

Activity book • DVD • Picture cards • Website

The Communication Cookbook

the better world campaign  
BTO

I can  
helps children communicate

BAKED BEANS

The essential ingredients of successful speaking and listening for 4-6 year-olds

The Communication Cookbook has been developed by I CAN, the children's communication charity, and the BT Better World Campaign, which helps young people use communication to create a better world.

We'd like to thank all the schools, teachers, parents and children whose invaluable help made the Cookbook possible.



helps children  
**communicate**  
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I CAN is the children's communication charity. I CAN works to develop speech, language and communication skills for all children, with a particular focus on children who find communication hard. I CAN develops programmes and provides training, consultancy, outreach services as well as resources and information for families and professionals. I CAN also runs two special schools for children with speech, language and communication needs.

[www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

the  
**better**  
world  
campaign



The BT Better World Campaign is dedicated to helping young people develop the communication skills they need to get the most out of life, at school, at home, and in society.

The Communication Cookbook is the latest in a series of resources made by the Better World Campaign in partnership with I CAN. Others include 'Learning to Talk and Talking to Learn'. A wide range of free resources can be found on our website.

[www.btbetterworld.com](http://www.btbetterworld.com)



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The activities in this book have been compiled by Wendy Lee (above), a professional adviser at I CAN. Part of Wendy's role is to make sure that I CAN's programmes and resources reflect best practice and evidence. Wendy is a speech and language therapist with over 20 years' experience in mainstream and special schools.

Over the years, Wendy has worked with children with a wide variety of speech, language and communication needs. She is also involved in training teachers and speech and language therapists.

Wendy is married to Simon, a head teacher, and has three daughters.

**'You have to make the effort, but if you do, the rewards will be not only surprising, but amazing.'**  
 Reception class teacher







# Welcome to The Communication Cookbook

Helping children develop their communication skills is one of the most important jobs you can do as a parent or teacher. That's because spoken communication is the key to so much in life that's important, from making friends and getting a good education to enjoying a successful career.

Communication is the foundation for getting a great start in life.

*The Communication Cookbook* shows you how to help children build language skills and grow into confident, skillful communicators during their critical first two years at primary school. Every child benefits from having a solid foundation of language and communication skills. It's impossible to be too good a communicator.

*The Cookbook* can also help prepare 4 year-old children for school, whether used at home by a parent or in a pre-school setting such as a playgroup.

We called it a *Cookbook* because there are five key ingredients in successful communication: attention and listening; vocabulary; building sentences; telling stories; and conversations. Children need nourishment in all five areas in order to develop into healthy communicators who are able to express themselves clearly and, just as importantly, understand what others say to them.

The book is packed with ideas for activities and games. They're great fun to do – for you as well the children! Far from being another chore to add

to your busy life, the activities can simply become part of your everyday routines, whether you're a teacher or parent.

Best of all, parents and teachers who tested the activities were very positive about their impact on children. They said the children enjoyed the games and became more confident with their communication. Parents even said it helped them get to know their children better!

Children develop at different rates at different times, so they will have different abilities at any one time. There are tips throughout that will help you to make the activity easier and harder to suit each child.

Don't forget to look at *The Communication Cookbook* DVD. This includes a demonstration by Wendy Lee of how to interact with children in order to support their growth as communicators. More details on page 56.

There's also a special *Communication Cookbook* website where you can find additional activities, download picture cards covering some of the core vocabulary for 4-6 year-olds and play a series of brilliant online games. It's all at: [www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)

*The Communication Cookbook* isn't for reading once and putting away on a shelf. Keep it handy. Use it every day. Be inspired by it and have great conversations with the children in your life.



**Being able to communicate is absolutely fundamental to children's development.**

The ability to communicate underpins just about every aspect of a child's development. It sits at the very heart of education. If a child is going to make the most of their time at school, they must be able to understand the teacher and join in discussions, whether the subject is maths, history or PE. Importantly, one of the first steps towards learning to read and write is to have solid verbal language skills.

Communication is also at the heart of a child's social and emotional development. Relationships are made and maintained through communication. And it's through communication that children learn to 'read' other people's emotional states and express their own.

The *Cookbook* aims to help *all* children because we know how important these skills are for every child's wider development. We know from research, for example, that difficulties with language and communication can have a serious impact on children's learning, behaviour and ability to make and maintain friendships.

If children have good speech, language and communication skills, life can be a lot easier for you as a parent or teacher, and ultimately for them. You'll be able to understand their needs and feelings, and they'll be able to understand your instructions more easily. You'll be able to negotiate and reason with them rather than nag or bribe. And of course you can have a lot of fun together with your conversations.

