

# Phonicsability Games

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# Introduction

The idea of inventing games of this nature was first conceived out of sheer desperation when I met my first uncooperative pupil. He told me confidently “I do not need to learn to read because I am going to be an actor.” As he was then only seven years old and quite unable to project his mind into the future, no argument of mine could convince him to believe otherwise.

A year later when this boy was diagnosed as being severely dyslexic he was triumphant. He stubbornly closed his mind to everyone’s attempts to help him and his behaviour in school gave much cause for concern, but our lessons continued. I spent two hours with him each week and, in spite of himself, he learned to read and write. The almost-miracle was achieved by means of games we played together, which he actually enjoyed.

Since then, every game in this series has been played time and time again with pupils who have a variety of problems as well as with those who appear to learn to read and write without experiencing any difficulties. As I saw more and more pupils benefiting from playing the games, I wanted to share them with other pupils – both old and young – so that they could experience the joy and laughter that come with learning to read and spell. I hope, also, that school teachers, parent teachers and helpers of all kinds will become better acquainted with the simple logic of teaching reading and spelling by phonics (sounds).

This is by no means a return to something old-fashioned in a back-to-basics approach. We are all discovering the real worth of a teaching method which, speaking generally, has not been profoundly comprehended. Nor has it been widely appreciated, so the subject could not have been taught effectively in the past. Fortunately, things are changing now; the extensive illiteracy throughout English speaking countries has excited much research. This adds authenticity to many small, enlightening experiments and discoveries currently being made by the few teachers who have the courage to probe. We are finding not only that it is pleasurable to teach reading and spelling by phonics, but also that hardly any pupils need to fail to learn to read.

I use these games in conjunction with Mrs Violet Brand’s scheme, using the order in which the sounds are introduced in *Fat Sam* (Egon). Each game supports and extends the new steps within the structure of the scheme, but they can be played in any order.

The games are unbelievably simple and, in principle, well within the capabilities of every potential reader, from the youngest beginners to older pupils who may be experiencing difficulties. Currently, my youngest pupil is five and the oldest is 57! One of my pupils, who was 14 when I first played the games with her, was so impressed by their efficacy that she is now studying child care and working with young children and is designing and making games of her own to help them.

Each game either practises and reinforces the sound/symbol relationship which has just been taught

or introduces the pupil to the next one. Some games combine these two aims. When the games are presented to the pupil at the optimum moments in her reading development, newly learned rules are established. (NB We have used ‘she’ throughout this book to refer to the pupil. This is done purely for the purposes of consistency and clarity. It is not intended to imply that females have more problems with reading than males. In other books in the series we shall use ‘he’ throughout.)

Although these games can help any pupil to learn to read and spell, they have proved to be particularly useful and effective for pupils who have experienced years of failure in most of their school subjects because of their poor reading skills. One eight-year-old boy who was sent to me to receive ‘help’ draped himself over the back of his chair as we began the first lesson and refused to look at anything on the table. Learning to read had become anathema to him; he had received plenty of ‘help’, but he still couldn’t read and so he had given up trying. His reaction presented a tense moment for me; I did not know the child and I certainly did not want to spoil our relationship before it had even begun! I took out a game and shook the dice. “Look Perry,” I said. “I am playing a game, and I am winning.” Fortunately, he won... and gladly came again.

Success in winning the games does not depend on a pupil’s ability to read or spell. The real secret of success lies in the fact that, quite subtly, the learning/teaching element is relegated to second place in favour of ‘luck’. Because of this, pupils do not feel anxious when they play. There are no worries or tensions; they are

confident that they **can** tackle something that appears to be so easy. In such a relaxed atmosphere, they can enjoy the fun of playing and even the triumph of beating the teacher! This latter achievement boosts the confidence of almost every pupil and it is very important to them. I have heard little ones discussing the play later in the day and looking very pleased with themselves as they've said, "I won two games today."

On the other hand, if the pupil loses, she can experience losing a game respectably, without any sense of failure, since she knows that she lost because the dice did not fall in her favour and definitely not because she was stupid!

Teachers will not, of course, be trying to win! On the contrary, and especially with younger pupils or those whose confidence needs to be built up, the teacher will contrive to lose the game! They will soon learn subtle ways to lose, by forgetting where the winning card is, by missing a turn, by always allowing the pupil to go first at the beginning of play, by working out whose will be the last card and by making helpful suggestions to the pupil so that she gets the advantage. I have also even turned a blind eye to a little cheating that works towards my purpose. Pupils have to know what they are doing in order to cheat... but of course I make it very clear that I do not approve of cheating and I correct it when I 'see' it!

