

In The Dark, Dark Den... (Reading)

A good activity to teach following the introduction of the phonemes 'ar', 'ee' and 'igh'

Learning Objectives

To blend to read simple words

To read simple sentences

Ingredients

Collect objects for including the relevant letters and sounds for each group (enough for 1 per child). These need to be hidden inside the dark, dark den

A selection of torches

A dark, dark den (inside or outside)

Individual word cards for each of the objects you're going to use for each group plus 'can', 'the' and 'see'

Sentence cards for reading 'Can I see a ...?' You will need 2 sentences per child. Half of the sentences should match the objects hidden in the den, half should not

A copy of A Dark, Dark Tale by Ruth Brown

Method

Make sure the children have had lots of opportunities to explore the dark, dark den with torches before the activity – they could even be involved in creating it!!

Read A Dark, Dark Tale to the children. Allow plenty of time for the children to talk about what 'dark' means.

Explain that the children are going to be investigators. There are some objects hidden in the dark, dark den and they are going to work out what they are.

Model the reading process using the word cards to match the objects hidden from the group. Point to each letter as the children join in with saying each sound, blending the sounds to read the whole word all together.

Practise reading a few 'Can I see a ...?' sentences. The children will probably need the process of rereading the sentence after the blending of each new word demonstrating in detail.

Demonstrate how to answer the questions on the questionnaire with a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

Remind the children about how to operate the torches.

Give each of the children a clipboard and a questionnaire to read and complete independently. On reading a sentence, each child should be given the time in the dark, dark den to see if they can find the relevant object using the torch, then record a yes/no answer on the questionnaire. Support and challenge as needed.

The number of questions on the questionnaire for each group will depend on how long the children are able to constructively concentrate for.

Variations

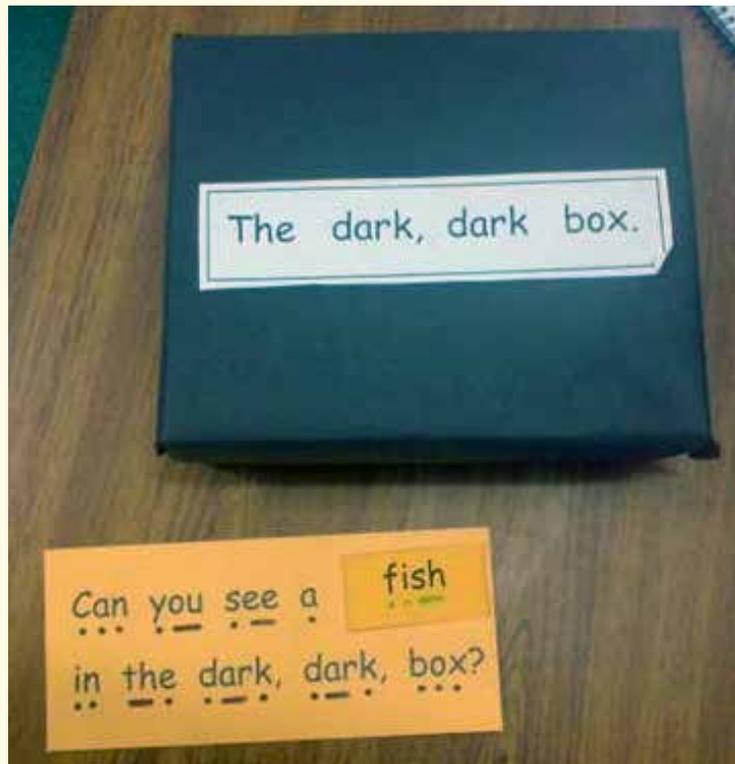
Encourage less able children with plenty of adult support. Read the sentences one at a time using a collaborative approach to reading, working as a team rather than independently. Careful choice of objects is crucial for these children. If they are still really struggling, or have not yet been introduced to the 'ee' phoneme, give out single word cards, rather than sentences, for things to find.

