

Play Letter-Sound Hopscotch!

It's not shiny or digital, but hopscotch is classic fun for little kids. You probably remember playing it with numbers from one to ten, but have you tried a variation with letters? As your child prepares for reading, try getting creative with movement and letters with this fun game. Here are two variations of "letter-sound" hopscotch that can build your child's phonics skills and help them jump right into reading.

What You Need:

- Piece of sidewalk chalk
- Small rock
- Perhaps a friend or sibling or two!

What You Do:

1. "Letter Blend" Hopscotch Game: Find a nice blank section of pavement—on a playground, sidewalk, or driveway—and use your chalk to draw twelve large square boxes with letter sounds in a hopscotch formation (check out [this activity](#) for an example). Kids start by hopping on one foot at a time, and say the name of the letter they land on. But when they land on the squares that go two across, one foot on each, they need to say the sound that the two letters make together. So, for example, a kid would start by hopping on one foot on "C," and saying it out loud. Then they'd hop on one foot to "H," but then land on the "crossbar," in which the left foot is on "C" and the right foot is on "H." Now the letters combine, and your child should shout the sound "CH"! Once they've got the hang of it, they are ready to play with the rock; they'll throw it onto successive boxes, hop around it while saying the letters, and then try to pick it up without losing their balance.
2. "Vowel Sound" Hopscotch: In early elementary school, kids will learn the difference between vowels—a, e, i, o, u (and sometimes y)—and consonants. They'll learn how every word in English has a vowel in it, and they'll practice finding vowels in words. What's often tough, however, is that every vowel has not one but two possible sounds! In technical terms, we call these the "long" and "short" sounds. The "a" in "apple," for example, is the "short" a sound, while the "a" in "cake" is the long one. Want to help your child jump into first grade vowels? Try this: Use your chalk to make simple hopscotch squares, but instead of labeling them with numbers, label them with vowel names. You have ten hopscotch squares to work with, which means you have space for both long and short vowel sounds for a, e, i, o, and u. Either you or your child can write a letter in each box; on top of the letter, though, write the symbol for long or short. So the "a" in "apple" (short sound) should look like a with a u on top, but the "a" in "cake" should have a straight line on top.
3. As your child hops on each box, have them say the letter sound correctly in order to advance. Invite a friend or two, and you've got a friendly game going; miss the sound and you go back; say it right and you jump ahead...not just into hopscotch, of course, but into important parts of the primary grades curriculum!

