

Let's Play

It takes all kinds of words—big and small—to build a strong vocabulary. Enjoy these games and activities together as you help your youngster learn sight words, opposites, and more!



Sight-word hunt

Send your child on a scavenger hunt through picture books to grow his sight-word vocabulary. (Note: Sight words are ones that appear frequently like *a*, *for*, *now*, or *and*. For a list, look online or ask your youngster's teacher.)

You'll need six sticky notes per player and several picture books to share. Write a different sight word on each note. Then, divide the notes evenly among players. Each player tries to match the words on his notes with words in a book. Stick the notes on the pages, and the first person to get rid of all his notes wins—and reads the words aloud. Make more notes, and play again.



Antonyms and synonyms

It's easier for your youngster to understand the meaning of a new word if she can relate it to a word she already knows. Play with *antonyms* (opposites) and *synonyms* (words with the same or similar meanings) to expand her vocabulary.

Think of a word your child uses often, such as *huge*. Then, take turns rolling a die. If you roll an even number (2, 4, 6), say an antonym for the word (*tiny*, *minuscule*, *small*). If you roll an odd number (1, 3, 5), say a synonym (*gigantic*, *enormous*, *big*). How many times can you go back and forth before you run out of words?

Alliteration alley

"Josh and Jamie did *jumping jacks* in the *jungle*!" Sentences with *alliteration*—or words that start with the same sound—

are fun to say and let your child use letter sounds to think of new words.

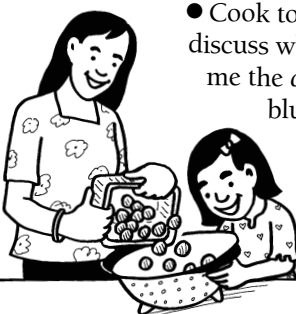
Have your youngster choose a letter (say, P). The first player gives a word beginning with the letter (*purple*). The second person adds a word that starts with the same sound (*purple pancakes*).

The next player adds another word (*peculiar purple pancakes*), and so on. A player is out when he cannot think of a new word or remember all the old ones. Words may be added in any order—at the beginning or end of the sequence or anywhere in the middle. The last person in the round gets to turn the words into a sentence. ("Purple pancakes are peculiar for penguins to prepare.")

Weave in words

The best way for your youngster to remember what new words mean is to hear them used in context. Everyday conversations offer an easy way to make this happen:

- In the car, talk about things you see, such as budding trees or tall buildings. ("Wow, look at the *buds*! It seems like just yesterday the trees were *bare*.")



- Cook together, and use new words to discuss what you're doing. ("Please hand me the *colander* so I can rinse the blueberries.")

- At bedtime, ask about your child's day and tell what happened during yours. ("I had a busy day at work—the store was *bustling* with customers. What was your day like?")

continued

The category game

Use familiar categories like sports, clothing, vehicles, and plants to help your youngster learn new words. Let her pick the categories, and then take turns calling out items that belong.

For example, sports words might include *baseball, hockey, lacrosse, and football*. If your child struggles to come up with a word, give her hints. Say the category is plants. You could ask, "What's the name of the flower Grandma showed you in her yard last week?" The last person to come up with a word that fits picks the next category.

Idea: For a bigger challenge, make the categories more specific (sports that don't use a ball, plants we eat).



Vocabulary bingo

Your youngster can match words and definitions in this bingo game.

Have each player make a bingo card with four rows of four boxes each. Use your child's spelling or vocabulary lists, and write each word in any box on your card.

Let one person be the "caller." He uses a dictionary and reads the definitions of the words, one at a time, without revealing the words. Players

cover the correct word on their cards with a bingo chip or another marker (jelly bean, marshmallow). Be the first to fill four boxes across, down, or diagonally, and yell, "Word bingo!" Then, read your winning words aloud and say what they mean.

Pickup words

Your child uses a *faucet* every day—but does she know that's what it's called? This version of pickup sticks can teach her new terms.



You'll need 24 craft sticks and a marker or pen. On each stick, write the name of a household object that your youngster might not know. *Examples: grater, ottoman, duvet.* To play, drop the sticks into a heap. The first player tries to pick up one stick without moving any of the others. If she succeeds, help her read the word, and give hints for where to find the item. ("We put our feet on it when we sit on the couch.") Seeing the object after learning what it's called is a good way for her to remember the word.