**Children thrive best on five.**

We're all familiar with the idea of having a balanced diet, incorporating five portions of fruit or vegetables a day. *The Communication Cookbook* follows a similar approach by recommending that children regularly practise communication skills in five different areas:

**Attention and listening**

**Vocabulary**

**Building sentences**

**Telling stories**

**Conversations**

Skills in these areas form the basic building blocks of communication. They are all vital and link with one another. They often overlap, meaning activities in one area can support language and communication in others. The book provides you with ideas for four different activities for each skill, making 20 in all.

As soon as you become familiar with the principles behind the activities, you'll be able to create your own versions. The possibilities are endless. Remember, make sure children practise their skills in all five areas on a regular basis.

All the activities are tried and tested. The vocabulary and grammar they promote has been carefully selected to be appropriate for children aged 4-6.

**Note to teachers: Incorporate the activities into your everyday classroom planning.**

**Note to parents: Fit the activities into your everyday routines.**

While 'speaking and listening' as a topic is covered within literacy, the reality (as most teachers know) is that spoken language is relevant to every aspect of the curriculum. For example, children need a good understanding of maths vocabulary (including terms such as 'more than' and 'less than') to work through the concepts of early mathematics. Similarly, in a science investigation they need to be able to predict what happens next. Throughout the day, children need to be able to work in pairs and small groups to problem-solve, negotiate and discuss topics together.

The activities in the book can be used to support learning in all areas. For instance, vocabulary exercises are a great way to teach the words required for a new topic. Sorting games can be used to categorise different types of material in science. *Word Bingo* can be linked to history lessons and *bossy Boo Cat* played in PE. Some activities are particularly well suited for quieter periods. Listening games, for instance, are ideal for circle time.

Teachers who took part in a *Cookbook* trial commented on how effective it was to do five activities a day over a 4-week period. The table below shows a suggested schedule, with the simpler activities coming first.

You can incorporate many of the activities into your everyday life. Do you have time to kill in a queue? A car journey to make? Have some fun with one of the activities and make the most of the opportunity. Shopping to be put away? Toys to be tidied? Turn the chore into a fun learning activity.

Why not turn cooking into an opportunity for language development and conversation? Encourage children to focus on the task at hand (attention and listening). Talk about the ingredients (vocabulary). Encourage them to give you instructions (sentence building). Ask them to explain what happened to another person (telling stories). And don't forget to chat as you cook (conversations).

Some of the activities, especially those needing a few props, might require you to put aside some special time, but even then, only a bit of preparation is needed.

Skill	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
<b>Attention and listening</b>	Recipe for good listening	Listening walk	Remembering games	Making sounds
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Boo Cat sorts things out	Action time	Word magic	Word bingo
<b>Building sentences</b>	Add an adjective	Guess what?	Do as bossy Boo Cat says	Barrier games
<b>Telling stories</b>	Picture sequencing	Basics of storytelling	Group story	Important story words
<b>Conversations</b>	Spot the difference	Finding out	3 conversation games	Let's talk about it



# How to get the most out of the activities

## Symbols

### How many can play?



Single child



Small group



Whole class

### How long does it last?



10 mins



5 - 10 mins



10 - 15 mins



Day to day

- Children learn best when they're having fun and enjoying what they're doing. So make sure the activities are light-hearted.
- Little and often is best. Doing five 10-minute sessions is much more effective than one 50-minute session.
- Repetition is great. Don't be afraid of using the same words in different activities. Children are more likely to remember that way.
- Incorporate the children's interests into the activities. For example, if they're into Mickey Mouse, make up Mickey Mouse stories, describe Disney characters, and so on.
- Different learning approaches suit different children. Try to involve as many senses as you can. Touching, tasting (if appropriate), seeing, hearing, looking. Remember the Chinese proverb: *'I hear, I forget. I see, I remember. I do, I understand'*.
- All children learn at different rates, so you should make the activities easier or harder to suit different children.
- Link new information to what the child already knows. For example, if you are talking about a banana, point out that it's the same colour as the child's t-shirt (and also that granny made a banana cake at the weekend!).
- Take time to help children reflect on what they've learned. If you look at the instructions for each activity, you'll see Boo Cat, a cartoon character, pointing out the skills being taught by the game. One of the best ways to help children learn is to get them to understand why they're doing what they're doing and what skills they are developing as a result. For example, it's great fun to play a game like Fruit Salad, which involves a lot of running around, but even better to know that in order to play the game well you need to listen, and that playing the game makes you better at listening. In turn, being good at listening is important for story time or for when you're talking with your friends.
- Be specific with your praise. Saying *'good listening'* to a child makes them aware of exactly what they've done well. Recognising what they've done well puts them in a better position to repeat it in the future.
- Encourage questions and make sure the children know that it's okay to make mistakes. Explain that mistakes are a good thing, because they provide you with the opportunity to do something better next time. Children should be able to recognise when they understand something and when they don't. They should feel comfortable about asking for clarification.

