

The Story Behind the Smart Start Word Key Exercises

One year I had a very bright six year old student who was not decoding as quickly as her older sibling had done in the first grade. This concerned her parents and in October they had her assessed by an educational psychologist. His conclusion was that she might be at risk to read and write in my classroom. The parents wanted to place her in their clinic for approximately six weeks of instruction to ensure her success. I definitely understood the parents' concern, but since it was early in the school year, I hoped they would wait and have her reassessed in May which would still give the student time to attend the clinic before school ended. Happily, they agreed.

* * *

After creating the word analysis exercises for sorting short and long vowels I was still puzzling over a way to solidify r-controlled vowels and the remaining digraphs and diphthongs. Studying the similarities between the patterns in the words, I eventually understood that the pattern of 2 vowels together was the over arching principle. It applied to all words containing digraphs and diphthongs! The new exercises would not focus on sorting words, but rather on finding groups of 2 letters which make a new or single sound. That was it! I also made sure not to include too many digraphs or diphthongs in a single exercise. Example: **ai & ay** I used the word list book, The Reading Yellow Pages to create **Word Key Exercises**. I called each pair of letters which makes a single or new sound a **word key** and taught my students that certain words cannot be decoded without knowing word keys. Example: **charge** If a child cannot recognize the three pairs of letters in the word "charge", he will either decode it as **k-h-a-r-g-e** or he will have to commit the word to memory. In a word key exercise, each pair of letters making a single or new sound is circled and counted. Then the words are read aloud to a partner. The word key exercises I made contain only fifteen words and are located in the Smart Start Companion. (download this pdf book at www.books4results.com)

Word key exercises provide students with practice locating pairs of letters which make a single or new sound. A pair of letters is called a word key.

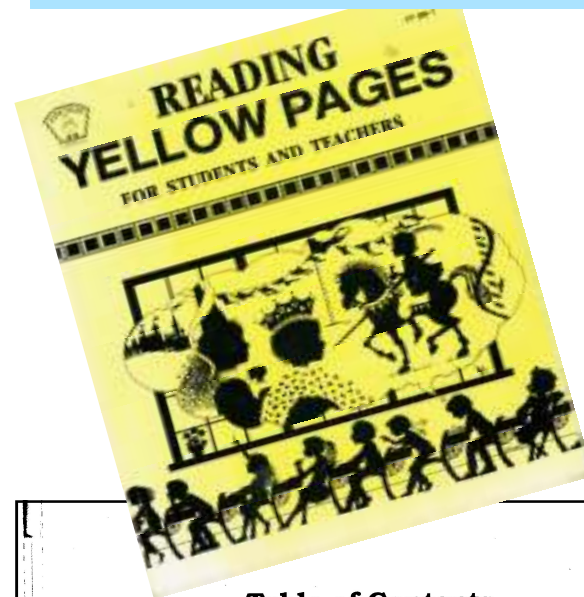


Table of Contents

Short Vowel Words	7
Long Vowel Words	10
Vowel Digraphs	12
Diphthongs	15
R-Controlled Words	17
Initial Consonant Blends	19
Final Consonant Blends	27
Initial Consonant Digraphs	29
Medial And Final Consonant Digraphs	30
Variant Consonant Sounds	32
Rhyming Pairs	33
Open And Closed Syllable Words	35
Prefixes	37
Suffixes	39
Contractions, Conjunctions, And Prepositions	41
Compound Words	42
Selected Abbreviations	44
Selected Word List Of Synonyms, Antonyms, Homonyms, And Heteronyms	46
Idioms	52
Great Ways To Share A Book	54
Reading Skills Checklist	56
Word Games To Reinforce Vocabulary	59
Glossary Of Terms Related To Reading Readiness	61

NOTE: At this point I began to think of my word list book as containing words children should learn to read in grade one and secondly as the words they should be able to both read and spell by the end of grade six.

Sample Word Key Activities

Word Analysis: Counting Keys

1. As new keys are introduced, students practice finding the keys in word analysis exercises. In each exercise students circle, count and record the number of keys found in each word.
2. Next, students read the words to a partner to practice their decoding skills.

• r-controlled Word Keys

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. car _1_ | 6. herb _1_ | 11. birth _2_ |
| 2. torch _2_ | 7. blurt _1_ | 12. chart _2_ |
| 3. perch _2_ | 8. mirth _2_ | 13. pork _1_ |
| 4. purse _1_ | 9. start _1_ | 14. persist _1_ |
| 5. skirt _2_ | 10. horse _1_ | 15. hurl _1_ |

The Value of Word Keys

Example: **charge**

A child who recognizes the letter pairs **ch-ar-ge** and knows their sounds, will also know the word has only three sounds to blend. With word key practice, the result for the student is that the word "charge" becomes as simple to decode as the word "dog"!

NOTE:

The quotes and thumbnails in this document were used for the purpose of criticism (analyzing effective teaching strategies). The use of these quotes is covered under the Fair Dealing of Canadian Copyright law under section 29.1 (criticism or review) which states "Fair dealing for the purpose of *criticism* or *review* does not infringe the copyright if the following are mentioned:

- a) the source; and
- b) if given the source, the name of the author, in the case of a work...

Graphics from iCLIPART professional license, Books for Results, Inc. Microsoft Publisher 97, Power Point 2010

Word Keys

- sh, ch, th, ph (f), gh (silent or f)
- wh, wr, kn, gn
- ai, ay
- oi, oy
- au, aw
- ou, ow (2 sounds), oe, oa
- ar, _ _ _er (2 beat word), ir, ur, or
- ue, oo, ew, ui
- ce, ci, cy (copycat s)
- ge, gi, gy (copycat j)
- ee, ee, ea
- Y at the end of two beat words says long e sound
- ie,
- Y at the end of one beat words says long i sound

- le at the end of two beat words _ _le
- ve comes at the end of words
- In a one beat short vowel word:
- _ck, _ll, _ff, _ss, _zz

When I first introduced my grade one students to **word key exercises**, they were already fascinated by secret codes. This time I showed them a different type of secret code. It required a key to read the message. One person writes a secret message to his friend in the boxes and afterwards fills in the rest of the paper with words to create a nonsense sentence. When the friend places the key upon the message he can read it!

I used the fun of deciphering coded messages to help children understand that word key exercises are like figuring out a secret code. I encouraged them that once they learned all their word keys they would be able to decode much more easily and also be able to read more interesting books.

The resulting fluency I witnessed in the classroom library after implementing the word key exercises was incredible. Near the end of grade one our favourite language arts game as a class became "Give us a word we don't know and we'll figure it out!" I'd write a multi-syllable word on the board and the children would compete to read it. They often decoded words correctly which they had never heard of!

* * *

By the middle of May, my student was reading fluently. Her parents took her back to the educational psychologist's clinic and had her reassessed. Afterwards, the clinician called me. My student had gotten 100% on the phonemic assessment and up to that point only two other students had ever achieved this! The other students had both been through their clinic! Next, the clinician asked what I had done between October and May. I faxed a copy of all my exercises to their office (short and long vowel sorting exercises and the word key exercises). Later, the clinician told me these were definitely the reason for the child's success and went so far as to say that if every teacher used them it might put them out of business!



Note:

Have fun selecting a student to whisper a short message in your ear. Write the message in the boxes and then fill in extra words. Select another child to decode the message using the paper key. Create and share as many messages together as time permits.