Each game has its own very clear aim about which part of the reading structure it supports. There are, however, some subsidiary aims which make the games even more valuable; look out for these as you play.

## ASSESSMENT

This is sometimes, for me, the main reason for playing a game. I often need to assess how much of the new work the pupil has assimilated and whether or not she is ready to go on. I assess the situation continually as I watch her strategies as she plays the game. I 'listen' to her thinking processes and to the use she makes of the sounds in the words. I need to know if she is really hearing the sounds or travelling down the dead-end road of remembering the words in 'look and say' fashion. If the latter is true, I know that more practice, more patient explanation and more adaptation to approach the problem from a different angle are all needed. During every game, I have to learn when to wait patiently for the pupil to remember and when to intervene with reassuring help. Playing these games has, in fact, helped me to be able to assess more precisely where my pupil is in her progress and how to help her move on.

## VOCABULARY

Each of these games extends the pupils' spoken vocabulary as well as helping them to read and spell. I always talk to them about the words we are using, about the meanings of the words and how they fit into sentences. I have been surprised by the number of pupils who do not know how to use some of the simple, three-letter words such as 'tub', 'wig', 'den' and 'pan', let alone the more difficult ones. I encourage the pupils to give clear definitions of the words to help them to remember when they later need to read them and use them in their own compositions.

## MEMORY TRAINING

Memory training is intrinsic to many of the games and with some ingenuity on the part of the teacher even more use can be made of the games to help pupils remember than might at first be apparent. I often ask questions while we are playing, such as "Where is the elephant?" or "Is the stork under the 'ar' or the 'or'?" The most difficult part of learning to spell is remembering which symbol to use from the selection which represent the same sound: 'ai', 'ay', 'a-e' for example. Should 'rain' be spelled 'rane', 'rayne' or 'rain'? The games most certainly help to sort out problems of this kind.

As you become more familiar with the games, countless opportunities will occur to you to use the materials to test pupils' memory skills.

## CONCLUSION

It has been my intention to make the games simple, attractive and fun to play. I have borne in mind, too, that they need to be played in a short time because I know from experience how little time many teachers have to spend with individual pupils.

I hope that the games can be photocopied cheaply so that copies may be taken home. Young children especially like to share what they have enjoyed with their families and the additional practice will be good for them. Alternatively, sets of games can be made up and stored as a resource, which can be lent to parents and returned.

The clear aims and simple rules help parents to become effective teachers who, in turn, can give valuable help in playing the games with other pupils. The components of the games may also be used as a resource to illustrate specific teaching points. I have used the games in this way with older pupils who do not necessarily need the competitive approach.

The pictures will also inspire many useful worksheets and ideas for new games, so there are many uses for these photocopiable materials.

## PLAYING THE GAMES

Most of the games are designed for two players who can either be the pupil and the teacher or two pupils playing together with the teacher or competent adult as referee. All reading games need supervision and mine are no exception, but the simplicity of these enables parents and classroom helpers to grasp the principles quickly to support the work of the teacher.

The rules of these games are very flexible and can be modified by the teacher to suit the pupil. Pupils sometimes change the rules and I have been happy to allow them to do that provided that the game is still fair and the main aims are accomplished.

There is a great deal of repetition of the rules across the selection of games. This aids each pupil's confidence and allows them to concentrate on the main purpose of the game without having to contend with more complicated instructions.

Pupils should move through the scheme at their own pace and teachers will find that there are more games for those sound/symbol groups, which need most practice. Not all pupils need to play all of the games. Teachers need to be aware of individual pupil's needs. There is little to be gained from playing a game once a pupil has understood that step, except, perhaps, to boost her confidence.

Teachers and helpers need to make sure that pupils know what the pictures represent before the game begins. Such a preview lends opportunity to talk about words and pictures and is an important part of the learning process.