## Make your home or classroom 'communication friendly'

We all know that it's easier to speak and listen in some places than others. Some factors are related to the physical environment (noise level, privacy), others are due to other people's communication styles. Are they approachable? Do they speak clearly?

It's important to make your home or classroom as 'communication friendly' as possible. For ideas on how to create an environment where children find it easy to talk and listen, read our special section, which begins on page 50.







ATTENTION  
AND  
LISTENING





# We're always asking children to listen, but they don't always know how to do it.

We tend to think of listening as something that everybody can do automatically. In fact, just like any other skill – from catching to counting – it can be taught and developed through demonstration and practice.

More and more demands are being made on our children's attention and listening within our busy and noisy society, making listening a skill which children can fail to develop properly. Some children struggle with listening, especially when they have to do it over a long period or when they are part of a larger group, like a room full of classmates. But listening is essential if children are to make sense of the sounds and words that surround them. It's also fundamental to having proper two-way conversations – which is when the fun really starts!

The ability to pay attention and concentrate is a closely related skill that also needs to be mastered if a child is to see things through to completion, whether it's playing a game, attempting a jigsaw or doing their school work. Some children have trouble sticking with tasks, preferring to flit from one thing to another, and this can slow down their learning. Being able to concentrate is one of those skills that develops through stages rather than all at once and really benefits from lots of practice and encouragement.

Fortunately, there are lots of ways you can help children to develop their listening skills. For example, it's a good idea to spend some time together with them every day in a quiet environment where

there's nothing to distract them from listening. Turning off the TV, radio or computer is a good start.

It helps to engage children's attention before giving instructions. Say their name first, make sure they're listening, and then give them the instruction. If they carry out the instruction properly, make sure you praise them (*'Well done. You knew what to do. You were doing really good listening'*). Speaking like that might sound funny at first, but children like it and will soon start to be aware of their own listening skills.

It's important that adults demonstrate good listening with children. We are important role models, so when children are speaking to us it's good to stop, make eye contact and concentrate on what they are saying. If this isn't possible, say something like, *'I can't listen now but give me a few minutes and then you can have my attention.'* Then when you have the time, listen really well. Doing this shows children that you value what they have to say.

Sometimes we need to cut down what we are saying to help our children listen. For example, when leaving the house in the morning, you might say: *'Ellie, shoes, coat, bag, please – brilliant. We're ready to go.'* This works better than long explanations, such as: *'Come on Ellie now, it's time to stop playing with your Barbies and get your shoes and coat on – oh and don't forget your bag – come on Ellie, get your things on, we're going to be late!'*



# Recipe for good listening

This activity teaches good listening by breaking it down into three key behaviours. This approach provides you with a simple way to recognise and praise good listening behaviour.

## The main idea

Good listening involves three key behaviours:

1. Sitting still
2. Looking at the person who is speaking
3. Thinking about what the other person has said

### What you do

Explain each behaviour separately and link it to good listening.

Praise each behaviour when you see it, again linking it to good listening. For example: *'You were sitting beautifully and that means you can listen better.'* The more firmly embedded this idea is in the child's mind, the better.



**'Look how good I am at listening. Now I know what to do.'**

## Have fun with role play

Have some fun demonstrating both poor and good listening.

### 1. Sitting still

Ask a child to tell you something – e.g. the best bit of their last holiday. Warn them that when they are talking, you might listen carefully or you might not.

When they are talking, wriggle around and look all over the place. Don't listen! You won't need to do this for very long.

Ask the children:

- *'Was I listening?'*
- *'How do you know I wasn't listening?'*
- *'What do I need to do to listen properly?'*

Usually, children come up with the idea of being still or looking at the speaker.

Go through this exercise again, this time listening well. Say to the children: *'I am sitting nicely so I am doing good listening.'* Use every opportunity that day to 'catch' children sitting nicely and listening. Praise them. For example: *'Look at you sitting so nicely and doing really good listening.'*

### 2. Looking

The next day (or when the children are ready) go through the same process, demonstrating both good and poor 'looking'.

### 3. Thinking

On the third day, go through the process again, this time with 'thinking'. Ask the children to talk to you. Make it obvious that you are not thinking about what is being said to you. For instance, stare blankly into space. Get the children to ask you questions. Explain that you don't know the answers because you weren't thinking.

