Crack the Code!: A Spelling Challenge

It's a rare kid that doesn't love a good spy game. Here's a way to have fun with mysterious codes while mastering an ordinary, necessary skill: first grade spelling. This game requires only a few simple materials, and can be done at home, in the car, or even in a doctor's waiting room.

What You Need:

- Paper and pencil
- Crayons or markers
- Index cards with spelling words written individually on them

What You Do:

1. Make a “Secret Code.” Ask your child to write down the entire alphabet, leaving space between and underneath each letter. Tell her that she is going to create a code that will enable the two of you to communicate secretly. Once she's written the entire alphabet, it's time to assign each letter a number. Underneath the A, ask your child to write the number 1. The number 2 goes under the B, and so on. When the code is completed, the letter Z should have the number 26 underneath it. Example:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N 1 2
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15

O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z 16 17 18
19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26

2. Take your child's weekly spelling word list, and put each word in “code” on a seperate index card, using numbers. Give your child the first index card and show her how she can change the numbers into letters using the code. This is done by looking at the first number of the coded word and finding its corresponding letter. For each word, ask your child to write the letter underneath the number on the index card and then move on to the next number. Continue until the whole word has been changed into letters. For example, if the word is "stand", the index card would look like this: 19 20 1 14 4

S T A N D

Continue with the next spelling word. Once your child has deciphered all her words, and practiced spelling them, give your child a new spy challenge! Ask her to use the code to write a sentence for you and see if you can decode it. For example, if they wrote:

9 12-15-22-5 25-15-21 13-15-13 it becomes, "I love you, Mom!" Keep the code handy so that you can write each other secret messages in the future, whenver the mood strikes. And don't be surprised if this becomes a favorite way to practice those spelling lists!

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