

HOLIDAY LANGUAGE GAMES

When long summer holidays are approaching, hopefully many families will find that they have some “extra” moments with their children. Perhaps it will be while travelling in the car, bus, train or tram or even in the dentist or doctor’s waiting room. Maybe those extra moments will be at home while relaxing outside or on the comfy couch. Wherever it is, children will enjoy playing language games.

The language games outlined below, will offer challenges and fun for adults and children alike. They will enhance children’s interest in sounds, build their knowledge of words and give them an opportunity for an extended turn in conversation. In addition, spending quality time playing these language activities with an adult or mature speaker will increase children’s confidence and strengthen family bonds.

Holidays are also a time for reading books. Visit the local library with the children and “stock up”! Choose both fiction books and factual books. Remember to choose books that can be read TO the children as well as those that they can read themselves. Audiobooks are great for the long car trips too.

The language activities are in no particular order but are listed under broad headings. These are: Sound Play, Word Fun, Discussion Time and Holiday Projects. The earlier activities in each section are ‘stand alone’, suitable for the car or waiting room. The latter activities in each section will best be played at home, or on holidays - even whilst camping - as they require minimal support with card, paper, pens etc.

SOUND PLAY

I Spy with my Little Eye. Play this popular game using a sound rather than the name of the letter. “I spy with my little eye something beginning with /mmm/”. e.g. mountain.

I Went Shopping. Again choose a sound E.g. /b/. Say “I went shopping and I bought butter”. Continue to take turns, recalling the previous word/s and adding a new one that has not been used before. E.g. “I went shopping and I bought butter and balloons”.

Sound sentences. 1) Make up a phrase or sentence that has words beginning with a particular sound and say it out loud. The other person has to identify the sound that was your focus sound. E.g. lovely lollypops (‘l’), marvelous muffins (‘m’), chirpy chickens chose chocolate (‘ch’).

2) Choose a particular sound (not letter) and take turns to make up a sentence in which as many words as possible begin with the sound.

Eg. 'f' Fiona fetched four falafel from Phoebe's farm. (Note: Phoebe begins with the focus 'f' sound even though it is not written with the letter F).

Tongue Twisters. Take turns to say these. What happens if you try to say them more quickly?

- o A stack of shiny stickers
- o A pile of purple pebbles
- o A box of savoury shapes
- o Seven slippery snakes slid silently south.
- o Naughty Nancy knitted knotted nighties for the navy.
- o Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
- o Rolly rabbit's racing rollerblades.

Long words. Give each other a very long word. Perhaps it is the name of something you can see around you or the name of one of your friends. The other person repeats the word and then claps out the beats or syllables, telling you how many there are in the word. Some examples: sausage (2), intersection (4), injection (3), escalator (3), magazine (3), doctor (2), Elizabeth (4), newspaper (3). Add a further task – after working out the number of syllables in the given word, you think of another word with the same number of syllables.

Listen to me. It is often difficult for children to identify the vowels in words. By telling a short story containing many words beginning with a particular short vowel, children will learn to 'tune in' to the vowels. Children listen for the short vowels sound /u/ as in Ugly Uncle. They clap hands or call out the sound 'u', each time they hear a word that starts with that sound.

Short vowel /u/:

My ugly uncle is called Pete. Mum says I am unkind to call him ugly, But Uncle Pete doesn't mind. Uncle Pete just laughs. Uncle Pete has a giant umbrella. His umbrella is so big we can all fit under it on the way to school. One day it was very wet and windy so Ugly Uncle Pete tried to put up his umbrella. The wind blew the umbrella inside out and took it high up in the air. Finally Uncle Pete's umbrella landed upside down on top of him. We laughed but Uncle Pete was not upset!

Short vowel /a/:

Ashley the acrobat was very active and agile. He loved to do handstands and somersaults in his act with the other acrobats. But Ashley was often tired after his circus act. One day he sat down to eat his juicy apple and he sat on some ants. There were ants on the acrobat and ants on the apple. The ants were very angry and Ashley became agitated. He hopped up and down. He tried to shake off the ants but he accidentally slipped on the apple. Poor Ashley, he broke his ankle. The other acrobats helped Ashley. An ambulance took Ashley the acrobat to hospital.

Short vowel /i/

If an insect bites - some people will get very ill. Other people might develop an itch. It is often difficult to stop scratching the itch. If I were an insect I would not want to make people itchy or feel ill. But if I were an insect I would not like people to injure me either. Some people seem to want to injure insects on purpose. It is impossible to tell them not to do it. Perhaps they have been very ill from an insect bite before.

Short vowel /e/

I buy a box of eggs at the supermarket every week. My son Eddy loves to eat eggs for breakfast. He is very energetic and plays a lot of sport. Eggs give him lots of energy for his exercise. Yesterday I bought a box of eggs and discovered that every egg in the box was empty except one! I asked my son Eddy to take the eggs back. Eddy was given another box of eggs. He went out through the supermarket Exit but as he was going down on the escalator he dropped the box of eggs. Every egg except one broke! So now we have just two eggs – one for me and one for Eddy!

Short vowel /o/

I have a pet octopus called Oliver. Often I take Oliver the octopus to my office. Oliver sits on my office chair and works on the computer. He can talk on the phone at the same time. Of course Oliver is a great help to me in my office. Some people think it is odd to have an octopus in the office but he is more help than a pet ostrich or a pet otter would be.