Challenge more able children by providing them with sentences including more complicated phonemes or longer words. Alternatively, provide an extended sentence and practise reading the tricky word 'you' by changing the sentences to read 'Can you see a ... in the dark, dark den?'

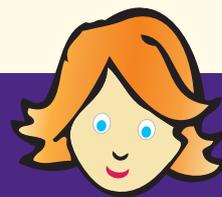
The Sweet Smell of Success!

Can the children...

- Maintain attention and concentration to complete the investigation? With support?
- Follow the simple instructions of the investigation? With support?
- Take turns when playing? With support?
- Recognise the tricky words 'yes' and 'no'? With support?
- Blend to read the words on the cards? With support?
- Read a simple sentence? With support?



Learning Lady Top Tips!



Making a dark, dark den big and dark enough for a group of six eager Reception children can be a challenge, but is well worth the effort, and it will be played in for hours following the activity. An old gazebo and black material would be an excellent idea, inside or out. Perhaps adding some cobwebs for added 'spookiness'. If you've only got a small space, why not work with smaller groups, taking turns to spend 30 seconds or 1 minute each in the den? The children can then come out to record their answers while other children take their turn.

In The Dark, Dark Den... (Writing)

Learning Objectives

To segment to write simple words
To write a simple sentence

Ingredients

Completed questionnaires from the previous activity
Writing tools and materials; depending upon the final presentation chosen (see below)
Whiteboards, pens and rubbers

Method

Revise writing the words 'I', 'can' and 'see' on the whiteboards all together.

Discuss the previous dark, dark den activity. Allow the children time to discuss their findings, using the completed questionnaires.

Model the oral frame 'I can see a ... in the dark, dark den' (for one of the objects). Repeat several times with the children joining in all together, counting the number of words on their fingers to embed the sentence.

Model writing the sentence as the children chant the sentence once more. Finger spaces, a full stop and oral segmenting will probably need to be explicitly demonstrated at this point.

Repeat this process with an oral frame and modelled writing for the sentence 'I cannot see a ... in the dark, dark den'.

Expect each child to choose an object from the questionnaire, orally constructing the correct sentence to match. Counting the words on their fingers as they say them will help to embed the sentence.

Support and challenge the children as they write the sentence independently. You might want to write some of the sentence all together, one word at a time.

Expect each child to reread his/her own writing to check it makes sense.

Encourage some children (who demonstrate sustained concentration) to record additional sentences to demonstrate understanding.

What Next?

Why not try writing on a large scale using large strips of black paper? Write using white chalk or paint, and then use the writing to decorate the outside of the dark, dark den.

As an alternative...

Make a 'lift the flap' display using sheets of A3/A4 black paper, folded horizontally. Expect the children to write the sentence/ draw a picture (as described above) using white chalk or white paint and a fine brush: 'I can see a fork in the dark, dark den'. Ask the children then to swap 'flaps' so that somebody else in the group writes a corresponding question on the front of the flap (for example, 'Can you see a fork in the dark, dark den?'). Make sure there are a good variety of sentences containing different objects, with 'I can' and 'I cannot' at the beginning.

Variations

The sentence writing can be done as a collaborative exercise. All of the children in the group could write the same sentence, one word at a time, with lots of adult support to help them with segmenting the words and leaving spaces in-between. If these children are still struggling they could simply label the objects inside the dark, dark den with single words rather than sentences.

Challenge more able children by using objects which have more complicated phonemes or longer words associated with them. They could also write longer sentences such as 'I can see a ... in the dark, dark den, but I cannot see a ...'

The Sweet Smell of Success!



Can the children...

- Maintain attention and concentration to complete the investigation? With support?
- Follow the simple instructions of the investigation? With support?
- Write all of the letters and the sounds that they make? With support?
- Orally construct the sentence to be written? With support?
- Segment to spell individual words? With support?
- Write a simple sentence?