

Talk Is Fun

Talking and Listening

Playing verbal word games is an engaging way for young children to build early literacy skills.

What is the practice?

Word games help preschool children develop listening comprehension skills and broaden their vocabulary. They can learn to communicate more effectively by playing games that introduce new words.

What does the practice look like?



Preschool children gathered on their playground are deciding whether to play “Simon Says,” “I Spy,” or “Duck, Duck, Goose.” All of these are word games that help build listening comprehension and vocabulary. Word games can have endless variations. They can be changed depending on your location. “I Spy” in a classroom can use very different words from “I Spy” at a museum. Use your children’s interests to make the game more meaningful and fun. “Duck, Duck, Goose” can use pairs of words about dinosaurs, planets, or any other interesting topic.

How do you do the practice?

There are many opportunities during the day to play word games with preschoolers.

- “I Spy” is a great game to play on field trips or even in the classroom during circle time. It helps children build their descriptive skills and practice listening to verbal clues.
- Games such as “Mother, May I?” and “Simon Says” can be good gross motor activities for outside time. These games also develop listening comprehension and give children practice at moving their bodies in response to verbal commands. They can also give children a chance to use words they might not use in daily conversation.
- Word games can be played during shared book reading, particularly with books that are familiar to your preschool class. Challenge your students by leaving off the end of a sentence or phrase for them to fill in. With rhyming books, have them come up with other words that rhyme.
- Preschoolers are often just starting to learn about opposites, which can be the source of other fun word games. Ask one child to think of a word, then another child to find the word’s opposite. This can be a great vocabulary builder and it gives preschool children practice with the concepts of “alike” and “different.”

How do you know the practice worked?

- Do your preschool students show enthusiasm for playing word games?
- Are your preschool students using new words?
- Are your preschool students showing increased ability to follow verbal directions during games?

Take a look at more fun with talking and listening

Ins and Outs of "Simon"

The preschool children in Raiza's class are an active, lively bunch. Some of their favorite word games are played outside, amid lots of running around. Raiza has modified "Simon Says" to suit her children's needs. When they are inside they play "Inside Simon." The Inside leader uses body part names and spatial directions (e.g., "lift your arms up"). When they are on the playground, they love to play "Outside Simon." In this more active game the leader may direct the others to run in circles, hop up and down, or dance in place. Raiza finds that both games are a great way to help her children focus, listen, and burn off some energy.



"I Spy" on the Go!

Naomi takes her preschool class on weekly field trips. While riding on the bus she keeps the children occupied by playing "I Spy." They call out everything they see in a certain category—everything red, everything with two wheels, everything moving slowly, etc. They practice using new words and describing what they see around them. The game keeps everyone happy until they reach their destination. They play "I Spy" a different way in the classroom. Each child gets a turn and the others ask questions until someone guesses the right answer.

Playful Transitions

Many of the preschool children in Randi's inclusive class have trouble with transitions. She found that using word games with them makes these times easier. Randi often gets the children's attention by speaking directions softly. This lets them know that something is coming and they need to pay attention. For example, she might say, "If you can hear my voice, put your hands on your head." Other times, she will start a nursery rhyme, waiting for the children to join in with the words she leaves out. She'll say, "This old man, he played one, he played knick-knack on my..." and the children will say, "Thumb." These word games help the children with language problems become better at listening and using words. They also help all the children make an easier transition between activities.

