

USING PHONICS AND SPELLING PATTERNS

Most of the words we read and write are one- and two-syllable *regular* words, which, because they are consistent with the rules of spelling and pronunciation, we can decode and spell even if we have not seen them before. Developing the ability to independently read and write most regular words is a complex process and takes time and practice with a variety of activities. This chapter describes activities successfully used by teachers to help all children become independent at decoding and spelling regular one- and two-syllable words.

Chapter 1 described activities that develop phonemic awareness and teach some letter names and sounds. If this knowledge is minimal (or nonexistent) in your students, you are not ready for this chapter but should do some of the activities suggested in Chapter 1. The activities in this chapter assume that children have developed some phonemic awareness and know some letter names and consonant sounds. They are now ready to use this knowledge and learn patterns they can use to decode and spell words.

VOWELS IN THE ENGLISH SPELLING SYSTEM

In English, the vowels are variant and unpredictable. The letter *a* commonly represents the sound in *and*, *made*, *agree*, *art*, *talk*, and *care*. We have given names to some of these sounds. *And* has a short *a*; *made* has a long *a*; *agree* is a schwa; the *a* in *art* is *r* controlled. We don't even have names for the sound *a* represents in *talk* and *care*. Further complicating things are the many words in which *a* doesn't do any of these six common things—*eat*, *coat*, *legal*—and the fact that even the consistent sounds can be spelled in many different ways. The long *a* sound is commonly spelled by the patterns in *made*, *maid*, and *may*. The sound *a* has in *talk* is spelled by an *aw* in *saw* and an *au* in *Paul*.

When you stop to think about all the possible sounds and spelling patterns for the vowels, you marvel that anyone becomes an accurate and fast decoder of English words. Yet that

is exactly what happens! All good readers could quickly and accurately pronounce the made-up words *gand*, *hade*, *afuse*, *sart*, *malk*, *lare*, *jeat*, *foat*, *pregal*, *maw*, and *naul*. Just don't ask them to explain how they did it!

In schools we have traditionally taught students many rules and jargon: the *e* on the end makes the vowel long; vowels in unaccented syllables have a schwa sound; when a vowel is followed by *r*, it is *r* controlled. We have taught so many rules and jargon because it takes over 200 rules to account for the common spelling patterns in English. Although these rules describe our English alphabetic system, it is doubtful that readers and writers use these rules to decode and spell words. So how do they do it?

Research (Adams, 1990) supports the view that readers decode words by using spelling patterns from the words they know. *Made*, *fade*, *blade* and *shade* all have the same spelling pattern, and the *a* is pronounced the same in all four. When you see the made-up word *hade*, your mind accesses that known spelling pattern and you give the made-up word the same pronunciation you have for other words with that spelling pattern. Spelling patterns are letters that are commonly seen together in a certain position in words. The *al* at the end of *legal*, *royal*, and the made-up word *pregal* is a spelling pattern. Sometimes a spelling pattern can be a single letter, as the *a* is in *agree*, *about*, *adopt*, and the made-up word *afuse*. Using words you know to decode unknown words is called decoding by analogy.

Spelling patterns are quite reliable indicators of pronunciation—with two exceptions. The first exception was explained in Chapter 2. The most frequently used words are often not pronounced or spelled like other words with that spelling pattern. *To* and *do* should rhyme with *go*, *so*, and *no*. *What* should rhyme with *at*, *cat*, and *bat*. *They* should be spelled like *way* and *stay*. *Said* should be spelled like *red* and *bed*. It is precisely because the most frequent words have the least predictable pronunciations and spellings that we use the word wall to help all children learn to read and spell them.

The second exception in spelling patterns is that some spelling patterns have two common sounds. The *ow* at the end of words occurs in *show*, *grow*, and *slow*, but also in *how*, *now*, and *cow*. The *ood* at the end of *good*, *hood*, and *stood* is also found at the end of *food*, *mood*, and *brood*. Children who are constantly cross-checking meaning with the pronunciations they come up with will not be bothered by these differences, as long as the word they are reading is in their listening-meaning vocabulary.

Whereas spelling patterns work wonderfully well for pronouncing unfamiliar words, they don't work as well for spelling! These are often two or more spelling patterns with the same pronunciation. When trying to read the made-up word *nade*, you would simply compare its pronunciation to other words with that spelling pattern—*made*, *grade*, *blade*. If, however, I didn't show you *nade*, but rather pronounced it and asked you to spell it, you might compare it to *maid*, *paid*, and *braid* and spell it n-a-i-d. Most words can be correctly pronounced by comparing them to known spelling patterns. To spell a word correctly, however, you must often choose between two or more possible spelling patterns. Activities in this chapter will first teach children that you look at the whole pattern to decode and spell words. Once children are decoding and spelling based on patterns, we do two activities—Reading Writing Rhymes and What Looks Right—to help them develop their visual checking system and decide which pattern is the correct spelling.

GUESS THE COVERED WORD

Most short words are made up of two patterns, the beginning letters and the vowel and letters that follow it. The beginning letters (which linguists call onsets and educators call consonants, digraphs, and blends or clusters) are all the letters up to the vowel. Children need to learn the sounds for these letters—which are quite consistent and reliable.

Unfortunately, although many children “learn” these sounds—they can circle pictures that begin with them and tell you what letter makes a particular sound if you ask them—they don't use them when they read and write. When writing and trying to figure out the spelling of a word such as *smelly*, they might begin it just with an *s* or an *sl*

instead of an *sm*. Faced with an unfamiliar word in their reading, they often guess a word that makes sense but does not begin with the right letters or guess a word with only the correct first letter, ignoring the other letters. All of the activities in this chapter stress learning and using all the beginning letters. Guess the Covered Word lessons teach these beginning letter sounds systematically and teach them in the context of reading. Children learn that guessing just based on beginning letters—or just based on making sense—is not a very good strategy. But when you use all the beginning letters and the sense of the sentence and consider the length of the word, you can make very good guesses at new words.

Here are the beginning letters children need to learn to use. We are using the jargon here—consonants, digraphs, etc.—so that you will recognize what is being taught, but we avoid it “like the plague” with children who get so confused by all the terms, they can’t focus on what we want them to—learning and using the sounds of the letters. We teach children the sounds for, and to look and listen for, “all the beginning letters—all the letters up to the vowel.”

Single consonants: b c d f g h j k l m n p r s t v w y z (including the “s” sound of *c* in *city* and the “j” sound of *g* in *gym*)

Digraphs (two letters, one sound): sh ch wh th

Other two-letter, one-sound combinations: ph wr kn qu

Blends (beginning letters blended together, sometimes called clusters): bl br cl cr dr fl fr gl gr pl pr sc scr sk sl sm sn sp spr st str sw tr

Guess the Covered Word lessons help students to learn to cross-check—to simultaneously think about what would make sense and about letters and sounds. To prepare for a Guess the Covered Word activity, we write 5–7 sentences on the board and cover one word in each sentence. We use sticky notes to cover the words and cover them in such a way that, after three or four guesses are made with no letters showing, we can uncover all the letters up to the vowel. For our first lessons, the sentences follow a similar

word pattern, we cover the final word, and we include in our covered words only words that begin with a single initial consonant.

Kevin wants a pet hamster.

Mike wants a pet python.

Paola wants a pet goldfish.

Ryan wants a pet turtle.

Devon wants a pet pony.

Jasmine wants a pet kitten.

We begin the activity by reading the first sentence and asking students to guess the covered word. We write three or four guesses next to the sentence. Pointing out to the children that “It sure can be a lot of words when you can’t see any letters,” we uncover all the letters up to the vowel (which in these first lessons is only one). We erase guesses that don’t begin with that letter and have students suggest possible words that make sense and begin with the correct letter and write these responses. When all the guesses that begin correctly and make sense are written, we uncover the whole word and go on to the next sentence.

We use Guess the Covered Word activities to teach and review all the beginning sounds. As the children begin to understand the strategy they need to use, we don’t limit the covered word to the final position. Now they read the whole sentence, skipping the covered word and then coming back to it to make guesses. We follow the same procedure of getting three or four guesses with no letters showing and then uncovering all the letters up to the vowel. Here are some sentences we might use when we are focusing on the digraphs *sh*, *ch*, *wh*, and *th*.

Corinda likes to eat chicken.

Chad ate thirteen waffles.

Sean likes orange sherbet.

Bob likes strawberry shortcake.

Chris bakes pies for thanksgiving.

Carol likes chocolate cake.

We teach and practice all the blends with Guess the Covered Word activities:

We all love it when it snows.

Some people go skiing.

People ride in snowmobiles.

The snowplow is fun to ride on, too!

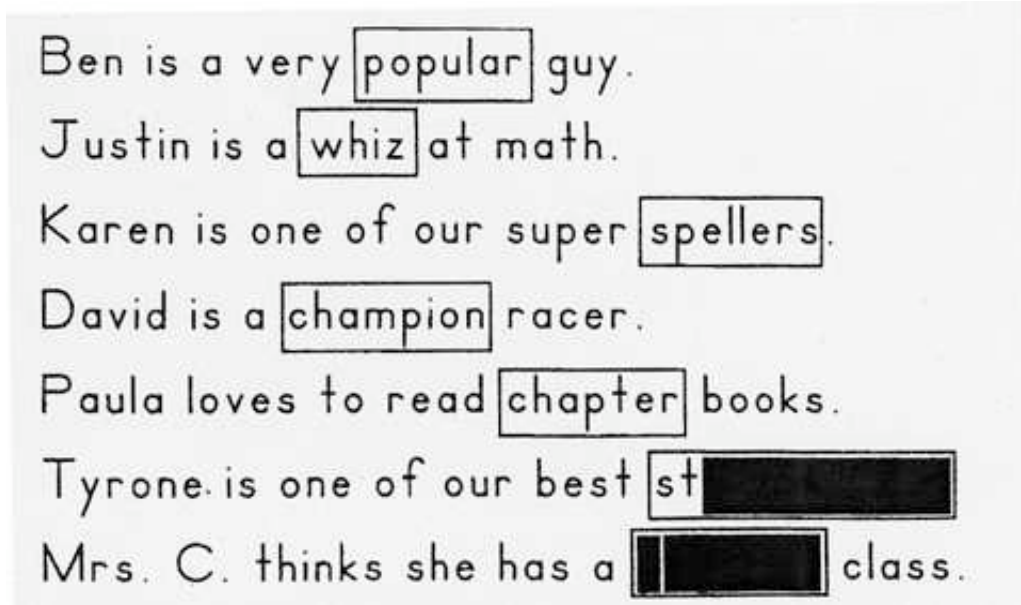
You can go down a hill fast in a sled.

