

Welcome to Word Ladders!

In this book you'll find 100 mini-word-study lessons that are also kid-pleasing games! To complete each Word Ladder takes just ten minutes but actively involves each learner in analyzing the structure and meaning of words. To play, students begin with one word and then make a series of other words by changing or rearranging the letters in the word before. With regular use, Word Ladders can go a long way toward developing your students' decoding and vocabulary skills.

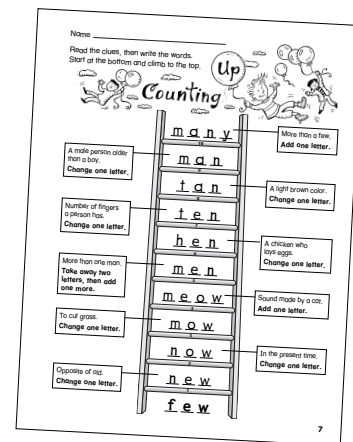
How do Word Ladders work?

Let's say our first Word Ladder begins with the word *walk*. The directions will tell students to change one letter in *walk* to make a word that means "to speak." The word students will make, of course, is *talk*. The next word will then ask students to make a change in *talk* to form another word—perhaps *chalk*, or *tall*. At the top of the ladder, students will have a final word that is in some way related to the first word—for example, *run*. If students get stuck on a rung along the way, they can come back to it, because the words before and after will give them the clues they need to go on.

How do Word Ladders benefit students?

Word Ladders are great for building students' decoding, phonics, spelling, and vocabulary skills. When students add or rearrange letters to make a new word from one they have just made, they must examine sound-symbol relationships closely. This is just the kind of analysis

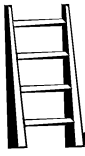
that all children need to do in order to learn how to decode and spell accurately. And when the puzzle adds a bit of meaning in the form of a definition (for example, "make a word that means to say something"), it helps extend students' understanding of words and concepts. All of these skills are key to students' success in learning to read and write. So even though Word Ladders will feel like a game your students will be practicing essential literacy skills at the same time!



How do I teach a Word Ladder lesson?

Word Ladders are incredibly easy and quick to implement. Here are four simple steps:

1. Choose a Word Ladder to try. (The first five pages feature easier ladders; you may want to start with those.)
2. Make a copy of the Word Ladder for each student.
3. Choose whether you want to do your Word Ladders with the class as a whole, or by having students work alone, in pairs, or in groups. (You might do the



first few together, until students are ready to work more independently.)

4. At each new word, students will see two clues: the kinds of changes they need to make to the previous word (“rearrange letters” or “add two letters”), and a definition of or clue to the meaning of the word. Sometimes this clue will be a sentence in which the word is used in context but is left out for children to fill in. Move from word to word this way, up the whole Word Ladder.



Look for the **Bonus Boxes** with stars. These are particularly difficult words you may want to preteach. Or you can do these ladders as a group so that children will not get stuck on this rung.

That’s the lesson in a nutshell! It should take no longer than ten minutes to do. Once you’re done, you may wish to extend the lesson by having students sort the words into various categories. This can help them deepen their understanding of word relationships. For instance, they could sort them into:

- Grammatical categories. (Which words are nouns? Verbs?)
- Word structure. (Which words have a long vowel and which don’t? Which contain a consonant blend?)
- Word meaning. (Which words express what a person can do or feel? Which do not?)

Tips for Working With Word Ladders

To give students extra help, mix up and write on the board all the “answers” for the ladder (that is, the words for each rung) for them to choose from as they go through the puzzle. In addition:

- Add your own clues to give students extra help as they work through each rung of a ladder. A recent event in your classroom or community could even inspire clues for words.
- If students are having difficulty with a particular word, you might simply say the word aloud and see if students can spell it correctly by making appropriate changes in the previous word. Elaborate on the meanings of the words as students move their way up the ladder.
- If students are stuck on a particular rung of the Word Ladder, tell them to skip it and come back to it later.
- Challenge students to come up with alternative definitions for the same words. Many words, like *lock*, *fall*, and *stock*, have multiple meanings.

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Name _____

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



A ladder with six rungs, numbered 1 to 6 from bottom to top. Each rung has a blank space for a word. Clues are provided in boxes connected to the rungs by lines.

6 Little.
Add one letter.

A shopping center.
Change one letter.

5

A machine that grinds pepper is called a pepper ____.
Add one letter.

4

Sick.
Take away one letter, then add two.

3

Give ____ to me.
Take away one letter.

2

To have lighted something.
Take away three letters.

1

l i t t l e

Name _____

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



It falls from the sky and makes you wet.
Add one letter.

_____ 11 _____

Walked very fast.
Take away one letter.

