

## Guess The First Letter: A Reading Challenge

As your first grader learns to read, experts advise that you aim for a balance: give her lots of time to read to you, balanced by lots of time when you read back to her. When she reads to you, she's practicing her decoding skills and learning to read text smoothly. When you read to her, you can read more challenging language, and help her stretch.

Here's a tried and true game challenge that you can use with your first grader the next time you read together. Start at the easy levels and work your way up—this is a useful practice technique through every early reading stage, and it's even fun to mess around with later on!

### What You Need:

- A picture book with clear, fairly large print that your child likes and has read with you at least once before.
- Small post-it flag papers
- A clipboard with a piece of blank paper for scoring

### What You Do:

1. Pull out a picture book with clear, fairly large print. Make sure it's a book that your child likes and has read at least once before.
2. Now pull out ten little post-it flags. Use them to cover ten initial letters in key words throughout the book. In the "Little Red Hen," for example, you might cover the "H", or in "Goldilocks," you could cover the "G" in the heroine's name, and perhaps the "b" in bed."
3. As you read, you'll open to the pages where you've placed the flags. Although you'll be doing the main reading, invite your first grader to tell you: what letter goes at the beginning of those words? She can then lift the flag and see immediately if she was right.
4. Each round consists of ten words. Give your child a point for each correct one, and see if she can keep track of her personal best over several days. If she keeps getting tens, she's ready for higher levels: **Level One:** Words that start with single consonants, like "cat" or "dog." **Level Two:** Words that start with two letters together, such as "chair" (cover the "ch"), or "start." **Level Three:** Words with "two vowels going out walking"—can your child tell what two vowels belong, for example, in "chair" or "clear"? **Level Four:** Entire words—can your child recognize and read that one?

Note: Be sure to keep an eye on your expectations. If your child gets scores of nine and ten, that doesn't necessarily mean that your level is too easy; it may be a source of great satisfaction to your child, and constant practice in these early reading skills is always good. If your child routinely scores lower, don't keep on at that level. Step back, make it simpler, and then you can always stretch later. What's most important at this point is that your child develops both solid skills and confidence. She can do it: fluent reading just needs to come in its own time.

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