## HOW TO MAKE THE GAMES

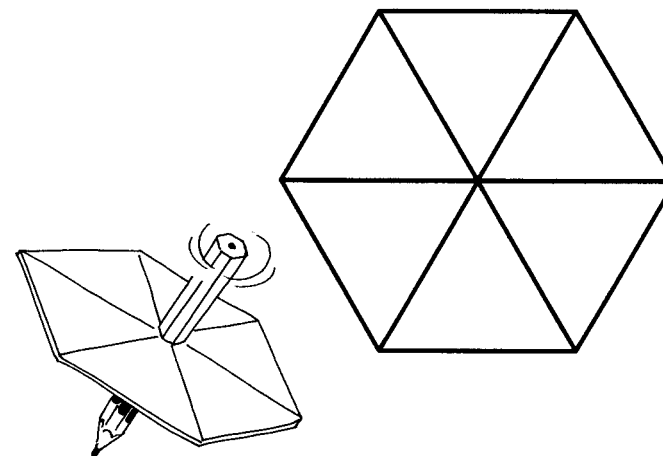
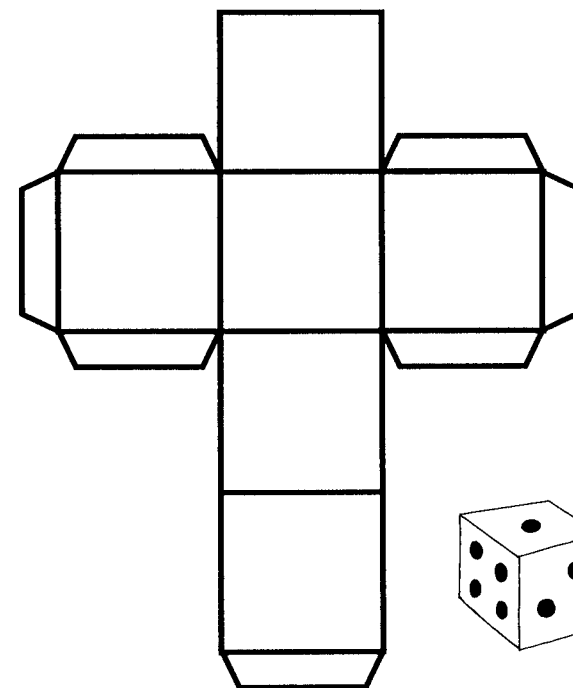
- Photocopy the required pages according to the instructions for each game, enlarging or reducing as you prefer. I made all my games to fit into zipped reading book folders measuring 40 x 27cm. This helps to keep the weight down when I have to carry a selection of games to school.
- Colour the pictures; I have found coloured pencils to be the best tools to use. Enlist the help of anyone who is willing, but if you intend to make your games permanent, make sure that your 'colourers' have high standards.
- Cut up the sheets as instructed and mount the pieces and the boards on card using an adhesive.
- If you intend to cover your games with Tacky Back, (and this will certainly preserve them for much use in the future) then use water-based ink pens. Spirit-based ink spreads under Tacky Back. You may prefer to mount the games on thinner card and laminate them.

## EXTRA EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

- Nearly all of the games can be played in a shorter time, if necessary, so I find it useful to carry an egg-timer in my bag.
- Blank dice can be obtained from:-  
Taskmaster Ltd, Morris Road, Leicester LE2 6BR

- Make your feely bags from attractive pieces of material. Cut out a rectangle which is just a little longer than an A4 sheet of paper. Stitch the sides and hem the top. Thread a string through if you wish.
- Buttons can be used for counters, or you can buy some from Taskmaster (see previous column). For 'counters' to move on the board, I collect trinkets or small toys from cereal packets. All these little novelties help to make the games more attractive.
- Stock up with zipped reading book folders for simple storage. I label my folders with my own description of the contents so that I can find the game I need quickly. I also put a mounted copy of the rules for the game into the folder with the pieces.
- Patience! – You will need much patience too. If you have a will to teach reading, patience grows with the thrill of achievement in both pupil and teacher. I trust that these little games will bring much satisfaction to many people.

An emergency dice or spinner can be made using the pattern opposite. You can enlarge or reduce it according to your needs.



# Using this Book

## REVISION OF THREE-LETTER WORDS

The first four games in this book will help pupils to revise sounding out three-letter words for reading and spelling. They should be able to do this confidently before proceeding to play the four-letter word games.

## FOUR-LETTER WORD GAMES

Some pupils need much practice before they can keep four sounds in mind for long enough to produce a word. Often they leave a sound out, saying 'pod' for 'pond'. These games will help draw attention to the importance of every sound in the word.

The games also introduce pupils to the blending of two consonant sounds before or after the vowel sounds. Remember that blending is all-important. The adult should demonstrate to the pupil how to allow the sounds to emerge gently, in succession and in the right order, without adding any other 'rogue' sounds which require an unwanted change in the position of the lips, tongue and teeth. For example,

**Mmmm aaaa nnnn (man)** and not **muh an ner**

**AIMS**

- To give additional practice in hearing, visualising and selecting the correct vowel for a given three-letter word.
- To help with memory training.