Walking back up is hard if the snow is slippery.

Guess the Covered Word is a very versatile strategy. We sometimes use Big Books and cover a word or two on each page. We also write paragraphs summarizing what we have learned during a science or social studies unit and cover words in it.

For years, people have marvelled at the faces of four presidents carved into Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. Now, there is another face to see in the Black Hills. Work on the face of Crazy Horse, a famous Lakota Indian chief, began over fifty years ago. The face of Crazy Horse is huge. It is taller than the Washington Monument. Each eye measures eighteen feet across. All four Mount Rushmore faces could fit inside the face of Crazy Horse. The carving is not finished. Sculptors are now busy carving Crazy Horse's horse for him to ride on. More than one million visitors have already paid the \$7 visitor fee to visit the Crazy Horse Memorial and Indian Museum.

Here is an example of a Guess the Covered Word lesson. They have guessed the first five words, are guessing words that make sense and begin with *st* for the sixth sentence, and have one more to go.



Through Guess the Covered Word activities, children learn that just guessing words is not a good decoding strategy, but when you guess something that makes sense in the sentence, has all the right letters up to the vowel (not just the first one), and is the right length, you can figure out many new words.

CHANGING A HEN TO A FOX

Children love to pretend, and in this activity they pretend they can change one animal, a hen, into a fox. They do this by changing one letter at a time. As they change that letter, they listen for where they hear the changing letter and review all the single consonants. To begin this activity, we write the names of five animals on the board—each of which has a different vowel sound:

cat hen pig fox bug

The teacher and the children say these words together, stretching out each word and talking about the beginning, middle, and ending sounds. Particular attention is given to

the middle sound—the vowel sound—in each of these words. Next the teacher asks the children,

“Can you change a hen into a fox?”

She tells the children that if they follow her directions and think about letters and sounds, they will be able to do this. The children all take a sheet of paper and these directions are given.

“Write **hen**” (the teacher points to the word *hen* on the board and everyone copies it onto their papers.)

“Now change the hen to a **pen**.” (The teacher and children decide they have to change just the first letter from an *h* to a *p* and write *pen* under *hen*.)

“Now change your pen into a **pet**.” (Children decide they have to change the last letter from an *n* to a *t* and write *pet*.)

“Can you change pet to **pit**?” (Teacher helps them stretch out *pit* and decide it is the vowel they need to change and this vowel has the same sound as *pig*.)

“Now change pit to **sit**.”

“Next, change sit to **six**.”

“Then, change six to **fix**.”

“Last, change fix to **fox**.”

Children love changing the letters and the animals, and they are using what they are learning about letters and sounds to spell lots of other words. (Many teachers initiate this activity by reading Mem Fox’s *Hattie and the Fox* to the children.)

Here are seven other Changing a Hen to a Fox lessons.

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| pig | bug | pig | cat | fox | bug | cat |
| rig | dug | big | bat | box | hug | hat |
| rid | dig | wig | hat | bop | dug | rat |
| rib | pig | win | rat | top | dig | rag |

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| rob | pin | fin | pat | mop | big | bag |
| bob | pen | fit | pet | map | bag | big |
| box | ten | fat | pen | mat | bat | dig |
| fox | hen | cat | hen | cat | cat | pig |

LEARNING THE MOST COMMON RHYMING PATTERNS

As children are learning the beginning sounds and how they can use these sounds to figure out words, they should also be learning some of the most common rhyming patterns. These rhyming patterns are called *rimes* by linguists and often called *word families* or *phonograms* by teachers. We call them *spelling patterns* because we want children to learn that you spell based on patterns—which includes the vowel and the letters that follow. Thirty-seven spelling patterns allow children to read and spell over 500 words commonly used by young children (Wylie & Durrell, 1970). Many teachers display these with a word and picture to help children learn the patterns that help them spell many other words.

Here are the 37 high-frequency spelling patterns (with possible key words):

| | | | | |
|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| ack(black) | ail(pail) | ain(train) | ake(cake) | ale(whale) |
| ame(game) | an(pan) | ank(bank) | ap(cap) | ash(trash) |
| at(cat) | ate(skate) | aw(claw) | ay(tray) | eat(meat) |
| ell(shell) | est(nest) | ice(rice) | de(bridge) | ick(brick) |
| ight(night) | ill(hill) | in(pin) | ine(nine) | ing(king) |
| ink(pink) | ip(ship) | it(hit) | ock(sock) | oke(Coke) |
| op(mop) | ore(store) | ot(hot) | uck(truck) | ug(bug) |
| ump(jump) | unk(skunk) | | | |

In addition, there are numerous books teachers can read to children and then children can read on their own which contain lots of examples of rhyming words with these most common rhyming patterns. Books with just one rhyming pattern in which almost all the

words have the same spelling pattern are the most helpful for children just learning patterns and how they help you spell words. C. and J. Hawkins have written four of these books: *Tog the Dog* (1986), *Jen the Hen* (1985), *Mig the Pig* (1984), and *Pat the Cat* (1993). Rigby publishes a set of Kinderrhymes with 24 titles, including *Rimes with Cat*, *Rimes with Cap* and *Rhymes with King*. *Zoo Looking* by Mem Fox (1995) has lots of words that rhyme with *back*.

Other particularly helpful books are books that contain just 6–8 different rhyming pairs. *There's A Bug in my Mug* and *My Nose Is a Hose*, both by Kent Salisbury (1997), are two such books. Both books contain tabs which when pulled reveal what is in the mug or turn the nose into a hose. These books are great fun and wonderful for helping children begin to understand how rhyming patterns work.

ROUNDING UP THE RHYMES

Rounding Up the Rhymes is an activity to follow up the reading of a book, story, or poem that contains lots of rhyming words. Here is an example using that timeless book, *I Wish That I Had Duck Feet* (Seuss, 1972). The first reading of anything should be for meaning and enjoyment. In Dr. Seuss's *I Wish That I Had Duck Feet*, a boy wishes he had duck feet so that he could splash and wouldn't have to wear shoes until he realizes his mother wouldn't want him in the house like that. The boy goes on to wish for deer horns, a whale spout, a long tail, a long nose until he thinks of the complications each would cause and finally decides to "be just me." As with so many other Seuss books, this one has enormous appeal for children.

After enjoying the book, point out to the children that in addition to a silly story and great illustrations, Dr. Seuss books are fun to read because of all the rhyming words. Tell the children that you are going to read several pages of *I Wish That I Had Duck Feet* again and they can help you "round up the rhymes." Read the first page and have students help you decide that the rhyming words are *why* and *dry*. Write these words on two index cards and place them one under the other in a pocket chart. Read the next page and have

the children identify the rhyming words, *me* and *see*. Continue to read until you have six or seven sets of rhyming words.

| | | | | | | |
|-----|-----|-------|------|-------|-------|---------|
| why | me | brown | play | floor | don't | instead |
| dry | see | town | way | door | won't | head |

Now, reread these pages again. As you get to the rhyming words, point to them in the pocket chart and have the children say them.

Next, have the children help you identify the spelling pattern. Explain that the spelling pattern in a short word includes all the letters beginning with the first vowel and going to the end of the word. After naming the vowels—*a, e, i, o, u*, and sometimes *y*—pick up the first set of rhyming words *why* and *dry*, have the children tell you the spelling pattern in each, and underline the spelling pattern. In *why* and *dry*, the spelling pattern is only the *y*. Put *why* and *dry* back in the pocket chart and pick up the next set of rhymes—*me* and *see*. Have the children say them and hear once more that they do rhyme. Then underline the spelling patterns: *e* and *ee*. They do rhyme but they have different spelling pattern. Explain that we only want to keep rhymes with the same spelling pattern, then toss *me* and *see* in the trash can.

Continue with the remaining pairs, deciding first that they rhyme and then underlining the spelling pattern to see if it is the same. There are now six pairs of rhyming words with the same spelling pattern in the pocket chart:

| | | | | | |
|-----|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| why | <u>brown</u> | <u>play</u> | <u>floor</u> | <u>don't</u> | <u>instead</u> |
| dry | <u>town</u> | <u>way</u> | <u>door</u> | <u>won't</u> | <u>head</u> |

The final part of this activity is the transfer step—how we use rhyming words to read and spell other words. Begin the transfer part of this activity by telling children something like:

“You know that when you are reading books and writing stories, there are words you have never seen before. You have to figure them out. One way people figure out how to read and spell new words is to see if they already know any rhyming words or words that have the same spelling pattern. I am going to write some words and you can see which words with the same spelling pattern will help you read them. Then, we are going to spell some words by deciding which words they rhyme with.”

Write two or three words that rhyme and have the same spelling pattern as the words in the pocket chart. Let the children underline the spelling pattern and put each word in the pocket chart under the other words with the same spelling pattern. Help the children use the rhyme to decode the words.

