



## Decoding (Phonics)

Letters represent sounds and when you combine letters words are created. Word study and games are a great way to teach patterns, blends, and basic understanding of phonics.

## Strategies for Decoding Success

- **Baseball game:** One child sits (the "hitter") and one stands (the "catcher") behind at the "plate." The "pitcher" (can be the teacher) stands in front of the other two with a stack of plainly printed word cards. Each word card has a "value" (single, double, triple, home-run) depending on how difficult the word is — simple, regular words are not worth as much as rare, irregular words. If the catcher names the word first, the hitter is out. If the hitter names the word first, he or she takes however many bases the word was worth. With each new hitter from one team, the other team provides a new catcher (make sure the same children are not always competing against each other). After three outs, the teams switch. Keep score to motivate students. **Notes:** This activity, and other activities that require a fast response, help the reader to develop fluency in decoding.
- **Making Big Words:** Provide each child a piece of paper with a collection of letters written at the top, and enough space on the page to write 20 to 30 words. The letters should be a mixture of vowels and consonants, with some of the common letters repeated, such as E, E, O, O, L, L, N, S, T, W, Y. Ask students to generate as many words as they can using the letters which are provided (for younger children, you may wish to give them letter tiles, so they can move the letters around). Tell students letters may not be used twice in a word unless the letter has been given twice. Some sample words that can be generated from the letters above include ON, LOW, SNOW, SLOWLY, SWEET, and YELLOWSTONE.
- **Making Words Regular and Irregular:** Assemble letters in a pocket chart to make a simple regular word (e.g. MINT). Have students read the word with you. Show them how you can change one letter of the word to make another regular word (e.g. LINT). When students start to see the regular pattern, show them that the same pattern is not always pronounced the same (e.g. PINT). Emphasize the fact that most words follow the pattern, but some words do not. (e.g. HOME, DOME, ROME, SOME, COME or ROOT, HOOT, BOOT, SHOOT, FOOT).
- **Rhyming and Spelling:** Write word families on a chart (e.g. work with children with common words that have the same rime but different onsets, such as RUG, BUG, HUG, etc.). Encourage students to read the words aloud. Illustrate that words that are spelled similarly (after the onset) usually rhyme (e.g. RAY, PLAY, HAY, BAY, DAY, PAY, MAY, etc). Show students that sometimes words rhyme even though they are spelled differently than the rhyming pattern (HEY, SLEIGH, WEIGH, etc). Ask students to practice saying the rhyming words and matching them to the written forms.
- **Word Search:** Place word cards around the room in prominent locations easy for students to see and reach. Gather students in the middle of the room. Say a word, and tell students to look for that word on a word card in the classroom. When they see it, raise their hand. The first to raise a hand is called on to get the word card. The child with the most word cards at the end wins. **Notes:** As a variation, give each child a stack of cards with names of objects that can be found in the room, and have the children move around the room putting their cards with the appropriate objects.
- **Word Ladders:** Write a word on the board that the students know how to spell and read. Tell students to come to the board and write a new word which is identical to the old word except for one letter (added, removed or changed). For example, if you start with the word IN, the first student could add a P to make PIN; the next student could change the I to an E to make PEN. Then it could become OPEN, and then OPENS, then OVENS, etc. Tell students not to go back to words that have already been used. **Notes:** Variation: Tell students the first and last word in a ladder. Ask them to construct the words in the middle. Example: Provide the words, GO and KNOW; students would construct a pathway, such as GO, GOT, NOT, KNOT, KNOW. This could also be turned into a game, like baseball. Each team takes a swing at adding a word, and when one team can not add any more words, they are "out."

- **Vowel Sounds:** For this activity, you will need a pocket chart with the vowels arranged at the top of the chart, and you will need a stack of cards with vocabulary words (with the vowels missing) on them. Provide students with a small stack of word cards — remember, vowels are missing from each word (e.g., CH\_KE, T\_GHT, P\_NT. Students decide what the word is, and place it under the appropriate vowel on the pocket chart. Students should then use each word to construct a sentence. As a challenge, irregular words can be mixed into the word set (e.g. CHO\_R, MIN\_TE, ISL\_ND). Throughout the activity, remind students that some words can be placed under more than one vowel on the pocket chart (e.g. P\_NT could be placed under A, I, or U). Discuss word meanings to stimulate vocabulary development.

\*\*Adapted from the website: **Instructional Resources: Instructional Activities: The Cognitive Foundations of Learning to Read: A Framework** <http://www.sedl.org/>

