

Sound Out, Don't Guess

This activity is easy to do but bring huge benefits. Use it for pupils who:

- Tend to guess at words at speed, reading “went” for “wet” for example
- Tend to “whole word” read , relying on visual memory eg reading “skipping” for “skating”
- Have letter reversal problems like b/d p/q
- Have no idea which is the correct spelling of a word from 3 phonically correct choices eg paint/pant/ paynt

Equipment needed:

1. A **phonic** book at the correct level for the pupil(s). There should be only a couple of words per page which will need extra support. Choose a book where there is a target sound to be practised (which the pupil has worked on/is working on) but everything else is decodable.
2. A small whiteboard and pen
3. A notebook , book mark or sheet to keep a visual record of progress with the activity

Method:

The object of the activity is to pull the pupil up on every guess at a word, but in a fun way. The pupil begins the activity with **10** lives, which are drawn on the whiteboard as stars, footballs, flowers, whatever. Each time a word is guessed rather than decoded, a life is lost and rubbed off. The object of the game is for the pupil to “stay alive” by not losing more than their 10 lives during that reading session. If the pupil manages to stay alive, they are given one reward point towards a reward which is given after 5 points are gained.

If they manage to stay alive and get their point, they then start the next reading session with **9** lives. This keeps up the level of challenge. The building up of reward points ensures that effort has to be sustained over many sessions to build up new/good habits.

Hints and Tips:

- You can play this game with a pair of pupils who are at the same level with their sounds and decoding.
- Keep good records. You will not remember how many lives they are on.
- Take a minute to look at the progress record together before the reading starts. Check how many lives they are getting for the session and how far off a reward they are.
- Do not take a life off if you come across a word which the pupil could not possibly decode eg a name. Hopefully this will not be a problem with phonic books.
- Don't take a life off if the pupil decodes but it is incorrect – just support them. It is the guessing that loses them a life. Praise all attempts at decoding.
- If you play with an extra pupil, the other pupil will be far more harsh than you about the other one losing lives!
- You need to be firm and consistent when making calls on losing a life. Letting a pupil off prolongs their reading problems but the pupil must generally see that they are succeeding. Make it fun – “Was that a guess? I think it was you know...” Oh, and another one..
- If a pupil is struggling, point out where the finish line is for the reading so they know they have a limited amount to do. Give a short amount of reading for anyone who is really finding it hard, or move the finishing line forward if they are flagging.
- If there is no success or a pupil is disheartened, switch to a slightly easier phonic book.
- If a pupil is looking at the pictures for visual clues, quietly put your hand/arm across the picture. Take it away once the page is read so the pupil can enjoy it at that point. It seems mean but remember you are helping to promote a good habit and correcting a faulty one which will let them down in the long run.
- Generally, pupils love playing this game and make excellent progress, but you may get the very occasional one with emotional difficulties who has absolutely no emotional resilience when it comes to making mistakes. Do what you can with damage limitation (see above) but this just may not be the right strategy for that pupil at this time.
- Liaise with other adults who listen to this pupil read, including parents. It is best if one person runs the activity and keeps the records but the other adults can reinforce the “sound out, don't guess” philosophy.