Finally, say two or three words that rhyme. The children decide what words they rhyme with and use the spelling pattern to spell them. Here are the *I Wish That I Had Duck Feet* words along with the new words read and spelled based on their rhymes and spelling patterns.

| | | | | | |
|------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| <u>why</u> | <u>brown</u> | <u>play</u> | <u>floor</u> | <u>don't</u> | <u>instead</u> |
| <u>dry</u> | <u>town</u> | <u>way</u> | <u>door</u> | <u>won't</u> | <u>head</u> |
| <u>sky</u> | <u>clown</u> | <u>tray</u> | <u>poor</u> | | <u>bread</u> |

Any book with lots of rhyming words—most of which have the same pattern—is a good candidate for a Rounding Up the Rhymes lesson. Because you will only round up the rhymes from part of the book, you can choose pages on which most of the rhymes have the same spelling pattern. You don't want to throw out more words than you keep! Many teachers tie this activity in with an author study of Dr. Seuss. Some of his other books that work particularly well are *In a People House*, *Ten Apples Up on Top* and *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*. Other great books for Rounding Up the Rhymes include:

Golden Bear, by Ruth Young (Scholastic, 1992)
How I Spent My Summer Vacation, by Mark Teague (Crown, 1995)
Inside, Outside Christmas, by Robin Spowart (Holiday House, 1998)
Penguins Climb, Penguins Rhyme, by Bruce McMillan (Harcourt Brace, 1995)
This Is the Pumpkin, by Abby Levine (Whitman, 1998)
Ten Little Dinosaurs, by Pattie Schnetzler (Accord, 1996)

MAKING WORDS

Making Words (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992) is an activity in which children are given some letters and use these letters to make words. They make little words and then bigger words until the final word is made. The final word—the secret word—always includes all the letters they have, and children are eager to figure out what the word is. After making words, they put the letter cards away, and the teacher leads them to sort the words into patterns. The final step is the transfer step, in which children use the rhyming patterns to decode and spell some new words. (The final step in Making Words is just like the final step in Rounding Up the Rhymes.)

Here is a sample Making Words lesson. The children have the vowels *a* and *i* and the consonants *c*, *h*, *n*, *p*, and *s*. In the pocket chart at the front of the room, the teacher has large cards with the same letters. Her cards, like the small letter cards used by the children, have the uppercase letter on one side and lowercase letter on the other side. The consonant letters are written in black and the two vowels are in red.

The teacher begins by making sure that each child has all the letters needed.

“What two vowels will we use to make words today?”

The children hold up their red *i* and *a* and respond appropriately.

The teacher has the children name the consonant letters, then writes a 3 on the board and says,

“Let’s begin with some 3-letter words. Take three letters and make *nap*. Everyone say *nap*.”

The children quickly spell *nap* in their holders, and one child who has it made correctly is tapped to go and spell *nap* with the pocket-chart letters. The teacher puts the index card with the word *nap* in the pocket chart. Next she says,

“Just change your vowel and you can change *nap* to *nip*. Everyone say *nip*. A little dog will nip at your shoes.”

The children make *nip* and then make four more 3-letter words: *sip*, *sap*, *pin*, and *pan*.

The teacher erases the 3 and writes a 4 on the board, then tells them to add just one letter to *pan* and they can make the word *span*. Because this word is unfamiliar to some children, the teacher explains that the part of a bridge that goes over the river is called the span. (If no connection can be made for this word, the teacher would just eliminate it from the lesson.)

“We say that the bridge spans the river. We also talk about how long an animal lives by calling it the life span. The average life span of a dog is about 12 years.”

Next they change one letter to change *span* to *spin*. At this point, the teacher says,

“Don’t take any letters out and don’t add any. Just change where the letters are and you can change *spin* into *snip*.”

They then make two more 4-letter words, *snap* and *pain*.

The teacher erases the 4 and writes a 5, and they use five of their letters to make the word *Spain*. The teacher ends the word-making part of the lesson as she always does by asking,

“Has anyone figured out the secret word—the word that can be made with all the letters? If you know, make that word in your holder and I will come and see what you have.”

The teacher walks around and finds two children who have figured out the secret word. “This was a hard secret word today,” she says as she sends both children to the pocket chart, and jointly they manipulate all the letters to make the big word. As they get almost to the end, the other children realize what the word is. They shout in amazement:

“It’s spinach!”

Several children make faces—presumably because spinach is not their favorite food—and then they all make *spinach* in their holders.

After all the children have *spinach* made in their holders, the teacher has them close their holders, and together they read all the words they have made, which are lined up in the pocket chart:

| | | |
|-----|------|---------|
| nap | span | Spain |
| nip | spin | spinach |
| sip | snip | |
| sap | snap | |
| pin | pain | |
| pan | | |

The children know that after making words, they sort these words into patterns and then use these words to read and spell other words. The patterns they sort for include beginning letters, endings (*s, ed, ing, er, est*), and rhyming words. Today’s lesson

includes only words that begin with *s*, *p*, *n*, *sp*, or *sn*. The teacher has them sort the words according to the beginning letters, which the children know are all the letters up to the vowel. The words sorted for beginning letters look like this:

| | | | | |
|-----|-----|------|---------|------|
| nap | sip | pan | span | snap |
| nip | sap | pin | spin | snip |
| | | pain | Spain | |
| | | | spinach | |

The teacher helps the children notice the beginning sounds and particularly the sound of *sp* and *sn* blended together at the beginning of words.

The next sort is for the rhyming words. The teacher asks:

“Who can come and find some rhyming words that will help us spell and read other words?”

Several children come up, and the words sorted into rhymes look like this:

| | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| nap | nip | pin | pan | pain |
| sap | sip | spin | span | Spain |
| snap | snip | | | |

When the rhymes are sorted out, the teacher writes on index cards a few new words such as flip and twin, which can be decoded based on these rhymes. The children put new words under the words with the same spelling pattern and use the pattern and the rhyme to figure out the words. Finally, the teacher reminds the children that thinking of rhymes can help them when they are writing too.

“What if you were writing and you wanted to write, *We set a trap to catch the mouse in our house*. How would you spell *trap*?”

The children decide that *trap* rhymes with *nap*, *sap*, and *snap* and will probably be spelled t-r-a-p. *Trap* is written on an index card and put with its rhyming counterparts. A similar procedure is used to decide that *brain* rhymes with *pain* and *Spain* and is probably spelled b-r-a-i-n. Here are the rhymes and transfer words in the pocket chart at the end of the lesson:

| | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| nap | nip | pin | pan | pain |
| sap | sip | spin | span | Spain |
| snap | snip | twin | | brain |
| trap | flip | | | |

One-Vowel Lessons

For the first several lessons, we use only one vowel. We make fewer words and have the children stretch out each word to develop their phonemic awareness.

Letters: a d h n s

Make: an and Dan has had sad sand hand hands

Sort for: s h -ad -an -and

Transfer Words: tan land mad glad

Letters: e d n p s

Make: Ed Ned den pen pens dens sped send spend

Sort for: d s p -en -ed -end

Transfer Words: ten fed bend sled

Letters: i l p s t

Make: is it sit pit tip sip lip slip spit split

Sort for: s -it -ip

Transfer Words: zip fit hit trip

Letters: o g n r s t

Make: go so no on Ron not rot rots song strong

Sort for: s r -o -on -ot -ong

Transfer Words: long hot lot trot

Letters: u b c r s

Make: us bus sub cub rub rubs cubs curb
curbs/scrub (2 secret words)

Sort for: c s r -us -ub

Transfer Words: tub Gus stub club

Steps in Planning a *Making Words* Lesson

1. Decide upon a “secret word” which can be made with all the letters. In choosing this word, consider child interest, the curriculum tie-ins you can make, and the letter/sound patterns to which you can draw children’s attention through the sorting at the end.
2. Make a list of other words that can be made from these letters.
3. From all the words you can make, pick 12–15 words using these criteria:
 - Words that you can sort for the pattern you want to emphasize.
 - Little words and big words so that the lesson is a multilevel lesson (Making the little words helps your struggling students; making the big words challenges your highest-achieving students).
 - “Abracadabra” words that can be made with the same letters in different places (side/dies) so children are reminded that, when words are spelled, the order of the letters is crucial.
 - A proper name or two to remind students to use capital letters.
 - Words that most students have in their listening vocabularies.

4. Write all the words on index cards and order them from shortest to longest.
5. Once you have the two-letter, three-letter, etc., words together, order them so you can emphasize letter patterns and show how changing the position of the letters, changing one letter, or adding one letter results in a different word.
6. Choose some letters or patterns by which to sort.
7. Choose four transfer words—uncommon words you can read and spell based on the rhyming words.
8. Store the cards in an envelope. On the envelope, write the words in order, the patterns for which you will sort, and the transfer words.

From *Month-by-Month Phonics for Third Grade*. (Cunningham & Hall, 1998)

Material appears courtesy of Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.

Unit-Connected Lessons

Many teachers pick the secret word from their science or social studies topics. Here are some lessons that go along with a science unit on energy.

Letters: e e i i c c l r t t y

Make: cry try ice rice city title elect cycle circle icicle
recycle tricycle electric electricity

Sort for: related words: electric, electricity; ice, icicle;
cycle, recycle, tricycle
words ending in le: title, cycle, circle, icicle, recycle,
tricycle

rhyiming words: cry, try; ice, rice

Transfer Words: reply twice spry slice

Letters: a e e i b r s t t

Make art/rat rate east beast/baste taste/state better
batter bitter rebate artist treaties batteries

Sort for: related words: art, artist
words in which y changed to i and added es:
batteries, treaties
rhyiming words: rate, state, rebate
east, beast; baste, taste

Transfer Words: debate least paste feast

Letters: a e i c g m n t

Make: eat act age cage came game tame/team magic
manic anemic eating acting magnet magnetic

Sort for: related words: act, acting; eat, eating;
magnet, magnetic
words ending in ic: magic, manic, anemic, magnetic
rhyiming words: age, cage
game, name, tame

Transfer Words: became stage shame rage

Lessons With “Cool” Secret Words

It is fun to teach some Making Words lessons in which the secret word is the name of a food, car, famous personality, or other “cool” word. Here are three lessons connected to some favorite foods.

Letters: e i c k n r s s

Make: in ski ice nice rice rink sink/skin sick rise

risen/rinse skier sicken Snickers

Sort for: related words: ski, skier; rise, risen; sick, sicken
rhyming words: in, skin
ice, nice, rice; rink, sink

Transfer Words: advise Berlin shrink price

Letters: e e i o c h r s

Make: is his rich hero echo core score shore chore cheer
sheer heroes echoes riches Cheerios

Sort for: related words: hero, heroes; echo, echoes; rich,
riches (es ending)
rhyming words core, score, shore, chore
cheer, sheer; is, his

Transfer Words: reindeer adore restore steer

Letters: e e l r p s t z

Make: set pet pets/step/pest rest zest steep sleep slept
reset spree pester seltzer pretzels

Sort for: related words: set reset; pest, pester; sleep, slept
rhyming words: set, pet, reset
pest, rest, zest
steep, sleep

Transfer Words: request invest upset jeep

Steps in Teaching a Making Words Lesson

1. Place the large letter cards needed in a pocket chart or along the chalk tray.
2. Have children pass out letters or pick up the letters needed.
3. Hold up and name the letters on the large letter cards and have the children hold up their matching small letter cards.