If a player moves another stick, her turn is over. Keep playing until all the sticks are gone. The player with the most sticks wins. *Note:* When no one can pick up a stick without disturbing the other ones, scatter them again.

My word wall

Stimulate your child's vocabulary and his creativity by creating a wall of words.

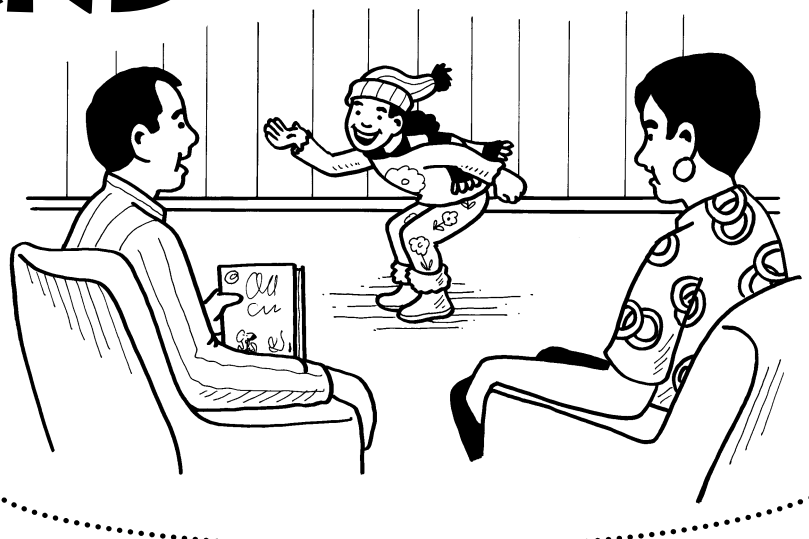
Together, look through a dictionary, and let him list words he likes. *Examples: dazzle, lollipop, whirl.* Read each definition together, and have him write the words in large letters on poster board. Then, suggest that he draw pictures or use stickers to illustrate the words' meanings. He might draw himself on a carnival ride and add arrows to show *whirl*. Hang the posters around his room. He will have eye-catching words to learn and enjoy!

Tip: Encourage your youngster to add new words to his wall when he reads.



TELLING AND WRITING STORIES

Get your child's story wheels spinning! With these ideas for telling and writing stories, you will spark her imagination as she builds oral language, fluency, and creative writing skills.



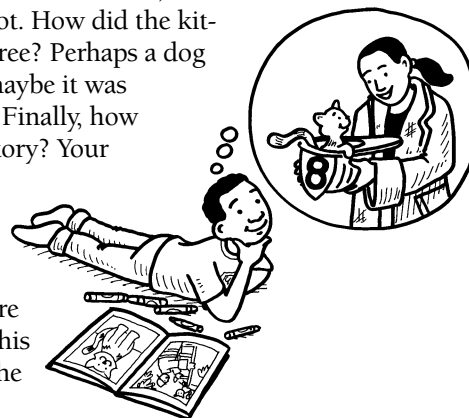
TALES TO TELL

PICTURE-BOOK THEATER

Let your youngster warm up her storytelling muscles by acting out a favorite book. Start by reading the book aloud a few times. Then, have her ham it up! What voices, facial expressions, and gestures will she use to bring the characters to life? If she's reading *Go, Dog. Go!* (P. D. Eastman), she may pretend to be the skiing dog and say, "Do you like my hat?" *Idea:* Film her so she can watch and see parts she might want to change. When she's ready, she could tell her story to family members.

COLORING-BOOK PROMPTS

Relax together by coloring in coloring books. Then, use your pictures as story prompts. Say your child colors a picture of a firefighter saving a kitten stuck high in a tree. Whose point of view does he want to tell the story from—the firefighter's or the kitten's? How would his story change depending on which way he tells it? Next, he should imagine a plot. How did the kitten wind up in the tree? Perhaps a dog chased it there, or maybe it was looking for a home. Finally, how will he resolve his story? Your youngster may come up with a happy ending like "The kitten went to live at the fire station." As he tells his story, he can show the picture he colored.



STORIES ALL AROUND

Storytelling can happen anytime, anywhere. Here are four opportunities.