Ask the children to tell you something else. This time, demonstrate good thinking and answer all the questions correctly.

### Praise works wonders

Now that you and the children know exactly what good listening involves, you can make your praise very specific. For example: *'You knew the answer because you were doing good thinking and good listening.'* This is very powerful as it tells children exactly what they are doing well.

**This activity is demonstrated on the DVD.**

### Reminder

*Remember to follow the good listening rules when talking with children. You will find they get very good at telling you when you're not doing it right!*







# Listening walk



This is a wonderful way to get children thinking about the different sounds they hear around them.

## How to do it

Tell the children you're going on a listening walk. Explain that everyone must listen very carefully to the sounds they can hear around them. Let the children walk for a while and then stop. Ask them to be very quiet and still. Get them to say what they can hear.

## Describing sounds

Help the children find words to describe what they can hear.

- Cars and lorries driving on the road (brmm, brmm).
- The wind blowing (whoosh).
- People talking (chatter, chatter), and so on . . .

Depending on where you walk, the sounds might be very different. So make sure you walk in a range of settings – the park, the shopping centre, the sports ground, and so on.

## Back at base

When you return home or get back to the classroom, make the sounds and see if the children remember what they stand for. 'What does brmm, brmm stand for?' Alternatively, ask them to describe what the wind, for example, sounds like (whoosh).

You can play an online version of this game on [www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)



## Variations

1. Make a listening map of the walk. Help the children draw a rough map of your route. Get them to draw things that represent the sounds they heard at various points.
2. Use your mobile or a tape recorder to record the sounds you hear at your stopping points. Replay them and see if the children can name the sounds.
3. Take a checklist with you and see how many of the sounds the children hear on their walk. Here are some items for a checklist.
  - Cars ● Insects ● Bells ● Voices ● Door slamming ● Buzzers

## Day to day

Whenever you are out and about, or even in the house, play this game of listening for sounds and working out what they are.

As children get better at listening, they can pick out quiet or subtle differences between sounds.



'I can hear loads of different sounds when I walk to school.'

# Remembering games

Remembering games are a great way for children to build their skills at paying attention. They are very simple to play and can be done anywhere. You can easily make up your own versions.

## Shopping basket

Start by saying something like: *'Mr Smith went shopping and bought a bottle of milk.'* Ask one of the children to repeat what you said and add another item. For example: *'Mr Smith went shopping and bought a bottle of milk and a loaf of bread.'* As you go around the circle, keep adding items. *'Mr Smith bought a bottle of milk, a loaf of bread and some apples.'*

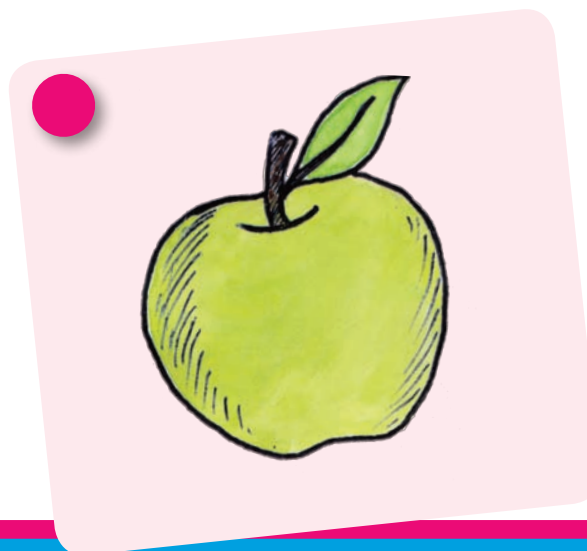


## Going on holiday

Begin by describing something Mrs Brown did on holiday. *'Mrs Brown went on holiday and ate some ice cream.'* The next child should add a holiday activity and remember what went before. For example: *'Mrs Brown ate an ice cream and went swimming.'*

## Birthday presents

The same idea again, but this time the list describes the presents someone got for their birthday. For example: *'For his birthday, John got a toy car, a cricket bat and scarf.'*



## Same sound

Change the format a little by having children choose something that begins with the same sound as their name. *'Jude went shopping and bought some juice.'* *'Billy went shopping and bought some butter.'*

*Make it easier*

*Have a range of objects or pictures in a basket for the children to pull out and hold.*



**'I can remember best when I concentrate.'**



# Making sounds

This is a great way to get children to play around with sounds, which is vital for the development of both speaking and listening skills.