4. Write the number 2 (or 3 if there are no two-letter words in this lesson) on the board. Tell them to take two letters and make the first word. Have them say the word after you, stretching out the word to hear all the sounds.
5. Have a child who has the first word made correctly make the same word with the large letter cards on the chalk tray or pocket chart. Do not wait for everyone to make the word before sending someone to make the word with the big letters. Encourage anyone who didn't make the word correctly at first to fix the word when they see it made correctly.
6. Continue to make words, giving students clues such as "Change just the first letter" or "Move the same letters around and you can make a different word" or "Take all your letters out and make another word." Send a child who has the word made correctly to make that word with large letter cards. Cue them when they need to use more letters by changing the number on the board to indicate the number of letters needed.
7. Before telling them the last word, ask, "Has anyone figured out the secret word we can make with all our letters?" If so, congratulate them and have them make it. If not, say something like, "I love it when I can stump you." Give them clues to help them figure out the big word.
8. Once all the words have been made, take the index cards on which you wrote the words and place them one at a time (in the order made) in the pocket chart or along the chalk tray. Have the children say and spell the words with you as you do this. Use these words for sorting and pointing out patterns. Pick a word and point out a particular spelling pattern—beginning letters, endings, related words, and rhymes. Ask children to find the others with that same pattern. Line these words up so that the pattern is visible.
9. To encourage transfer to reading and writing, show students how rhyming words can help them decode and spell other words. Write two words on index cards and have students put these two new words with the rhyming words and use the rhyming words to decode them. Finally, say two words that rhyme, and have students spell these words by deciding which words they rhyme with.

10. If you like, give them a take-home sheet with the same letters across the top (alphabetical order, vowels then consonants, so as not to reveal the secret word to parents). Have the children write capitals on the back, cut the letters apart, and make words to fill the boxes, including words made in class and others they can think of. Here is a sample for a lesson in which the secret word is Michael.



From *The Teachers Guide to the Four Blocks* (Cunningham, Hall, & Sigman, 1999) Material appears courtesy of Carson-Dellosa Publishing Company, Inc.

USING WORDS YOU KNOW

Another activity that helps children learn patterns and how patterns help you read and write is called Using Words You Know. To plan a Using Words You Know lesson, we pick three or four words that our children can read and spell and that have many rhyming words spelled the same way. While about half the word-wall words are irregular words

such as *they*, *was*, and *have*, other words follow the expected pattern. Many teachers put a star on those word-wall words such as *big*, *play*, *not*, *make*, *ride* and *thing* that help you spell lots of other words and use these in a Using Words You Know activity. Recently we have begun using some well-known brand names that have lots of rhyming words. We bring in packages with the product names and then use those names as the known words. Children are highly motivated by these products and are fascinated to see how many other words these products can help them read and spell. Here is a sample lesson using ice cream and Cool Whip.

We begin the lesson by displaying the products and letting children talk a little about them. Next we draw their attention to the names and tell them that these names will help them spell and read a lot of other words. Using the board, chart, or overhead, we make columns and head each with one of the key words, underlining the spelling pattern. The students do the same on a sheet of paper. At the beginning of the lesson, their papers look like this:

ice cream cool whip

We then show them words that rhyme with *ice*, *cream*, *cool*, or *whip*. We do not say these words and do not allow them to say the words but rather have them write them in the column with the same spelling pattern. We send one child to write the word on the chart, board, or overhead. When everyone has the word written under the word that will help them read it, we have them say the known word and the rhyming word. We help them to verbalize the strategy they are using by saying something like,

“If c-r-e-a-m is *cream*, d-r-e-a-m must be *dream*. If c-o-o-l is cool, d-r-o-o-l is *drool*.”

After showing them 8–10 words and having them use the known word to decode them, we help them practice using known words to spell unknown words. To help them spell, we can’t show them a word. Rather, we say a word, such as “twice,” and have them say

the word and write it under the word that it rhymes with. Again, we help them verbalize their strategy by leading them to explain,

“If *ice* is spelled i-c-e, *twice* is probably spelled t-w-i-c-e. If *whip* is spelled w-h-i-p, *strip* is probably spelled s-t-r-i-p.”

Here are what the children’s sheets might look like when all the one-syllable rhyming words have been added:

| | | | |
|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| <u>ice</u> | <u>cream</u> | <u>cool</u> | <u>whip</u> |
| nice | dream | drool | tip |
| mice | stream | pool | skip |
| slice | scream | fool | trip |
| twice | gleam | spool | strip |
| dice | beam | stool | clip |

To make the lesson a bit more multilevel and show children that decoding and spelling based on rhyming words works for bigger words too, we would end the lesson by showing them a few longer words and having them write them under the rhymes and use the rhymes to decode them. Finally, we would say a few longer words, help them with the spelling of the first syllables, and have them use the rhyme to spell the last syllable. Here is what their papers would look like with some added longer words:

| | | | |
|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| <u>ice</u> | <u>cream</u> | <u>cool</u> | <u>whip</u> |
| nice | dream | drool | tip |
| mice | stream | pool | skip |
| slice | scream | fool | trip |
| twice | gleam | spool | strip |
| dice | beam | stool | clip |
| sacrifice | mainstream | whirlpool | equip |
| device | downstream | preschool | spaceship |

It is very important for Using Words You Know lessons (and the transfer step of Rounding Up the Rhymes and Making Words lessons) that you choose the rhyming words for them to read and spell rather than ask them for rhyming words. In English, there are often two spelling patterns for the same rhyme. If you ask them what rhymes with *cream*, or *cool*, they may come up with words with the e-e-m pattern such as *seem* and words with the u-l-e pattern such as *rule*. The fact that there are two common patterns for many rhymes does not hinder us while reading. When we see the word *drool*, our brain thinks of other o-o-l words such as *cool* and *school*. We make this new word *drool* rhyme with *cool* and *school* and then check out this pronunciation with the meaning of whatever we are reading. If we were going to write the word *drool* for the first time, we wouldn't know for sure which spelling pattern to use, and we might think of the rhyming word *rule* and use that pattern. Spelling requires both a sense of word patterns and a visual checking sense. When you write a word and then think, "That doesn't look right!" and then write it using a different pattern, you are demonstrating that you have developed a visual checking sense. Once children become good at spelling by pattern—rather than putting down one letter for each sound, we help them develop their visual checking sense through two activities: Reading/Writing Rhymes and What Looks Right? During Using Words You Know lessons, we are trying to get them to spell based on pattern, and we "finesse" the problem of two patterns by choosing the words we present to them.

Using Words You Know lessons are easy to plan if you use a good rhyming dictionary. We use the *Scholastic Rhyming Dictionary* (Young, 1994). Children enjoy Using Words You Know, especially if the words you use are popular products such as *Coke*, *Crest*, *Tang*, and *Cat Chow*.

Steps in Teaching a Using Words You Know Lesson

1. Display and talk about the words they know.
2. Make as many columns as needed on the board and on student papers. Head these with the known word and underline the spelling pattern.

3. Show one-syllable words written on index cards. Have them write them under the word with the same pattern and use the rhyme to pronounce the words.
4. Say one-syllable words and have them decide how to spell them by deciding which word they rhyme with.
5. Repeat the above procedure with longer words.
6. Help students explain how words they know help them read and spell lots of other words, including longer words.

Here are some sample lessons using popular products and places.

Products: Bold Shout Cheer

One-syllable words to read: sold, scout, told, deer, mold, shout,
clout, trout, peer, steer.

One-syllable words to spell: gold, pout spout, sprout, jeer, sneer,
cold, scold, stout, fold

Longer words to read: checkout, reindeer, blackout, blindfold, scaffold
knockout, uphold, dropout, engineer.

Longer words to spell: cookout, without, household, handout,
unfold, fallout, withhold, pioneer, volunteer.

Products: Kit Kat Gold Fish

One-syllable words to read: spit, split, that, grit, flat, dish, bold, spat,
mold, rat

One-syllable words to spell: slit, old, hold, wish, swish, quit, chat,
hat, hit, brat

Longer words to read: admit, profit, misfit, wildcat, credit, democrat,
selfish, unselfish, acrobat, blindfold

Longer words to spell: permit, visit, combat, outfit, nonfat, catfish,
Starfish, billfold, doormat

Products: Kool Aid Pop Corn

One-syllable words to read: horn, cop, raid, worn, drop, maid, prop,
fool, shop, born

One-syllable words to spell: torn, flop, braid, scorn, crop, thorn, tool, stool,
paid, chop

Longer words to read: mermaid, lollipop, unicorn, stillborn, workshop,
bridesmaid, prepaid, toadstool

Longer words to spell: newborn, unpaid, raindrop, gumdrop, acorn, afraid,
nonstop, stepstool

Places: Taco Bell Burger King Pizza Hut

One-syllable words to read: fell, part, shut, bring, yell, sting, string,
shell, sell, rut, quell, fling

One-syllable words to spell: ring, spring, swell, wing, swing, smell,
strut, glut, spell, well

Longer words to read: haircut, misspell, firststring, darling, inning,
peanut, dumbbell

longer words to spell: retell, shortcut, seashell, something, hamstring,
upswing, undercut

WORD SORTING AND HUNTING

Word Sorts (Henderson, 1990) have long been advocated as an activity to help children know what to attend to, and to develop the habit of analyzing words to look for patterns. There are a variety of ways to do Word Sorts, but the basic principles are the same. Children look at words and sort them into categories based on spelling patterns and sounds. Children say the words and look at how they are spelled. They learn that to go in a certain category, the words must “sound the same and look the same.” After sorting words chosen by the teacher, children hunt for other words in books, magazines, and other print around them and then sort these additional words for the patterns as well. In word hunts, teachers help students identify the patterns and then direct children to locate those patterns as they occur naturally in other print sources.