_____ 10 _____

Part of the wheat plant.
Change one letter.

_____ 9 _____

Short for Bradley.
Add one letter.

_____ 8 _____

The opposite of good.
Change one letter.

_____ 7 _____

A stick used for hitting balls.
Change one letter.

_____ 6 _____

A wager or guess that something will happen.
Take away one letter.

_____ 5 _____

You wear it to hold up your pants.
Change one letter.

_____ 4 _____

Something that makes a ringing noise.
Change one letter.

_____ 3 _____

Healthy.
Add two letters.

_____ 2 _____

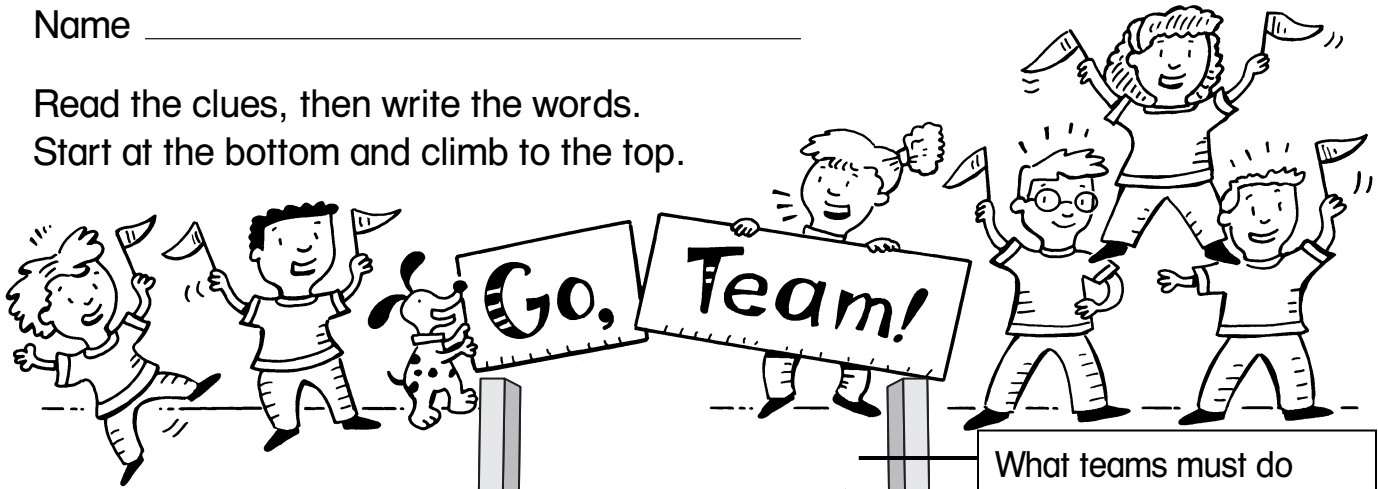
All of us.
Take away one letter.

_____ 1 _____

w e t

Name _____

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.




What teams must do together. The coach said to us, "Good ____, team!"
Change one letter.

Something gets ____ out when it has been used often.
Change one letter.

Ripped.
Add one letter.

An enormous weight: 2,000 pounds.
Take away two letters, then add one.

 What you pay to cross a bridge.
Change one letter.

Not short.
Change one letter.

A story.
Change one letter.

To get or bring something.
Change one letter.

Not wild. A house pet is ____.
Rearrange letters.

Food that comes from animals.
Rearrange letters.

10

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1

t e a m

Name _____

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.




Sweet Seasons



Another season.
Change one letter.

9

 To heat something to just below the boiling point.
Take away one letter.

More slim.
Add two letters and rearrange.

8

A thick and gooey liquid.
Add one letter.

Thin and narrow, not wide or thick.
Take away two letters, then add one.

7

A bandage that hangs from the neck to support a hurt arm.
Add one letter.

To make music with your voice.
Take away one letter.

6

Something a bee does.
Take away one letter.

A cord or thread. You put beads on a _____ to make a necklace.
Change one letter.

5

4

3

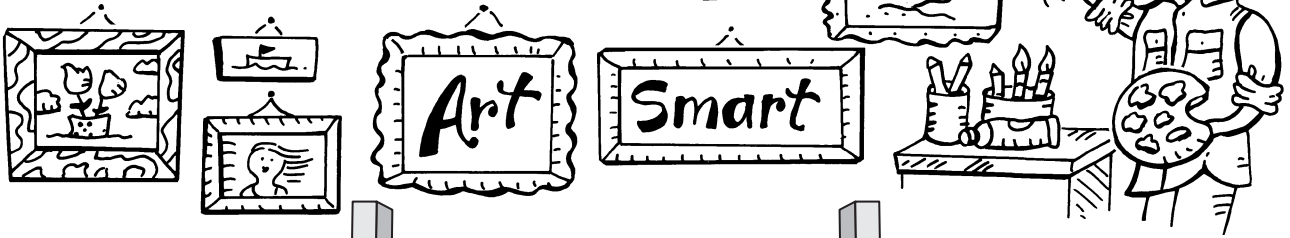
2

1

s p r i n g

Name _____

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



To make pictures.
Take away two letters, then add one.