## Getting ready

What you need for this activity are lots of different ways of making sounds. You can produce your own noise-makers (with the help of the children!) using household items. For example, make a shaker by filling an empty bottle or tube with rice or dried beans. Plastic bowls make great drums and saucepan lids function as excellent cymbals. Toy shops are full of inexpensive noise-making instruments, like rattles, bells, whistles, and so on.

## Three ways to play

### Songs and stories

Ask the children to make noises in songs and stories whenever certain characters or actions are mentioned. For instance, tell them that every time the Wolf is mentioned in Little Red Riding Hood, they must make a sound with the shaker. Every time Jack climbs the beanstalk, they must bang a saucepan lid. Tasks like these encourage children to listen extra carefully.

### Copy me

To play this variation, you need to have two of each instrument. Sit at a table, opposite a child. Give them the same set of instruments as you have. Put a barrier on the table between the two of you – a large book, for example. For the game to work, you need to make sounds without them being able to see which instrument you are using.

Make a sound. For instance, shake a rattle. Ask the children to make the same sound. To make it more challenging, create a sequence of sounds (bang, rattle, shake) and ask them to make the same sounds in the same order.

### Drums

Play a pattern of beats on a drum (plastic bowl) and get the children to repeat the pattern on their own drum (dum dee dum dum dum). To make this a little harder, use more than one instrument. For example, play a pattern on the saucepan lid and then a different pattern on the shaker. Ask the children to copy both the rhythms and the sounds.



'I can hear which sounds are the same and which are different.'











## Vocabulary

# Helping children learn new words is not only important, it's also great fun.

A good vocabulary is essential if children are to understand what's going on around them, get to grips with new ideas and express their own thoughts. While children pick up new words at different rates, every child benefits from playing vocabulary-building games. They help boost children's confidence with language, and words are interesting things to talk about and play with.

The starting point is to help children make the connection between words and objects. 'Look, there's a helicopter.' 'Mummy's eating a mango.' You can explain what new words mean. 'By tomorrow I mean the day after today, after you've had one more sleep.' Connecting words like this is a natural thing to do with very young children but works well with older children too, especially with more unusual words.

You can show how words are linked to other words in different ways. For example, they might be similar in meaning (tall, high, long). Or they might fit in the same category (animals) or subcategory (farm

animals). You can point out that some words are linked by sound. For example, they might start with the same sound (ball, bee, boy) or they might rhyme (hat, cat, mat).

Children need to know that words can be used in lots of different ways. Some words are about doing (walking, tidying, swimming), some are about describing (big, small, red). Some words are names for things or people (table, mum, school), others give names to ideas or concepts (size, weight). Having fun with words really helps children to remember them and organise them properly in their heads.

The key to building vocabulary is lots of repetition, making links between new words and things children already know. It's a good idea to use the words introduced by the exercises in different situations throughout the day, walking down the street, at the shops, or at home. Vocabulary building can take place anywhere, at any time.









10 mins



# Boo Cat sorts things out

This exercise helps children learn how to sort words into different categories. This is a crucial part of building an effective mental filing system, which helps children learn and remember words and their meanings.

## Setting up

Create a set of picture cards from the three *Boo Cat sorts things out* sheets. Tell the following story:

**Boo Cat has been out shopping.**

**He has a shopping bag full of food and clothes. He doesn't know where to put them.**

**Let's help him sort out the shopping into things we eat (food) and things we wear (clothes). The food needs to go in the kitchen cupboard. The clothes need to go into the wardrobe.**

## Playing the game

Lay out the cards and ask the children to sort them. Prompt if necessary. 'Which things do we wear? Which do we eat?'

### Variations

- Use real items instead of pictures
  - Make your own set of cards using photos or clip art
  - Use different objects to sort
- Sort in different ways. Here are some ideas:
- By weight (heavy/light)
  - By colour (yellow/blue)
  - By feature (toys with wheels/toys without wheels)
  - By appearance (smooth, rough)

## Taking it further

Use the exercise as an opportunity to chat about the words you're using.

- 'That's right, it's an orange. An orange is food. It's something we eat. Yummy!'*(Simple)*
- 'Gloves! When might I wear these?'*(More complex)*

You can play this game many, many times. Children love, and benefit from, repetition.

You can play an online version of this game at [www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)

### Day to day

Turn tidying up or putting the shopping away into a sorting game. 'Put the dolls in the yellow box and the clothes in the drawer.'



'I like this game - it helps me to know which words go together.'



# Action time

This activity is great for helping children develop their skills at using verbs – the words we use to describe actions.

## Setting up

Make a set of picture cards by cutting up the *Action Time* sheet at the back of this book. The cards show a range of verbs, such as *walk*, *look* and *jump*.