In many classes, different groups of children are working on different levels of sorts. Many teachers do a directed sorting lesson with a group of children first, and then the children continue sorting and hunting in their groups or in partner formats. Here is one example of how one teacher manages several different levels of spellers using a variety of sorting formats.

The teacher is meeting with a group of children who need to work with the various spellings of the vowel *a*. She has divided a transparency into four columns, and the children have all divided their papers into four columns. The teacher heads each column with a vowel pattern and a word that children know that has that pattern. The children set up their columns just like those on the transparency. Question marks are put in the last column to indicate the place to put other words with *a* that don't fit in the first three columns.

| | | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| a | ai | a-e | ??? |
| <u>cat</u> | <u>rain</u> | <u>make</u> | <u>are</u> |

As children write each word, the teacher helps them focus on the sound of the *a* and the spelling. *Cat* has just an *a* and the *a* says *a* like in *apple*. *Rain* has an *ai* and is pronounced like *ape*. *Make* is spelled with an *a*, a consonant letter, and an *e*, and the *a* is also pronounced like *ape*. *Are* looks like *make* but does not sound like *make*, so it heads the ??? column. The teacher then shows children words with *a* and has them read each word and decide which column it goes in. To go in a column, it must both look the same and sound the same. The first four words the children see and pronounce are: *map*, *name*, *paid*, and *pad*. The children pronounce them, stretching out the sound of the vowel, and write them in the appropriate column, and the teacher writes them in the column on the transparency:

| | | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| a | ai | a-e | ??? |
| <u>cat</u> | <u>rain</u> | <u>make</u> | <u>are</u> |

| | | |
|-----|------|------|
| map | paid | name |
| pad | | |

The next word is *have*. The children want to immediately write it under *make*, but the teacher has them stretch it out, and they decide that it looks like *make* but sounds like *cat*. It has to go into the ??? column. The teacher continues showing them words containing the letter *a*, which they pronounce and then write in the correct column. They have some trouble with *taste* because there are two consonants between the vowels, but the teacher explains that the pattern is *a* and one or more consonants and the *e*, and they decide it can go with *make*. They decide that *saw* and *park* have to go in the ??? column along with *was*. Here is what their papers and the transparency look like when 15 words have been sorted.

| | | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| a | ai | a-e | ??? |
| <u>cat</u> | <u>rain</u> | <u>make</u> | <u>are</u> |
| map | paid | name | have |
| pad | wait | taste | saw |
| fast | brain | rate | park |
| jazz | | safe | was |

On the following day, this group works by themselves. One member of the group is the leader and gets to “play teacher”. He shows each word (on index cards prepared by the teacher), has the group pronounce the word, and then writes it on the transparency after the group members have written it on their sheets. If there is disagreement on which column a word should go in, the leader does not write it anywhere but puts it aside to ask the teacher about when the teacher returns to check their work. At the end of this second day, their papers and the transparency look like this:

| | | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| a | ai | a-e | ??? |
| <u>cat</u> | <u>rain</u> | <u>make</u> | <u>are</u> |
| map | paid | name | have |

| | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|------|
| pad | wait | taste | saw |
| fast | brain | rate | park |
| jazz | jail | safe | was |
| lamp | main | crane | Paul |
| crash | fail | date | want |
| brag | bait | case | |
| pant | drain | place | |

Meanwhile, on the second day, while this group is working on their own with “play teacher,” the real teacher is doing a Word Sort introduction with a group of children who are working with spelling changes when s is added to words. This group’s papers and transparency have these three columns:

| | | |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| s | es | ies |
| <u>cats</u> | <u>churches</u> | <u>babies</u> |

Working with this group, the teacher shows them words, which they pronounce and then write in the appropriate column. At the end of the first day, their columns look like this:

| | | |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|
| s | es | ies |
| <u>cats</u> | <u>churches</u> | <u>babies</u> |
| animals | boxes | ladies |
| whales | lunches | puppies |
| crabs | branches | berries |
| cameras | ashes | parties |
| cars | taxes | countries |

The only word that is difficult for this group is *whales*. Some children think it should go in the “es” column because it ends with *es*, but they decide that what you are focusing on was what was added, and since the word *whale* ends in *e*, only the *s* was added.

On the next day, the group working with *a* works with partners to find more words with *a* for their group to sort on the fourth day. Each set of partners is given 10 index cards and told to find “10 terrific words with *a*.” They write the word they find in big letters on one side of the card, and then, on the other side, they print the key word (in teeny letters) to show what column they think it goes in. Meanwhile, the *s*, *es*, *ies*, group is doing their “play teacher day,” and the real teacher is doing a sort introduction with another group of students who are sorting words with vowels followed by *r* into these columns:

| | | | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ar | or | er | ir | ur | ?? |
| <u>car</u> | <u>for</u> | <u>her</u> | <u>bird</u> | <u>curl</u> | <u>work</u> |

After sorting with the teacher today, this group will work in a “play teacher” group on the second day, and then work with partners on the third day to find “ten terrific words” and write them on index cards for their group to sort on the fourth day.

Children in every grade are at all different levels in their spelling abilities. Teachers who are good “kid watchers” look at how children spell words in their first-draft writing to decide what spelling patterns children are ready to learn. The arrangement just described shows how teachers might work children on a number of different spelling levels. In this classroom, the procedure for each group was:

Day 1. Teacher-directed introduction of a new sort.

Day 2. Group continues to sort words created by teacher under the direction of a “play teacher.”

Day 3. Partners work together to find 10 terrific words for their group to sort tomorrow. Teacher checks their cards before their group convenes again.

Day 4. Group convenes and each partnership gets to “play teacher” by presenting their 10 terrific words to the group to be written in the correct columns.

Day 5. Children in group hunt for more words or choose words they really like for each pattern and copy them into a page in their spelling notebook, putting words in the correct columns.

Word sorting and hunting are wonderful activities to develop spelling and decoding skills because children are actively involved in discovering “how words work.” Many teachers post charts with the categories the class has worked on, and children are encouraged to add words that fit the pattern any time they find them in anything they are reading. Some children keep word notebooks and add words they find that fit particular categories as they find them throughout the year. In classrooms in which word sorting and hunting are regular activities, children love meeting a “new word” and thinking about where it might fit in all the various categories they have worked on. Most children love collecting things—word sorting and hunting encourage word collecting! The best source for information about word sorting and hunting is *Words Their Way* (1996) by Donald Bear, Marcia Invernizzi, Shane Templeton, and Francine Johnston.

READING/WRITING RHYMES

Reading/Writing Rhymes is another activity that helps students learn to use patterns to decode and spell hundreds of words. In addition, all beginning letters (onsets) are reviewed every time you do a Reading/Writing Rhymes lesson. Once all the rhyming words are generated on a chart, students write rhymes using these words and then read each other’s rhymes. Because writing and reading are connected to every lesson, students learn how to use these patterns as they actually read and write. Here is how we do Reading/Writing Rhymes lessons.

You will need an onset deck containing cards for all the beginning sounds. The cards, 3X5 index cards, are laminated and have the single letter consonants written in blue, the blends in red, and the digraphs and other two-letter combinations in green. On one side of each card, the first letter of the onset is a capital letter. The onset deck contains 50 beginning letter cards including:

Single consonants: b c d f g h j k l m n p r s t v w y z

Digraphs (two letters, one sound): sh ch wh th

Other two-letter, one-sound combinations: ph wr kn qu

Blends (beginning letters blended together, sometimes called clusters):

bl br cl cr dr fl fr gl gr pl pr sc scr sk sl sm sn sp spr st str sw tr

At the beginning of the lesson, we distribute all the onset cards to the students.

Depending on your class, you can distribute them to individual children or to teams of two or three children. Once all the onset cards are distributed, we write the spelling pattern we are working with 10–12 times on a piece of chart paper. As we write it each time, we have the children help spell it and pronounce it.

Next, we invited children who have a card that they think makes a word to come up and place their card next to one of the written spelling patterns and pronounce the word. If the word is indeed a real word, we use the word in a sentence and write that word on the chart. If the word is not a real word, we explain why we cannot write it on the chart. (If a word is a real word and does rhyme but has a different spelling pattern, such as *bread* to rhyme with *ed*, we explain that it rhymes but has a different pattern and include it on the bottom of the chart with an asterisk next to it.) We write names with capital letters, and if a word can be a name and not a name, such as Jack and jack, we write it both ways.

When all the children who think they can spell words with their beginning letters and the spelling pattern have come up, we call children up to make words not yet there by saying something like,

“I think the person with the *sp* card could come up here and add *sp* to *ed* to make a word we know.”

We try to include all the words that any of our children would have in their listening vocabulary but we avoid obscure words. If the patterns we wrote to begin our chart get made into complete words, we add as many more as needed. Finally, if we can think of

some good longer words that rhyme and have that spelling pattern, we add them to the list. (We spell and write the whole word here, since children do not have the extra letters needed to spell it.)

| |
|-----------|
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |
| ed |

Chart for *ed* spelling pattern as lesson begins.

Once the chart of rhyming words is written, we work together in shared writing format to write a couple of sentences using lots of rhyming words. Next the students write rhymes. Many teachers put the children in teams to write these rhymes and then let them read their rhymes to the class.

You can use the Reading/Writing Rhymes format to teach any of the common vowel patterns. If you are using a basal reader or curriculum guide that specifies an order in which the vowel sounds will be taught and tested, let that order determine the order in which you make charts for Reading/Writing Rhymes. Just as for Using Words You Know, we use a rhyming dictionary as our source for the rhyming words. We pick the patterns that have the most rhyming examples. (Some patterns will generate some “bad” words. You can either not distribute the beginning letters that would make those words,

or tell children that there are some words that could be made which “we never use in school” so we won’t include them. And you don’t need anyone to tell you what they are!)

