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 perform 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 one of the 100 Word Ladders to try. (The last three pages are the hardest ladders in the book, so avoid starting 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 the letters” or “add two letters”), and a definition 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.

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?)

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.

Tips for Working With Word Ladders

To give students extra help, mix up and write all the “answers” for the ladder (that is, the words for each rung) on the board 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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Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

1. A small cucumber that has been preserved in vinegar. **Change one letter and rearrange the last two.**

2. A light red color. **Change one letter.**

3. What a bee or wasp might do. **Change one letter.**

4. To have sung in the past. **Change one letter.**

5. Mentally healthy or sound. **Take away one letter.**

6. To make music with your mouth. **Take away one letter, then add two.**

7. To be smelly. **Take away one letter, then add two.**

8. Alike. These two things are almost the ___ **Change one letter.**

9. What two nickels make. **Change one letter.**

10. An old-fashioned word for woman. **Change one letter.**

11. To choose. **Take away two letters.**
Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

1. Used for attaching two pieces of cloth together.
   Change the first letter.

2. The moving air.
   Change one letter.

3. Moderate or gentle, not harsh.
   Take away the first two letters, then add one.

4. To defeat others in a game.
   Take away one letter.

5. Another word for father.
   Change one letter.

6. A kitchen utensil used for frying.
   Take away one letter.

7. What you think and reason with.
   Change one letter.

8. The distance between the supports of a bridge.
   Change the vowel.

9. Frogs sometimes sit on lily ___s.
   Change one letter.

10. The past tense of do.
    Change one letter.

11. To turn in circles.
    Add one letter.

12. Another word for a child.
    Change one letter.
Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

Name ____________________________________________

1. The edible seed of certain plants.
   Take away the first two letters, then add one.

2. A small ball that can go on a necklace.
   Change one letter.

3. Hair that grows on a man's face.
   Add one letter.

4. Listened to something.
   Change one letter.

5. Body organ that pumps blood.
   Change one letter.

6. This makes something hot.
   Take away one letter.

7. You sit on this.
   Change one letter.

8. An ocean mammal with flippers.
   Change one letter.

9. Another word for ocean.
   Take away one letter.
Name ____________________________

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

A homophone of the previous word. A penny is worth one ___.
Change one letter.

To cause something to go somewhere.
Change one letter.

The rate at which something moves.
Change one letter.

Opposite of closed.
Rearrange the letters.

An instrument for writing.
Take away two letters.

Caused something to go.
Change the last letter.

You plant this in the ground.
Take away one letter.

I hope to ___ no more than ten dollars at the movie.
Take away the first letter, then add two.

A slang word for no.
Add an o, then rearrange.

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p e n n y
Name

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

1. What you do with a needle while sewing. 
   **Add two letters at the beginning.**

2. To end or destroy. 
   **Take away one letter.**

3. Quiet and unmoving. 
   **Add one letter.**

4. What stores do with the things in them. 
   **Take away the last letter, then add two.**

5. What plants do without water. 
   **Change one letter.**

6. Wood or stone that runs along the bottom of a door or window. 
   **Change the vowel.**

7. This makes you want to scratch. 
   **Take away one letter.**

8. Cleverness or intelligence. 
   **Take away one letter.**

9. A costume you might see on Halloween. 
   **Add two letters.**

10. Expert ability at doing something. 
    **Change one letter.**

    **Change one letter.**

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