## Playing the game

Place the picture cards face down and ask the first child to choose one. Let's suppose that Julie picks the card for *jump*.

Julie then selects someone from the group and tells them to do the action on the card. For example, Julie says: '*I choose David... David, jump!*' David jumps, then selects another member of the group and gives them the same instruction. '*I choose Mital... Mital, jump.*'



'It's fun using different words to tell people what to do.'

## Remember

Make sure you give plenty of positive feedback. '*Julie, that was good talking. You were very clear.*' '*David, you did good listening. You knew what to do.*'

## Moving on...

When everyone in the group has had a go at the first verb, another picture card is chosen by a different child and the routine is repeated.

## Variations

Make some props available – for example, an apple, a book, a ball, etc.

This time the children have to choose (a) the picture card with the verb, (b) the person they are going to instruct, and (c) an item to involve in the instruction. For example: '*John eat the apple.*'

You can also ask the children to give 'silly' instructions, such as: '*Mrs Brown, read the banana.*' This is more than just a bit of extra fun. Knowing which sentences make sense and which don't is an important ability for a child to develop.

## Day to day

Help children to have more control over their lives by encouraging them to give clear instructions ('*Daddy, can you blow up my football, please*') or asking for permission to do something ('*Mrs Brown, can we put the hoops away, please?*')





# Word magic

This activity is a brilliant way to introduce new words into a child's vocabulary.

## Setting up

Choose the word you are going to focus on. You could use a real object (a lightbulb or pineapple, for example) or a photograph (like a river or boat).

Use the headings on the *Word Magic* template to encourage the children to talk about the object from various angles. Let's work through an example, using *pineapple* as the chosen word.



## Playing the game

Ask the child to describe it.

You might need to use some additional prompts like:

- What colour is it?
- How big is it?
- What does it feel like?

### Ask some 'what' questions

- What do we do with it?
- What is it: a fruit or vegetable?
- What kind of plants do they grow on?

### Ask some 'where' questions

- Where do we keep pineapples in the house?
- Where can you buy one?
- Where do they grow?

### Ask some 'who' questions?

- Who has tasted a pineapple?
- Who has bought one?
- Who likes the taste?



'This game is fun. It helps me learn lots about new words.'

## Taking it further

What else do you know about pineapples? What other fruits are grown in hot countries? What other things go well with pineapple? (Ice cream!)

**This activity is demonstrated on the DVD.**

## Variations

- For a whole class, divide them into groups and have each group think about one of the prompts – then get the group to share their ideas.
- If you are working with an individual child, make your templates on A4 paper and help the child to fill them in. Create a vocabulary book by keeping the completed sheets in a file.
- If you are working with a group, make your templates from much larger sheets and display them as wall posters.
- Word Magic is a great everyday way to teach new words or pre-tutor a class in the vocabulary for a new topic – maybe on the interactive white board.



# Word bingo

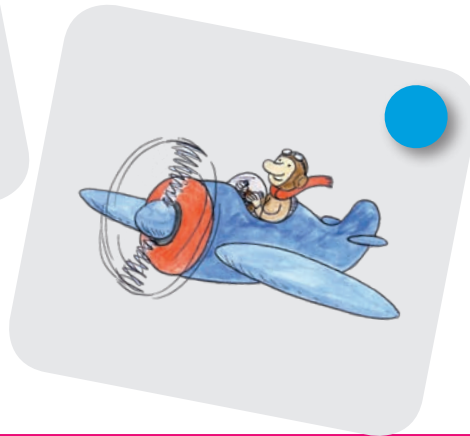
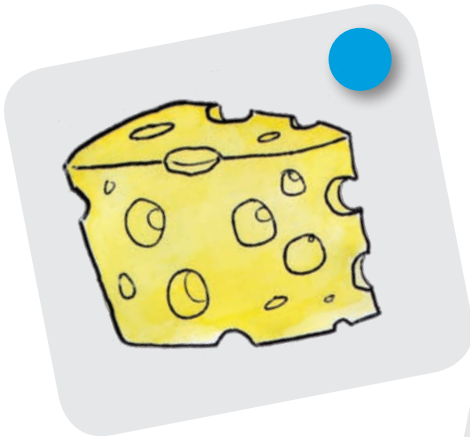
This game is a brilliant way to reinforce newly learned words. Children love it because of the bingo format, which leads to lots of fun and excitement.

## Setting up

Cut out the bingo cards from the *Word Bingo* sheets at the back of the book.

As you'll see, there are four different bingo cards, each containing 10 illustrations, so you can play the game with up to four children.