Zack, Mack and Jack went
inside for a snack. Jack and
Mack^{were} trying to lean over the crack
with out falling on their back.
Jack sat out back in the black
stack looking in a crack for
a snack. The geese^{sat} on a crack
out back then we came back and
saw the geese leave and the track
was black.

Nathan and Edward’s piece. Here is what two struggling readers wrote after helping the teacher create the chart of *ack* words. They took turns writing sentences—you can see the different handwriting. Notice also that almost all the other words are spelled correctly—a result of diligent daily word-wall practice, including one-the-back activities with endings and rhymes.

The next most common sounds vowels have are sometimes called the “long “ sounds. Some children find it easier to figure out these long vowel words because you can actually hear the vowel “saying its name.” Again, we don’t want to confuse children by placing too much emphasis on the terminology or the rules. Rather, we want them to

notice the pattern. The easiest and most consistent long vowel spelling for *a* is the a-y pattern, so we would begin with that one, using the same procedure of handing out all 50 beginning letter cards and inviting children who have letters they think will make real words to come up and place their cards next to the *ay* and say the word and put it in a sentence. When they have not noticed that their letters will make a word, we clue them by saying something like,

“I think the person who has the *br* could come up here and spell the word that is the sound a donkey makes.”

Just as we did for short vowels, we add longer *ay* words that rhyme at the end, along with any common rhyming words with a different spelling pattern. The children are always amazed at how many wonderful rhyming words there are on the *ay* chart and eagerly write lots of silly rhymes.

| <u>ay</u> | |
|-----------|-----------|
| day | today |
| say | Monday |
| way | Tuesday |
| play | Wednesday |
| lay | Thursday |
| bay | Saturday |
| Hay | Saturday |
| may | Sunday |
| May | birthday |
| stay | away |
| stray | highway |
| clay | x-ray |
| gray | yesterday |
| pray | holiday |
| pay | faraway |

| | |
|--------------|----------------|
| way | subway |
| tray | *sleigh |
| Ray | *weigh |
| ray | *hey |
| sway | *they |
| slay | *ballet |
| bray | |
| spray | |

They ay chart. The asterisk indicates words that rhyme but have different spelling pattern.

The second most common way of spelling the long vowel sound is to have an *a* followed by a consonant or two and then a silent *e*. A good way to introduce this is with the *ake* pattern because it has many appealing rhyming words. The other common combination for the long *a* sound is *a-i*. Many rhyming words can be spelled with *a-i* or *a-e*. The fact that there are two common patterns is not a problem when reading. Students quickly learn that both *a-i* and *a-e* often have the long *a* sound. When spelling a word, however, there is no way to know which one is the correct spelling unless you recognize it as a word you know after writing it. This is why we often write a word and then think, “That doesn’t look right, and then try writing it with the other pattern to see if that looks right. When we write rhymes that have two common spelling patterns, we write both patterns on the same chart. Students come up and tell us the word their beginning letters will make, and we write it with the correct pattern. In many cases, there are two homophones, words that are spelled differently and have different meaning but the same pronunciation. We write both of these and talk about what each one means. Artistic teachers draw a little picture next to one of these so that students can tell them apart.

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <u>ail</u> | <u>ale</u> |
| sail | sale |
| tail | tale |

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| trail | whale |
| snail | Dale |
| Gail | gale |
| hail | Yale |
| bail | stale |
| Fail | scale |
| mail | male |
| frail | |
| pail | pale |
| wail | female |
| rail | tattletale |
| quail | wholesale |
| nail | |
| detail | |
| monorail | |
| toenail | |
| cottontail | |

Here is the chart for all the *ail* and *ale* long-vowel spelling patterns.

Here are the vowel patterns that are common enough to merit teaching and make good Reading/Writing Rhymes lessons:

For the short vowels, the most common rhyming patterns are:

ack ad am ap ash at an and

ed et est ell en

ick id ip ill it in

op ot ock ob

uck ug ump unk unch

Here are the long-vowel combinations that have the most examples:

ay ake ail ale ain ane aid ade ait ate

eat eet eal eel ea deed

ice ide ine it eight
old o oe ow (show) oke oak ote oat oan one ute oot

Some people consider the *ank, ang, ink, ing*, patterns long vowels, and some people consider them short vowels. In many dialects, they are somewhere in between. In any case, they are common enough so that children should learn them.

ank ang ink ing

The r-vowel patterns are:

ar ark art
are (care) air ear (near) ear eer
ert irt urt irl url urn ern earn
orn ort ore oar

The vowel *a* has special sounds when it is followed by *l, w, or u*:

aw all awl aul

O is the vowel with the most different sounds:

Ook ood oom ool
Oy oil out ow (how) ew ue oo (too)

All the common vowel patterns can be taught through Reading/Writing Rhymes. We always choose the patterns that will generate the most rhymes, and when there is more than one common spelling for a rhyme, we include both, or in some cases all three spelling patterns.

WHAT LOOKS RIGHT?

What Looks Right? Is an activity through which children learn that good spelling requires visual memory and how to use their visual memory for words along with a dictionary to determine the correct spelling of a word. In English, words that have the same spelling pattern usually rhyme. If you are reading and you come to the unknown words *plight* and *trite*, you can easily figure out their pronunciation by accessing the pronunciation associated with other *ight* or *ite* words you can read and spell. The fact that there are two common spelling patterns with the same pronunciation is not a problem when you are trying to read an unfamiliar-in-print word, but it is a problem when you are trying to spell it. If you were writing and trying to spell *trite* or *plight*, they could easily be spelled t-r-i-g-h-t and -p-l-i-t-e. The only way to know which is the correct spelling is to write it one way and see if it “looks right” or check your probable spelling in a dictionary. What Looks Right? Is an activity to help children learn how to use these two important self-monitoring spelling strategies.

Here is a sample lesson for the *oat-ote* pattern. Using an overhead projector or the board, create two columns and head each with an *oat-ote* word most of your children can both read and spell. Have the children set up two columns on their paper to match your model:

coat

vote

Have the children pronounce and spell the words, and lead them to realize that the words rhyme but have a different spelling pattern. Tell them that there are many words that rhyme with *coat* and *vote* and that you can't tell just by saying the words which spelling patterns they will have. Next say a word that rhymes with *coat* and *vote*, and write it both ways, saying, “If the words is spelled like *coat*, it will be g-o-a-t. If it is spelled like *vote*, it will be g-o-t-e.” Write these two possible spellings under the appropriate word.

Tell the children to decide which one “looks right” to them and to write only the one they think is correct. As soon as each child decides which one looks right and writes it in the correct column, have each child use the dictionary to see if that spelling can be found. If

the child cannot find the one that looked right, then have them look up the other possible spelling. Cross out the spelling you wrote that is not correct and continue with some more examples. For each word, again mention, “If it is spelled like *coat*, it will be g-o-a-t, but if it is spelled like *vote*, it will be g-o-t-e.” Write the word both ways, and have each child write it the way it looks right and then look in the dictionary to see if the word is spelled the way the child thought.

Here is what your columns of words would look like after several examples:

| | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| <u>coat</u> | <u>vote</u> |
| goat | gote |
| boat | bote |
| float | flote |
| noat | note |
| quoat | quote |
| throat | throte |
| bloat | blote |

To make your lesson more multileveled, include some longer words in which the last syllable rhymes with *coat* and *vote*. Proceed just as before to write the word both ways and have children choose the one that looks right, write the word, and look for it in the dictionary. For the *coat-vote* lesson, here are three longer words you might use:

| | |
|--------------------|---------|
| promoat | promote |
| devoat | devote |
| remoat | remote |

Here is a lesson for the *ait-ate* pattern. Notice that several of these pairs are both words. Children should find both *gate/gait* and *plate/plait*. This is an excellent time to talk about homophones and how the dictionary can help you decide which word to use. Also notice

the words written at the bottom. Whenever we think of common words such as *great*, *eight*, *weight*, and *straight* that don't follow the pattern, we point these out to children, explaining that most—but not all—words that rhyme with *date* and *wait* are spelled a-t-e or a-i-t.

What Looks right? Is a versatile strategy and can be used to help children become better spellers of longer words. Here are two lessons for the *tion/sion* and *le/el/al* patterns.

While you are working with all these rhyming words is a wonderful time to have your children write some poetry. Select a poem or two your children will like, and read it to them several times. Then have them decide which words rhyme and whether or not the rhyming words have the same spelling patterns. Using these poems as models and the rhyming words you have collected as part of your spelling pattern lessons, students can write some interesting rhyming poetry.

| | |
|------------------|----------------------|
| <u>date</u> | <u>wait</u> |
| bate | bait |
| fate | fait |
| hate | hait |
| skate | skait |
| gate | gait |
| plate | plait |
| state | stait |
| rebate | rebat |
| debate | debat |
| donate | donait |
| hibernate | hibernait |
| **straight eight | weight great |
| <u>motion</u> | <u>pension</u> |
| action | aesion |
| station | stasion |

| | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| mantion | mansion |
| mention | mension |
| lotion | losion |
| nation | nasion |
| tention | tension |
| attention | attension |
| extention | extension |
| divition | division |
| multiplication | multiplieasion |
| televition | television |
| vacation | vacasion |
| collition | collision |

| | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|
| <u>people</u> | <u>model</u> | <u>animal</u> |
| travle | travel | traval |
| little | littel | littal |
| channle | channel | channaal |
| loele | loeel | local |
| equle | equal | equal |
| loyle | loyel | loyal |
| settle | settel | settal |
| poodle | poodel | poodal |
| bubble | bubbel | bubbal |
| tunnle | tunnel | tunnaal |
| normle | normel | normal |
| generle | generel | general |
| possible | possibel | possibal |
| invisible | invisibel | invisibal |
| principle | princeipel | principal |

COACHING FOR STRATEGIC DECODING AND SPELLING

A basic principle of *Phonics They Use* is that the work we do with words is only useful and worthwhile if children actually use what they know while reading and writing. In all word activities, we stress transfer to reading and writing. In Guess the Covered Word activities, we emphasize helping children verbalize how using meaning, all the beginning letters, and word length helps you make a very good guess. By ending each and every Making Words and Rounding Up the Rhymes lesson with a few transfer words that the rhyming words will help them read and spell, we are constantly reminding children how and when to use their word strategies. Children write using words used in Reading and Writing Rhymes and What Looks Right? lessons.