# Find the Word

**HOW TO MAKE THE GAME**

- Cut up the sheets to make three kinds of squares – words, pictures and vowel sounds. Stick the appropriate vowel sound letter to the back of each word card.

**HOW TO PLAY**

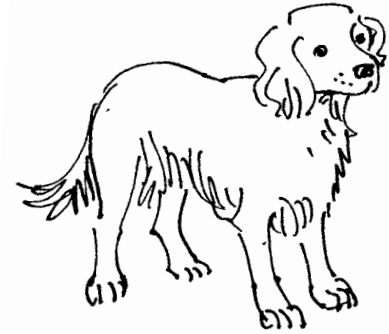
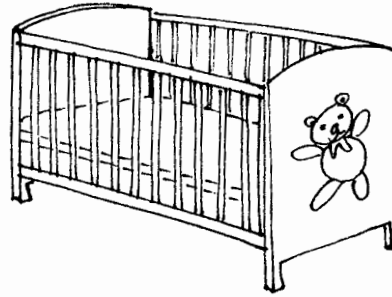
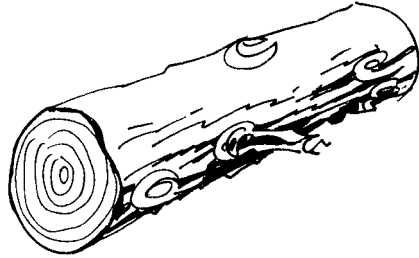
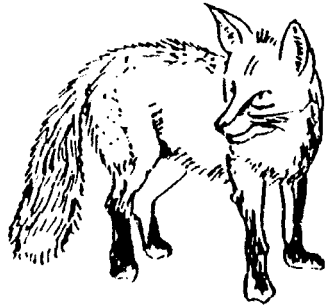
- Turn the word cards over so that the vowel sound is facing upwards.
- Group word cards with same vowel together in an orderly manner.
- Give each player three picture cards and stack the rest.
- The first player begins by selecting a word card from one of the vowel groups. She should do this purposefully, having one of her three picture cards in mind.
- If the card she selects can be paired with her picture, she may set the pair aside as her own and take another picture card from the stack.
- If she made a wrong choice, she must replace the word card carefully and try to remember not to take it again until she needs it. It will help players to observe each other as they may need the cards that their partners reject. When all the cards have been used up, the winner has the most pairs.

**TEACHER GUIDANCE**

This game incorporates revision with memory training. It presumes that extensive work has already been done on first sounds and three-letter word building.

Once the game is set up according to the instructions, you may need to help the pupil to decide which of her three words she is going to look for first. Having determined that, ask her which vowel sound she is going to look for. She will then need to read the word she has chosen to see if it pairs with her picture. Do not rush in to help. Give her quiet time to work it out. If she hesitates too long, find out where the problem is. It may be that she is sounding the last letter incorrectly, or she may need lots more practice in building three-letter words. Be sensitive to find out where she is operating.

A note of revision for the teacher – when you need to know how to sound a letter, get your mouth ready to say a word that begins with that letter but do not say the word. Just let that first, tiny sound come out. It will be ‘d’ not ‘duh’ or ‘der...og...ger’ (dog).



fox

log

cot

dog

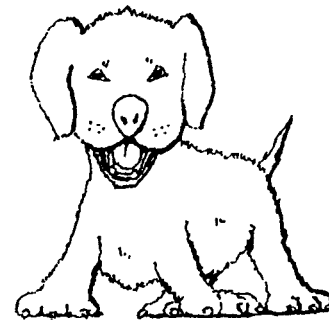
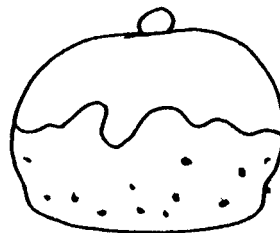
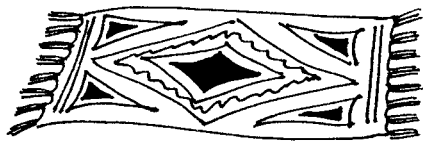
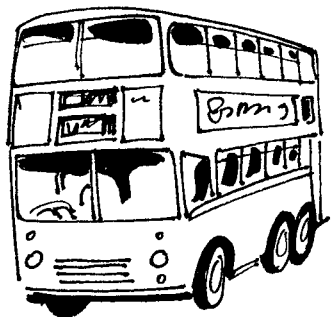
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