The reference sheet has all 20 illustrations on it which you use to call out the items. Give the children enough counters so they can cover the illustrations as you call them out.



## Playing the game

There are several ways to play being the bingo caller.

You can simply call out the name of the item. For example:

- *'Boat... sock... glass...'*

You can describe what the item looks like. For example:

- *'It's got wings and wheels and a pilot at the front end.'* (Aeroplane)

You can describe what it's used for. For example:

- *'It's something you sleep in when you're little.'* (Cot)

You can describe where it's found. For example:

- *'It's yellow and you find it in the fridge.'* (Cheese)

## And the winner is...

Children should shout out *'Me!'* when they have the item on their card.

The first child to complete their card first is the winner and should shout *'Bingo!'*

## Variations

You can make your own bingo cards to reinforce different sets of words. For instance, you can make cards for words from a new topic being discussed at school or words that you know the children are struggling with.



**'This game is good for listening and finding out about words.'**







BUILDING SENTENCES

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## Building sentences

# Putting words together to make sentences is an exciting step in a child's development.

Putting words together to make sentences is a major step in a child's communication development, with children usually understanding more than they can say.

To understand and use sentences, children need to know how to combine words in the right order, using appropriate grammar. They also need to learn how to combine short sentences into lengthy ones that convey more complex information and still make sense to the listener.

Using and understanding sentences enables children to see how powerful language can be in influencing the world around them and making things happen as a result of their speaking or understanding.

As children begin to express themselves in sentences, they also start exercising more control over their lives – for example, by making their needs known. So speaking in sentences is quite a leap, and for that reason it's particularly important to provide them with a safe, non-critical environment in which to practise their skills, beginning with very simple sentences.

The more a child hears sentences being used in a range of situations and settings, the more likely they are to pick up the technique.

Encourage children to communicate in practical situations, where something happens as a result of them speaking or understanding. This will help them to get really engaged in the activity. For example, ask them to describe, in a sentence, what they would like to do next. Ask them to describe the toy they would like to play with. Give them an instruction that has several parts to it. *'First get the paints out, then find some paper.'*

Guessing games are a great way to get children to use sentences. For example, ask a child to describe their favourite TV character and you (or another adult) guess who they're talking about.

As an important role model, it's essential that you speak in clear sentences yourself. Use specific language (*'The green chair'*) rather than empty words (*'The one over there'*). Start with short sentences and extend them when the child is ready.

There's an online game to practise understanding sentences at [www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)

# Add an adjective



This exercise is great for encouraging the use of descriptive words (adjectives) and linking them into simple sentences.

## Setting up

Get the children to collect some objects to describe, such as a ball, toy or cup. They can choose more unusual objects such as a sieve or a thistle. The more unusual the object, the wider the range of words needed to describe them.

## Playing the game

Hold the ball in your hand and say: 'This is a ball.' Hand the ball to the next child and ask them to add another word to describe the ball. For example, they might say: 'It's a blue ball.' The ball is then passed to the next child, who adds another descriptive word. 'It's a round ball.' Keep going as long as you can. 'It's a big ball'. 'It's a bouncy ball.'

## Remember

As always, recognise and praise good listening behaviours.



### Make it easier...

Prompt with some gentle questions: 'What does the ball feel like?'

### Make it harder

With older children, get them to add the words together into a sentence: 'It's a blue ball.' 'It's a round blue ball.' 'It's a big, round blue ball . . .', and so on.



'I am learning so many words to describe things.'



# Guess what?

This exercise helps children to practise both understanding sentences and saying them. They have to listen and understand clues to work out the answer. The activity also helps them to learn about categories. Some children might need quite a lot of support with this activity at first.

## Setting up

Create a set of pictures (about 12) by cutting photographs from magazines. Alternatively, use picture cards you might already have from other games.

Arrange the pictures face up. Without being seen, put a coin (or some other reward) under one of the pictures.

Explain that you are going to describe one of the pictures. The children's job is to decide which one you are talking about.



## Playing the game

Let's say you have chosen a photograph of a frog. Offer the children six clues, one for each of the headings below. For example, say: 'This is what category it belongs to – it's an animal!'

### Heading

The category it belongs to  
 What it does  
 One way of describing it  
 What it's like  
 What it's not like  
 The letter it begins with

### Clue

It's an animal  
 It can jump  
 It's green  
 It's a bit like a toad  
 It's not like a rabbit  
 It begins with the letter F

### Day-to-day

You can play this game anywhere, any time, without props. Play it like 'I spy', but instead start by saying, 'I'm thinking of something that lives in a zoo...' or 'I'm thinking of someone who has a baby brother...'