In spite of all this concerted effort, there are some obstinate children who "just don't get it!" They participate and seem to understand our word activities, but when they read and write, they don't use what they know. There are two ways to help children use more of what they know.

Coaching During Writing Conferences

Writing conferences provide an opportunity to coach children to use what we know they have learned about spelling. When we publish a book or prepare pieces for display on the bulletin board, we help children to spell the words correctly so that other people can read what they wrote. There are many words that children use in their writing which they can't be expected to know how to spell. When we are conferencing with them, we may simply acknowledge the good efforts shown in their attempts at spellings and then write the correct spelling. But at other times, we use the editing conference as the teachable moment to nudge them forward in their use of spelling patterns. Imagine that you are editing with a child, and the child has written the word *trade* as *trd*. Ask that child:

"Where's your vowel? Every word needs at least one vowel. Remember in Making Words we always use at least one red letter in every word. Stretch out the words *trade* and listen for the vowel you hear."

The child will probably hear the *a*. Then help him decide where to put it. Add the *e* on the end and tell him that you can't hear the *e* but if you say *trade* slowly, you can hear the *a*, and that when he is trying to spell a word to remember that every word needs at least one vowel.

Now imagine that another child comes to you with trade spelled *trad*. You might say something like:

“That was a good try on *trade*. You wrote down every sound you heard. But let's look at the spelling pattern a-d. We know some a-d words. B-a-d- spells *bad*; m-a-d spells *mad*; d-a-d spells *dad*. Can you think of a word that rhymes with *trade* and use that spelling pattern?”

If *made* is on the word wall, the child will probably realize that *trade* should be spelled with the same pattern. It is also possible (but not likely) that he will think of *paid* and want to spelled *trade* t-r-a-i-d. In this case, point out that *trade* does rhyme with *paid* and could be spelled like *paid*, but point out the other pattern in words like *made* and *grade*.

Writing conferences are a great opportunity to individualize what we teach children. For some children, we just praise the invented spelling efforts and fix the spelling. For other children we use the opportunity to point out things about letters, sounds, and spelling patterns that they know when doing words but are not applying as they are writing.

Coaching During Reading

To coach children to use what they know while reading, we do some short (8–10 minutes) individual or very small group coaching sessions in which we lead them through the steps at the exact moment they need to use them. We use text that they haven't read before and that is going to contain some words they need to figure out. Having text at instructional level (5-10 errors per 100 words) is ideal. Explain to the children that the

book will have words they haven't learned yet and that the purpose of these lessons is to practice how good readers figure out words they don't know. Have a child begin reading, and when the child comes to an unknown word and stops, say:

“Put your finger on the word and say all the letters.”

Good readers look at all the letters in each word. Children who are struggling with reading tend to look quickly at the word, and if they don't instantly recognize it, they stop and wait for someone to tell them the word. Asking them to say all the letters forces them to look at all the letters. (Note, we are not giving the sounds of letters but rather naming the letters.) Sometimes, after saying all the letters, they correctly pronounce the word! This is proof that they aren't in the habit of looking at all the letters, and you should let them know what they have done by saying something like:

“That's right. There are lots of words we see when we are reading that we don't recognize right away, but when we look at all the letters, we can sometimes figure them out. Good job! Continue reading.”

If, after saying the letters, the child does not say the word, you should say:

“Keep your finger on that word and finish the sentence.”

It may seem foolish to have the child keep his or her finger there, but young children's print-tracking skills are not nearly as good as ours. Many children can't use the context of the sentence and the letters in the unknown word to figure out a word because once they get to the end of the sentence, they can't quickly look back and find the troublesome word. Keeping one finger on the word allows the child to quickly track back. If, after finishing the sentence, the child correctly pronounces the word, say something like:

“Right. You can figure out lots of words you don't know if you use your finger to keep track of where the word is, finish the sentence, and then do like we do in

Guess the Covered Word and guess a word that makes sense, begins with all the right letters, and is the right length. Continue reading.”

If the child still does not get the word, you have three possible cues to point out. If there is a good picture clue (which the child has ignored), you could say,

“What animal do you see in the picture that begins with *l*?”

If the troublesome word can be decoded based on one of the patterns on the word wall or used frequently during other word activities, you could say,

“Let’s see. The word is spelled s-t-r-i-n-g. We know that t-h-i-n-g spells *thing*. Can you make this word rhyme with *thing*?”

If there is nothing in the picture to help, and the word is not easily decodable based on a familiar rhyming word, you can give an explicit context clue. Imagine that the troublesome word is *place* in the sentence:

Clifford wanted to go to a far away place.

You could say:

“Where do you think Clifford might want to go that begins with p-l?”

If the child gets the word after you give the most appropriate cue, be sure to tell the child what he or she did.

“Right. Lots of times there is something in the picture that matches a word we don’t know, and if we use the picture and the letters and making sense, we can figure out the word.”

Or:

“Right. You can use words that rhyme with words you know to help you figure out lots of words, just the way we do on the back of our word-wall paper and when we figure out new words at the end of Making Words or Rounding Up the Rhymes.”

Or:

“Right. When you thought about where Clifford might go and the sounds for the letters p-l, *place* was a word with all the beginning letters that made sense.”

The tactics described so far will result in the reader figuring out an unknown word about 90 percent of the time. But there is always a word that they still don't get, and if we tell them the word, we are reinforcing their “wait and she will tell me eventually” decoding strategy. We never tell them the word, but finally when all else has failed, we will give them a choice from which they can't fail to get the word. Imagine that the word is *ridiculous* in the sentence:

That is a ridiculous hat.

We say to the child:

“Well, let's see. Do you think it says ‘That is a ripe hat’ or ‘that is a ridiculous hat’?”

We make our alternative begin with the correct letters but be so unmeaningful that the child will make the right choice. We then say:

“Good. That was a hard word but you got it! Let's continue reading.”

Explaining this in writing makes it sound much longer and more complicated than it actually is. When we are coaching a child to learn to use what he or she knows (but isn't using), we choose text in which the child is going to come to an unknown word every second or third sentence. When the child stops at a word, we go through the following steps:

1. Put your finger on the word and say all the letters.
2. Keep your finger there and finish the sentence.
3. What do you see in the picture that starts with ___?
Or: Let's see the word is spelled ____. We can spell ____.
Can you make this rhyme with ____?
Or: Where do you think Clifford would go that starts with ___?
4. Finally, if the cueing fails: "Let's see do you think it says "That is a ridiculous hat or that is a ripe hat?"

When the child gets the word after any of our cueing, we congratulate the child and point out what strategy the child used that helped him or her figure out the word. If the child miscalls a word (instead of the usual struggling reader strategy of stopping on the word and waiting to be told), we wait for the child to finish the sentence. Then we repeat the sentence as the child read it, point out that it didn't make sense, and then take the child through as many steps as necessary.

Most children do not need the kind of one-on-one or very small group coaching described here, but for those who do, short coaching sessions held a few times each week make a world of difference in their ability to use what they know when they need to use it.

HOW ALL THESE ACTIVITIES ARE MULTILEVEL

All the activities in this chapter have "something for everyone." Regardless of where your students are in their phonics and spelling abilities, there are things they can learn from each lesson format. Guess the Covered Word lessons provide continuous practice with all the beginning letter patterns. Children who already know most of their beginning

letter sounds learn the important strategy of using meaning, all the beginning letters, and word length as cues to the identification of an unknown word.

Changing a Hen to a Fox provides practice with beginning, middle (vowel), and ending sounds. Children develop their phonemic awareness as they stretch out words and hear where in the word the letter needs to be changed. Children who know letter sounds see how these help them to spell lots of words. Changing a Hen to a Fox is a wonderful way to review letter-sound knowledge, particularly early in the year.

While Rounding Up the Rhymes, some children are still developing their phonemic awareness as they decide which words rhyme and are learning that rhyming words usually but— not always—have the same spelling pattern. As they use the words rounded up to read and spell new words, children who need it are getting practice with beginning letter substitution. Children who already have well-developed phonemic awareness and beginning letter knowledge are practicing the important strategy of using known words to decode and spell unknown rhyming words.

Making Words lessons are multilevel in a number of ways. Each lesson begins with short easy words and progresses to some medium-size and big words. Every Making Words lesson ends by the teacher asking, “Has anyone figured out the word we can make if we use all our letters?” Figuring out the secret word that can be made from all the letters in the limited time available is a challenge to even our most advanced readers. Making Words includes even children with very limited literacy, who enjoy manipulating the letters and making the words even if they don’t get them completely made until the word is made with the big pocket-chart letters. By ending each lesson with sorting the words into patterns and then using those patterns to read and spell some new words, we help children of all levels see how you can use the patterns you see in words to read and spell other words.

Using Words You Know lessons provide children who still need it with lots of practice with rhyming words and with the idea that spelling pattern and rhyme are connected.

Depending on what they already know, some children realize how words they know can help them decode, while other children realize how these words help them spell. If you want to make the lesson a bit more multilevel at the upper end, include a few longer words that rhyme, and help students see how their known words can help them spell the rhyming part of longer words.

Words sorting and hunting are made multilevel by forming groups of children who indicate through their writing that they are ready to focus on particular patterns. The teacher then sets up a schedule so that different groups work with the teacher or together in cooperative formats on different days. The groups are not fixed but rather formed and re-formed as spelling needs and growth are evidenced.

Read/Writing Rhymes and What Looks Right? are perhaps the most multilevel activities. All beginning letters, including the common single consonants and the less common, more complex digraphs and blends, are reviewed each time the teacher distributes the onset cards for Reading/Writing Rhymes. Phonemic awareness is developed as children say all the rhyming words and blend the vowel pattern with the beginning letters. Children whose word awareness is more sophisticated learn that there are often two spellings for the long-vowel patterns and develop their visual checking sense as they see the rhyming words with the different patterns. They also learn the correct spelling for many of the common homophones. The addition of some longer rhyming words helps them learn how to decode and spell longer words.