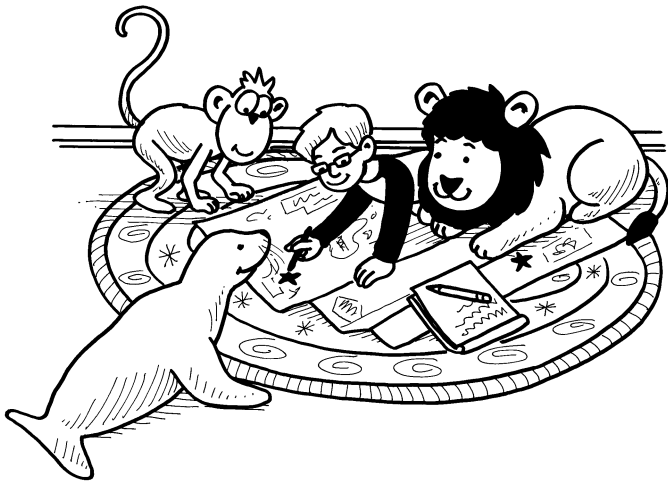
1. While playing, ask your youngster to make up an adventure at his toy construction site or Lego fortress.
2. Snuggle up with family photos, and share stories about the memories they trigger.
3. Attend puppet shows, plays, or ballets, and let your child retell the story afterward.
4. Invent silly bedtime stories. Yours might feature a flying umbrella, while your youngster could tell about his stuffed rabbit's escapades in the forest.



ABC STORY

For this family storytelling activity, let your child print each letter of the alphabet on a separate index card. Shuffle the cards, and stack them facedown. The first person takes one and begins a story based on that letter. For X, she might say, "One day, a boy discovered a magical xxylophone." Lay the card faceup on the table. The next person draws a new letter, places it beside the first, and continues the story. For H, she could add, "The boy got on his horse to carry the xxylophone to town." Keep going until you've used 10 cards. The last person wraps up the tale. Then, choose a new letter, and start another story.

continued



STORIES TO WRITE

MAP ADVENTURES

Save maps from places you visit like the zoo, a state park, or a museum. When you get home, your youngster can write a story about his trip and use the map to keep it in sequence. First, have him trace his route with a crayon and add a star for each place you stopped. On a zoo map, he may star the petting zoo, the giraffe exhibit, and the lion's den. Next, ask your child to dictate or write a sentence or two about each stop. Remind him to use sequence words (*first, then, next, last*) to make his story flow well. "First, we stopped at the petting zoo. The goats smelled funny, and their coats were scratchy." Help him read his story aloud, pointing to the map for reference.

CHARACTER COMBOS

Suggest that your youngster write a "mash-up" story—combining characters from two different books. For instance,

she might have Amelia Bedelia throw a birthday party for Fancy Nancy. When your child has a rough draft, she can draw pictures to go with it. Encourage her to look at her drawings for details she could add to improve her tale. Perhaps she'll change "Amelia put icing on the cake" to be more descriptive: "Amelia put swirly pink icing on the three-layer cake." After she reworks her story, staple her pages and illustrations together to make a book.

MISSING PIECES

Laugh out loud—and help your youngster practice using parts of speech—with this silly Mad Libs-style game. Let him think of a story idea (an underwater adventure, a cookie theft). Then, each of you write your own fill-in-the-blank story on the topic, replacing each noun with a blank labeled *person, place, or thing*. Example: "One morning, _____ (*person*) woke up and got ready for his trip to _____ (*place*). When he arrived, he saw purple _____ (*things*) glowing in the water." Without giving away your stories, ask the other person to supply a noun for each blank ("I need a person's name, now a place," and so on). Trade papers, and read the funny tales aloud. *Idea:* Write new stories, leaving the verbs (action words) or the adjectives (describing words) blank.



FINDING INSPIRATION

Spark your youngster's imagination with these ideas for starting stories:

- Together, write 10–20 "what if" questions on slips of paper. Examples: "What if trees talked?" "What if butterflies were as big as cars?" Store the slips in a clean plastic jar. Your child can choose one when she wants to write.
- On walks, take turns dreaming up tales about things you see along the way. Maybe an invisible elephant dented that mailbox on the corner, for example. Help your youngster write the stories down when you get home.



- Mix up the cards from a *Memory* game. Have your child pick three at random—say a fish, an ice-cream cone, and a tricycle—and weave them into a story.

- List and number six problems that could make a good story. Examples:

1. Mysterious noise
2. Lost key
3. The grass turns blue

Let your youngster roll a die and write a tale matching the number she rolled (roll a 1, and write about a mysterious noise).