

Whole Word Reading Instruction*

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Many struggling readers have a difficult time mastering phonics. Visual-spatial learners tend to be sight readers. Here are some ways to bridge the gap between sight reading and phonics.

- Be sure that the child can retain a visual image. Some children with AD/HD perceive in a blink, but have poor visual memory. Play memory games, such as “I Spy” with eyes closed. Encourage taking “memory snap shots” of favorite words.
- Build a **large** sight vocabulary. Label things. Use picture dictionaries. Have a Treasure Box of great words. Sylvia Ashton-Warner gave children their own pile of words—whatever they wanted to learn. “Treasure Boxes” with favorite words aid the sight word process. It is important to learn *lots* of sight words, which become stored in visual memory and are available for analytic phonics.
- Play games with Treasure Box words. Pull 2 or 3 random words and make a silly sentence. Pull 3 to 5 words and use in a story. Sort 12 words into categories. Any categories will do, like *words with double letters*, *7-letter words (5-letter, 4-letter)*, *action words*, *words that make pictures in your mind*, *words ending in “y,”* *words with only one vowel*, *words with letters all the same size*, *words with letters that go below the line (g, j, p, q, y)*. Have the children make up their own categories.
- Pin words behind people and play, “Guess the Word.” Others see the word and can answer yes or no questions.
- Small, bland words that are not easy to visualize (e.g., “the,” “went,” and “over”) can be learned in fun, colorful phrases, as in the first anecdote in this section: “The monkey went *over* the bridge.”
- Make pictures for phrases, such as “*over* the bridge,” “*into* the dragon’s mouth,” “*behind* his back,” “*the* King of Slobs,” “*for* ME!” etc., to help learn Dolch reading vocabulary.
- After you read a story aloud, play Word Hunt on a couple of pages. Ask the child to find an interesting word—never a bland word like “for,” “of,” “the,” etc.
- Have all the children make their own books. They can cut out or draw pictures, then dictate captions. Staple the pages together into books. Have fun reading these books. (Now little words are learned in context.)
- After the children are reading a bit, use Treasure Words for analytic phonics. Have them sort words into: Same Beginning Sound pile, Same Ending Sound pile;

Rhyming Words; Silent E words; etc. Can they make a silly sentence or tongue twister out of some of the words?

- Discover word patterns. These will often be rhymes. On the board, play games substituting beginning or ending sounds. Rather than teach short vowel sounds (which are hard for VSLs to learn), teach a rhyming word or the same word “family.” Remember that these children are good at recognizing patterns, love seeing relationships, have a superb sense of rhythm, but are poor at memorization.
- Teach consonant blends through silly tongue twisters: “Please play on the planet, Pluto.” “Greedy Greta eats green grapes.” “Spray the Spruce with sprinkles in the spring.” Read the Dr. Seuss alphabet book to the children, then have them make up tongue twisters of their own.
- Teach Greek and Latin roots, prefixes and affixes. See if they can find these parts of words in the additives on cereal boxes, in dictionaries, in books with Latin names of animals and insects, in medical books, at the zoo or botanical garden.
- Accompany reading with visualization techniques to assist children in learning to spell words they want to use in their creative writing. (See “A Visualization Approach to Spelling” after the section on reading.)

*From Silverman, L. K. (2002). *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner*. Denver: DeLeon Publishing.