

Spelling investigations

Whenever possible, make spelling a “let’s find out” kind of activity. You can use the four-step spelling lesson described on p. 23.

Ask a question, give a piece of information or form a hypothesis. Then:

1. Collect words.
2. Sort out the words.
3. Look for the pattern and logic.
4. Use the patterns to build more words.

When to use investigations

You can use these kinds of activities as the following:

- ✓ individual or group investigations
- ✓ homework assignments
- ✓ challenges for the whole family
- ✓ quiz-of-the-day on your bulletin board
- ✓ a follow-up to reading, using an example word from the text
- ✓ a starting-point for a spelling lesson
- ✓ activities for children who have misspelled similar patterns in their writing

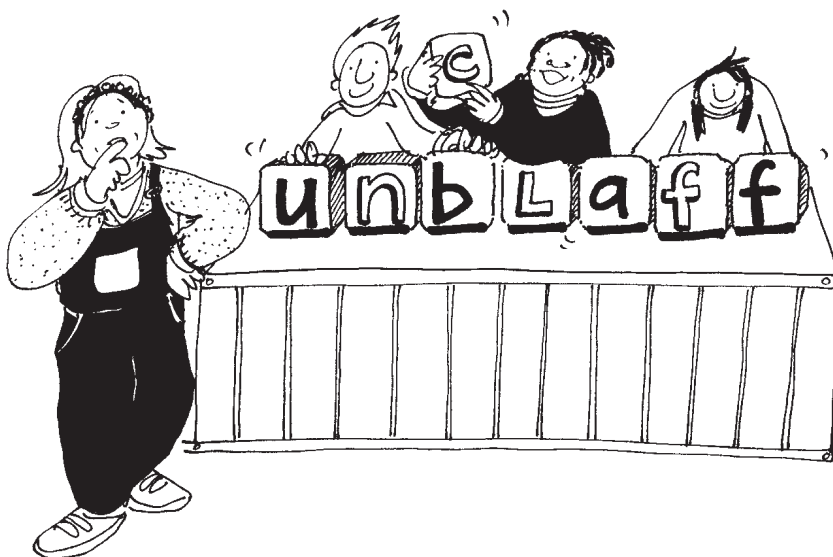
Ideas for investigations

Here are some examples of the kind of questions you can ask to start such an investigation:

- ✓ In how many different ways can two vowels be combined? Write example words for each combination.
- ✓ In how many different ways can three vowels be combined? Write example words for each combination.
- ✓ Find words in which a long-vowel sound is made with only one letter. (Children should include *y* as one of the vowels that make a long sound. *Y* and *w* are considered vowels when they come at the end of a syllable but consonants when they begin a syllable.)
- ✓ Find words in which two vowels together make a short-vowel sound. (*head, forfeit*)
- ✓ What is the longest word you can write with only one vowel? (*Strengths* is probably the longest they will find. Attempting to build long words will involve trying out combinations of three consonants.)
- ✓ Find words that have *y* as their only vowel.
- ✓ Which vowel combinations can have more than one pronunciation? List examples of each. (*ea, ou, oo, oe*)
- ✓ The pattern *a_e* makes a long *a* sound. Which consonants can fill the space? Write words for each. (Repeat with each vowel.)

- ✓ *Ow* can have two pronunciations, as in *snow* and *cow*. Write examples for each sound. (Repeat for *ea* – *bread/lead* and *oo* – *foot/food*.)
- ✓ Which consonants can follow *s* in a word? Write example words for each combination. (Follow up with consonants that can follow *m*, or *n* at the end of a word.)
- ✓ Which consonants can come before *r*? Write example words for each combination. (Follow up with consonants that can follow *r* at the end of a word.)
- ✓ Which consonants can come before *l*? Write an example word for each combination. (Follow up with consonants that can follow *l* at the end of a word.)
- ✓ Which consonants can double at the end of words? Write three example words for each pair. Which are common? Which are rare?
- ✓ Are there any words that begin with a double consonant?
- ✓ Which consonants can pair with *h*? Write example words for each combination. Which can come at the beginning of words? Which can come at the end of words?
- ✓ Which is more common at the end of words: *c* or *ck*?
- ✓ Which letters can be silent at the beginning of words?
- ✓ List adjectives that end with a long *e* sound. How is this ending most often spelled? What other spellings are possible?
- ✓ What different suffixes can denote a person who does a certain job? (Start with examples, such as *actor*, *artist*, *electrician*.)
- ✓ Which words are spelled differently in American, Canadian and British English?
- ✓ Which words are spelled exactly the same as French words? (Extend the list by adding other languages.)
- ✓ What abbreviations can you find for titles and jobs? (Start with *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Dr.* The telephone directory will provide many more examples.)
- ✓ Which words can be abbreviated to form a contraction?
- ✓ In how many different ways can we make a word plural? (This is an excellent activity for children to take home. With the help of adults, they may find close to 20 ways.)
- ✓ Find words with four, five, or six syllables. What is the largest number of syllables you can write in a single word? (Finding a few words will involve a lot of syllable counting along the way.)

- ✓ The double letters found most often at the end of words are *ll*, *ss* and *ff*. Which vowels can come immediately before these endings? Write example words for each.



- ✓ When *ch* makes a hard *c* sound, the word is most likely of Greek origin. Write musical examples. Write scientific examples.
- ✓ Words ending in *eau* are of French origin. Write examples. Write the plurals of these words.
- ✓ When *ph* makes the sound of *f*, the word is probably of Greek origin. Find examples in which the *ph* comes at the beginning of the word, and examples in which the *ph* comes at the end of the word.
- ✓ The ending *ery* often denotes a place where a certain job is carried out. Write as many examples as you can.
- ✓ In compound words, all the letters of both words must be written. Write examples of compound words in which the last letter of the first word is the same as the first letter of the second word, as in *grand daughter*.
- ✓ In consonant combinations in which both letter sounds are heard, the most common letters are *l*, *r* and *s*. Which consonants can combine with these? Write example words for each.
- ✓ *Ology* is a Greek suffix meaning the *science of* or *study of*. Write as many *ology* words as you can. Illustrate/mime/explain the meaning of each. Turn each one into a person by changing the suffix to *ist*.