

Using Plastic Letters To Spell Words

This activity works well with a small group of students, or even a whole class if you have enough sets of letters. Instead of using the whole alphabet, each student work with about eight to ten letters. Students spell words dictated by the teacher with the letters. They do not write the words on paper, which allows the spelling to proceed rapidly from one word to the next.

Do this activity after students have practiced building two-sound chunks with plastic letters; see the instructions on this site.

Make a list ahead of time of the words you want the students to spell. Then list all of the letters that will be needed.

Have the students sit around a table or at their desks. Ahead of time, cut sheets of construction paper lengthwise to form two pieces. Each student takes two pieces and places one above the other in front of them on the table. The top sheet is the "letter bank." The bottom sheet is the spelling area.

Give each student a box with two each of all the alphabet letters. Say the sound of each letter the students will need, one at a time. When they hear each sound, students should find the letter needed and place it on the top sheet of construction paper. Explain to the students that this is their letter bank. When all the needed letters have been placed in the letter bank, you're ready to begin.

Say each word slowly and distinctly and coach the students to listen for each sound and place the letters accordingly from left to right. Model as needed. Each student will select the letters needed from his own "letter bank," and spell the word in the spelling area. This activity quickly shows which students are having trouble. Look at the students' words and have them listen again and correct as needed. Have students place the letters back in their letter banks before dictating another word.

After the students become comfortable with the process, go through a number of words as quickly as the students can spell them.

Sometimes, have the students leave a word that they spelled in their spelling area, and ask them to change one letter to create a new word. For example, if the student has spelled *cat*, say, "Change just the beginning letter to make the word *sat*." Or say, "Change the last letter to make the word *cap*." Or say, "Change the middle letter to make the word *cut*." Soon, the students won't need to be cued. Just say a string of words as follows, one at a time, and have students replace or remove letters as needed to spell the word: *cat*, *can*, *fan*, *fax*, *tax*, *ax*, *ox*, *box*.

This activity enhances the student's phonemic awareness. He is matching letters with the sounds he hears in words. He is learning to sequence, add, remove, and substitute sounds in known words to make new words.