How many syllables? This is best played with a group. Children take turns to select a multi-syllabic word from a card pile. (the cards can either have written words and/or pictures of the items) If they correctly identify the number of syllables they add that number of points to their score. E.g. umbrella (3), mysterious (4), dinosaur (3), planet (2), creative (3), teacher (2), carnival (3), hippopotamus (5), helicopter (4), cellophane (3) carrot (2), exciting (3), alphabet (3) holiday (3). Set a realistic total such as 15 or 20 and the first to achieve that is the winner of that round.

WORD FUN

Brainstorm! One person thinks of a describing word e.g. sticky. All players then take turns to think of a word that this word describes, being careful to choose something that others have not already used. Eg. sticky – bun, honey, fingers, situation. To make the game more difficult ask each player to recall the other words in order before adding his/her new word. Some suggested adjectives: wonderful, tiny, exciting, rough, pale, unusual, narrow.

Categories. An object is named. The next person must think of an object that is in the same 'category' – that is, it has a common attribute. It is up to the person who gives the word to explain why it was included if others do not understand e.g. *window*: *telescope* (you look through them both), or *painting* because they both have a frame.

I'm thinking of – Provide 2 describing words for something that you can picture in your mind. Others must take turns to guess what it is. For example: something – small and furry, big and expensive, soft and fluffy, noisy and smelly, square and hard.

Word of the day – Select the word of the day from a number written on cards that have been placed in your decorated Word of the Day box. Some suggestions for young children – careful, important, machine, pretend, smooth. For older children - option, reliable, prefer, evidence, extraordinary, considerate. Talk about the word meaning using simple language – give examples of situations when you might use the word and say the word in a sentence to illustrate. Try to use the word throughout the day. Children might keep a tally of the number times they can use the word appropriately over the course of one day.

Associations. Collect pictures of common items such as car, tree, bird, cup, hamburger, girl, swimming pool, flower, pencil. Take turns to suggest a describing word that no-one else has used. For example if the adjective 'red' has already been used to describe car, it can not be used to also describe flower or pencil.

DISCUSSION TIME

What do you think? Share your ideas about the following -

- o the most interesting holiday
- o the scariest movie
- o the best present or birthday party
- o the funniest thing

In the family. Who amongst your family or friends is –
the tallest? the shortest? the funniest? the noisiest? the quietest? the silliest?
the kindest? the best cook? the best “fixer” of things? the clumsiest?

What's your opinion? Present a subject. For example: plastic bags, dummies, jogging, dentists, pet fish, fingernails. Speakers then take turns to give their opinion. Encourage others to listen to opinions that may not necessarily be their own. Model the 'sentence starters' e.g. In my opinion. I believe that. I think that.

Survey. Pretend you are doing a TV or radio survey. Ask the people you know their favourite - colour, TV program, holiday destination, book, music group, number etc. Collect your results and record them, along with the person's age, on a chart. Were the answers different for children, teenagers, adults?

Change the words. Choose a familiar song and change the words – E.g. “Mary had a little lamb” could become – Patrick had a naughty pig. Have fun making up the rest of the words, e.g. It's skin was rough and hairy. And everywhere that Patrick went the children thought him scary! It followed him to school one day, it got out through the gate. And Patrick had to chase his pig, which made him very late.

Blind Fold – one person is blind folded and their partner must explain to them how –
o to get from one room to another
o to make a peanut butter sandwich
o to tie and ribbon in their hair
o to write a letter.

HOLIDAY ‘PROJECTS’

Create an “first sound” scrap book. Find photos from magazines or draw a picture, e.g. of an crocodile– then create a sentence or headline – Curly the Crazy Crocodile is Captured at Carnival. Remember to stick to the same SOUND and not LETTER (that is, you wouldn’t include chips and a crocodile on the same page as they begin with different sounds.)

It’s Time for the News! Find a large cardboard box (Often available from supermarkets or electrical stores.) Cut out a “screen” from one side of the box and draw buttons or knobs for volume control and channel. Set on a table or stool. Children will enjoy giving their own “news bulletins” of what has been happening in the holidays. They might also like to try a “weather report” or if they have seen a movie to give a “movie review”.

After the movies. After watching a movie children choose a scene to reenact. Alternatively they will enjoy drawing their favourite scene and talking about it to someone who has not seen the movie.

The Odd Sock Puppet Show. It seems all families have a collection of odd socks that don’t make a pair. Sew two buttons on the sock near the toe. Insert your hand into the sock with the thumb at the heel and the other fingers towards the toe to create a mouth. Think of a name for your puppet and let it perform in a small play or song. You can also create a different character “voice” for your sock puppet.

Make a collection. During the school holiday we often go to new places or try our different activities. Why not start a collection. It could be some interesting shells from the beach, some small coloured or shiny rocks/pebbles from a bush walk. Even if it seems that you will be staying home most of the holidays there are still many things for you to collect, display and learn more about.
Here are some suggestions – stickers of your favourite sports stars, tickets, stamps along a theme, (e.g. flowers, people, building, sports), bottle tops, Harry Potter pictures, feathers.

Mystery bag. Ask yes or no questions to guess an object hidden inside a bag.

Spot it! On longer trips give each child a checklist of items to tick off as observed – e.g. 5 red cars, post office, police car or police station, 2 motorbikes, school.

This newsletter was originally written and published by Sue Reilly and Elizabeth Love in December 2006. It was re-formatted with slight changes by Lucia Smith in May 2012.