In What Looks Right? children learn to use the dictionary to check a possible spelling. They also learn how the dictionary can help you decide which way to spell a word when there are two words that sound the same but have different spellings and meanings.

ASSESSING PROGRESS

Good assessment in an ongoing activity. Teachers watch their children in a variety of reading and writing situations and notice what strategies the children are using and what

they need to move them forward. In addition to the ongoing observations of children, which let us know what to teach that many children would profit from and are ready for, and what nudges particular children need, it is also good from time to time to stop and assess progress in a more systematic way. Remembering the principle “What they don’t use, they don’t have,” we assess their decoding and spelling as they are actually reading and writing.

Observing Word Strategies in Reading

By observing children’s reading, teachers can look at the misreadings children make and determine what word identification strategies they are using. Good readers will self-correct many of their misreadings. This usually indicates that they are using context to check that what they are reading makes sense. Successful self-correction is an excellent indicator that the reader is effectively using all three cueing systems: meaning (semantic), sounding-like language (syntactic), and letter-sound knowledge (graphophonic). Some readers tend to overuse context—their misreadings make sense but don’t have most of the letter-sound relationships of the original word. Others overuse letter-sound knowledge. Their misreadings look and sound a lot like the original words, but they don’t make any sense. By observing children’s reading, we can determine what strategies they are using and what kind of instructional activities we might provide for them.

To look at children’s word strategies while reading, we first must have something for them to read in which they make some errors—but not too many. This level is generally referred to as instructional level—the level of a book or story in which the child correctly identifies at least 90–95 percent of the words and has adequate comprehension of what was read. The text the child is reading should be something the child has not read before, and although the child may read more than 100 words, the first 100 words are generally used for analysis.

Teachers use a variety of materials to do this assessment—depending on what is available and what the school system requires. Some teachers use passages contained in the

assessment package that accompanies many basal reading series. Other teachers or schools have designated certain “real” books as benchmark books. They don’t use these books for instruction but only for assessment purposes. They decide that one book is what most children could read at the 90–95 percent word-identification accuracy level are actually using. By looking at two or three writing samples done a month or more apart, we can easily determine progress in word development. In looking at their writing sample to determine their level of word knowledge, we want to look at their spelling of high-frequency words and their attempts at spelling less-frequent words. First we notice whether all the word-wall words are spelled correctly. Next we look at how the child is spelling words on the wall and not readily available in the room. Do their invented spellings indicate that they can hear sounds in words and know what letters usually represent those sounds? Are the letters in the correct order? Are they beginning to spell by pattern rather than just putting down one letter for each sound? Are they using starred word-wall words to spell rhyming words? Are they adding endings correctly and beginning to use appropriate spelling changes?

In addition to writings on self-selected topics, many schools collect focused writing samples and look at these to determine growth in writing ability and word knowledge. A focused writing sample collected for assessment purposes should have a topic specified about which most children have good general knowledge, and children should write on this topic with no assistance from the teacher or any other child. Some examples of topics used in primary classrooms include:

My Favorite Things to Do

What I Like to Do at School

An Animal I Would Like to Have for a Pet

Many schools have the child write about the same topic at several different points in time—May of kindergarten, January and May of first grade, January and May of second grade, for example. These topic-focused nonassisted first drafts are then compared to determine an individual child’s writing growth. In addition to a slew of valuable

information about how the child writes—sentences sense, topic sense, word choice, writing conventions—these samples yield valuable information about the child’s developing word knowledge.

Observing Word Strategies for Spelling Unknown Words

Here is another quick and simple measure we like to use to determine how children are developing their word knowledge. Making sure that each child cannot see what others are writing, we dictate 10 words to them which we don’t expect them to be able to spell and then analyze their attempts. Teachers use a variety of words, the major criterion being that these words are not and have not been available in the room and that they show a variety of different patterns. Many teachers use the 10 words suggested by Gentry and Gillet on their Developmental Spelling Test (1993).

monster
united
dress
bottom
hiked
human
eagle
closed
bumped
type

(If your children like to write about monsters and thus have learned to spell *monster*, you might substitute another word, perhaps *blister* or *mountain*.)

Once children have spelled these words as best they can, Gentry and Gillet suggest analyzing their spelling using the following stages:

The Precommunicative Stage: Spelling at this stage contains scribbles, circles, and lines with a few letters thrown in at random. These letters usually are just there, and any connection between these letters and the words they are thinking is pure coincidence.

The Semiphonetic Stage: The second stage can be seen when words begin to be represented by a letter or two. The word *monster* may be written with just an *m* or an *mr* or a *mrt*. *Type* might be written with just a *t* or *tp*. This stage indicates that the child is beginning to understand letter-sound relationships and knows the consonant letters that represent some sounds.

The Phonetic Stage: In the third stage, vowels appear—not necessarily always the right vowels, but vowels are used and most sounds are represented by at least one letter. Phonetic spelling of *monster* might include *munstr* and *mostr*. *Type* will probably be spelled *tip*. You can usually tell when a child is in the phonetic stage because you can read most of what children in this stage write.

The Transitional Stage: In this stage, all sounds are represented and the spelling is usually a possible English spelling, just not the correct spelling. *Monster* in this stage might be spelled *monster* or *monstur*. *Type* is probably spelled *tipe*.

The Conventional Stage: Finally, the child reaches the stage of conventional spelling, in which most words a child at that grade level could be expected to spell correctly are spelled correctly.

Of course, children's spelling of different words will indicate different stages. The important thing is not which stage they are in but how they are growing. Put the sample away along with writing samples and oral reading records, and use them to compare how they do on the very same tasks later in the year.

The Names Test

A final possibility to consider when assessing children's word knowledge is the Names Test. I developed the Names Test (Cunningham, 1990) several years ago when working with a group of older remedial readers. These boys were good context users, and it was quite difficult to determine what they knew about letter-sound patterns when they were reading contextually because they were such good context users. I wanted to measure of their word identification ability that was not confounded by context but that was just a list of words. Reading a list of words is a rather "unnatural act", and choosing the words is quite difficult. If you choose words most children have in their listening vocabularies, you run the risk of also choosing words they know as sight words and thus don't have to decode, and you could overestimate their letter-sound knowledge. If you choose very obscure words, they probably don't have them in their listening vocabularies and thus can't use the "sounds right" clue to check their probable pronunciation. Nonsense words have the same problems. Nothing we ask kids to do is more unnatural than reading a list of made-up words (well, almost nothing!), and many children try to make the nonsense word into a word they have heard of; the nonsense-word test would thus be an underestimate of their decoding ability.

There is one type of word, however, that children hear often—and thus have in their listening vocabularies—but that they don't read often—and thus are not apt to have already learned as sight words. Names are heard all over the place. Names are a big part of every TV and radio program, and usually these names are pronounced but not read. Names are one type of word that most children have a lot more of in their listening vocabularies than in their sight vocabularies; thus, I use names for the source of words to measure decoding ability not confounded by context.

In addition to their more-often-heard-than-read quality, names have another advantage for a word-reading test. We do sometimes read lists of names. Teachers and others often "call the roll"; thus, reading a list is a somewhat more natural real-reading task than most other word-list reading tasks. Here is the Names Test, with directions and suggestions for analyzing children's responses.

The Names Test of Decoding

(From Cunningham, 1990; additional names by F.A. Dufflemeyer.)

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Jay Conway | Chuck Hoke |
| Kinberly Blake | Homer Preston |
| Cindy Sampson | Ginger Yale |
| Stanley Shaw | Glen Spencer |
| Flo Thornton | Grace Brewster |
| Ron Smitherman | Vance Middleton |
| Bernard Pendergraph | Floyd Sheldon |
| Austin Shepherd | Neal Wade |
| Joan Brooks | Thelma Rinehart |
| Tim Cornell | Yolanda Clark |
| Roberta Slade | Gus Quincy |
| Chester Wright | Patrick Tweed |
| Wendy Swain | Fred Sherwood |
| Dee Skidmore | Ned Westmoreland |
| Troy Whitlock | Zane Anderson |
| Shane Fletcher | Dean Bateman |
| Bertha Dale | Jake Murphy |
| Gene Loomis | |

Procedures for Administering and Scoring the Names Test

(From Cunningham, 1990)

Preparing the Instrument

1. Type or print the 35 names on a sheet of paper or card stock. Make sure the print size is appropriate for the age of the students being tested.
2. For students who might perceive reading an entire list of names as too formidable, type or print the names on index cards, so they can be read individually.
3. Prepare a protocol (scoring) sheet. Do this by typing the list of names in a column and following each name with a blank line to be used for recording a student's responses.

Administering the Names Test

1. Administer the Names Test individually in a quiet, distraction-free location.
2. Explain to the student that she or he is to pretend to be a teacher who must read a list of names of students in the class. Direct the student to read the names as if taking attendance.
3. Have the student read the entire list. Inform the student that you will not be able to help with difficult names, and encourage him or her to "make a guess if you are not sure."
4. Write a check on the protocol sheet for each name read correctly. Write phonetic spellings for names that are mispronounced.

Scoring and Interpreting the Names Test

1. Count a word correct if all syllables are pronounced correctly regardless of where the student places the accent. For example either Yó/lan/da or Yo/lán/da would be acceptable.
2. For words in which the vowel pronunciation depends on which syllable the consonant is placed with, count them correct for either pronunciation. For example either Ho/mer or Hom/er would be acceptable.
3. Count number of names read correctly, and analyze those mispronounced, looking for patterns indicative of decoding strengths and weaknesses.

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(In addition to the books in the box on page 97, these were cited in the text.)

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Kinderryhmes—24 titles, including *Rimes with Cat*, *Rimes with Cap*, and *Rhymes with King* (Rigby, 1998)

Zoo Looking, by Mem Fox (Mondo, 1996)

Hattie and the Fox, by Mem Fox (Simon and Schuster, 1988).

There's a Bug in My Mug, by Kent Salisbury (McClanahan, 1997)

My Nose Is a Hose, by Kent Salisbury (McClanahan, 1997).

I Wish That I Had Duck Feet, by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1972).

