referee, say the sound and then invite the child to land the beanbag on it. Each kid gets three throws in one turn. Each beanbag that makes it onto the correct letter sound represents a point, and the child with the most points after 2-4 turns (depends on how many kids you have and how long the attention span of your group) can get to be referee next time. **Note:** this activity works especially well when kids are comfortable with tossing beanbags, and they have pretty decent aim. If you’ve got a more scattershot bunch, it works just as well if you put the board against a fence or wall, and have kids run up to it and touch the correct square for a few rounds.

Why this works: In order to master letter blends in first grade reading and spelling, kids need to practice, practice, practice. While flashcards and room decorations help them remember visually, there’s nothing like “kinesthetic” (whole body) learning to help kids integrate their lessons for keeps. Don’t be surprised if you end up with some happy family memories while you’re at it.