

Playing with Words

Is your child already enthusiastic about rhyming games, Scrabble, anagrams, or Pig Latin? Try adding a new kind of word game to your collection: riddles!

*What is gray, has four legs, big ears, a tail, and a trunk?
A mouse going on vacation!*

Riddles are an excellent way for kids to learn how to really listen to the sounds of words, understand that some words have more than one meaning, and how to manipulate words. Riddles also help build a rich vocabulary and strengthen reading comprehension. And finally, riddles are familiar and fun – a good incentive for thinking about words and reading. Here's how to get started with riddles:

Riddle books

There are lots of wonderful riddle books (visit <http://www.readingrockets.org/articles/books/c369>). Dive into one and just start reading some of the riddles out loud – the questions and the answers. Talk about the structure of the riddle (question/answer) and why the answers make silly sense if you understand the multiple meanings of the words. Share your thinking about the word play to help your child understand the riddle more clearly. Riddle books are especially entertaining for family trips or long drives, and can inspire original riddle-making by parents and kids alike.

Homonym fun

Homonyms – words that sound the same but have different meanings – provide a great opportunity for word fun. Say a word out loud, and see if your child can generate more than one meaning for the word. For example:

ball: a round object used in games

ball: a fancy party

moose: the animal with antlers

mousse: a chocolate dessert

Word meaning and context

Show your child how to figure out what a word means by thinking about the words around it. For example, the word “school” can refer to your child’s classroom or a group of fish. Once your child becomes aware of the double meaning of “school” he can start to appreciate or even invent riddles like this:

Why are fish so smart?

Because they swim in schools!

For more information on teaching kids about riddles, take a look at this article:

www.ReadingRockets.org/article/28315