9

A thing used to suck a drink from a glass.
Add two letters.

8

Not cooked.
Change one letter.

7

A tool used to cut wood.
Change one letter.

6

The past tense of *sit*.
He _____ in the chair.
Take away one letter.

5

A word you might say to make an animal go away.
Add one letter.

4

A house pet that is related to lions and tigers.
Change one letter.

3

An automobile.
Take away one letter.

2

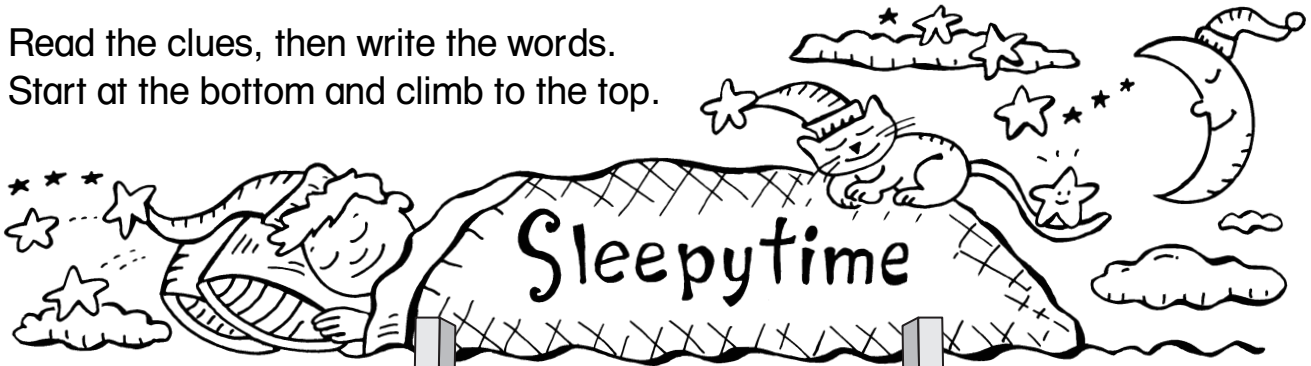
A two-wheeled vehicle for carrying things.
Add one letter.

1

a r t

Name _____

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



A ladder with 11 rungs, numbered 1 to 11 from bottom to top. The word 'sleep' is written at the bottom. Clues are provided in boxes on either side of the ladder.

Left side clues:

- 11: A short rest. **Change one letter.**
- 10: To hit. **Change one letter.**
- 9: Children often sit on their parents' ___s. **Rearrange the letters.**
- 8: Another name for a bucket. **Change two letters.**
- 7: Baby birds make this sound. **Take away two letters, then add one.**
- 6: To flow or trickle slowly. **Take away one letter.**

Right side clues:

- 11: A liquid that comes from trees. **Take away one letter.**
- 10: To make applause. **Add one letter.**
- 9: A friend. **Take away one letter.**
- 8: To take off the skin of an orange. **Change one letter.**
- 7: An animal that gives us wool. **Add one letter.**

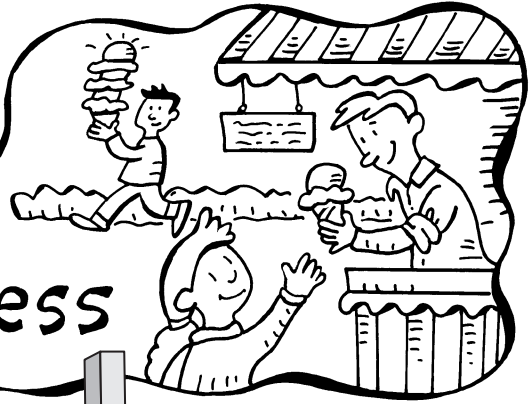
Word at the bottom: s l e e p

Name _____

Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



More or Less



Opposite of *most*.
Add one letter.

9

Opposite of *first*.
Change one letter.

8

If something can't
be found, it's _____.
Change one letter.

7

The price of
something.
**Take away
one letter.**

6

The land next to
the sea.
Add one letter.

5

What a doctor puts on
your arm or leg if it's
broken.
Change one letter.

4

A wooden barrel that
holds liquids.
Change one letter.

3

This covers your face
on Halloween.
Change one letter.

2

The pole on a sailboat
that holds the sails.
Change one letter.

1

m o s t