## Taking it further

When the children are familiar with the activity, let them take turns at being 'teacher'. At first, the children might need a lot of adult help with making sure their descriptions fit the six categories, though they will develop this ability with practice.

### Variation

Play the game as a quiz.

Choose a picture without telling anyone what it is. See if the children can guess correctly by asking the six questions.

1. What category does it belong to?
2. What does it do?
3. How would you describe it?
4. What is it like?
5. What is it not like?
6. What letter does it begin with?



'I gave really good clues. The others guessed what I was talking about.'







# Do as bossy Boo Cat says

This activity encourages children to use simple sentences to tell others what to do. It's also great fun.

## Setting up

Prepare a set of picture cards by cutting up the *Do as bossy Boo Cat says* sheets. These cards show actions like touch your nose, run to the window or wiggle your foot. Explain that Boo is feeling very bossy today. Take one of the picture cards yourself. 'Bossy Boo Cat says sit on the floor.' Sit on the floor, as instructed.



## Playing the game

Ask a child to pick a card. Get them to pass on the instruction to another member of the group. For example: 'Bossy Boo Cat says walk to the door.'

### Make it harder

You can get the children to use longer sentences by having them include an extra description. Here are some examples.

Bossy Boo Cat says:

- Touch your nose with your thumb
- Walk to the door quickly
- Jump up and down four times
- Sit on the floor and keep still



'I can make a sentence AND tell people what to do!'

## Taking it further

When they're ready, the children will be able to think of their own bossy Boo Cat instructions without the help of cards.

### Variations

You can turn the activity into a dressing-up game. Prepare a collection of clothes, including items like hats, scarves, socks, trousers, belts, sunglasses, watch, rings, shoes, and so on.

In the basic version of the dressing-up game, make sure some of the instructions are unexpected (like 'Put the tie on your leg.')

This will make sure the children think about the instructions rather than carry them out automatically. As an extension to this version, get the children to add another detail such as:

- Put the woolly hat on your hand
- Put the stripey scarf on your head
- Put the blue sock on your nose



# Barrier games

Barrier games are a fabulous way of encouraging children to be precise in what they say. The idea with these games is to put a 'barrier' between the players so that they can't see what the other person is doing. You can make an effective barrier by using a large opened-out book, a tray or piece of cardboard.

## Getting ready

Play in pairs. Give each pair the same drawing and identical sets of coloured pencils. For example, you can use the drawings on the *Barrier games* sheet.

One child colours in a part of their drawing and instructs the other child to do the same. For example, the child might say: 'Colour the curly hair brown. Colour the straight hair yellow.' Continue until both pictures have been coloured in.

At the end, the children check the pictures and decide whether or not they are the same.

## How to help

Go through the pictures with the children and identify what went well and what could have been done differently to make the pictures more identical. Help them to understand the idea of clarification. For example: 'Did you mean light blue or dark blue?' Encourage the child who is doing the drawing to ask questions if they are at all confused: 'Do you mean the boy with the straight hair or the curly hair?'

Barrier games are powerful because they provide children with immediate feedback on whether or not their message got across clearly. They also help children to understand how powerful and useful language can be.

**This activity is demonstrated on the DVD.**

## Variations

Barrier games can be used in many different ways to practice giving and understanding instructions. Here are some examples, all of which can be adapted to suit the children's abilities.

- Give one child a picture to describe so the other can copy it.
- Get the children to make identical sets of beads.
- Use the pattern on a pegboard as the item to be described for copying.
- Give both children the same set of bricks (different shapes, colours and sizes) and get them to create the same patterns.
- Give each child the same set of toys – like Playmobile figures – and get them to create identical scenarios.
- Dress identical picture dolls with a variety of clothes.
- Complete a task, like making a sandwich, with a choice of bread and fillings.
- Describe where to put items on a simple map.



'I need to give clear instructions to make sure our pictures are the same.'





Charlotte "I did it for pearls."

Handwriting  
Aa Bb Cc Dd  
Ee Ff Gg Hh  
Ii Jj Kk Ll  
Mm Nn Oo Pp  
Qq Rr Ss Tt  
Uu Vv Ww Xx  
Yy Zz  
Capital All the

Supertips  
Superwashable



# telling stories







## Telling stories

# Tell me what happened. What's the story?

We tell each other stories at home, at work and across the dinner table. We replay the events of our lives through our stories. ('You'll never guess what happened to me this morning ...'). We tell stories to unload our anxieties, pass on news, share information and explain how we feel about things.

In short, stories are woven into the fabric of life. Being able to tell stories (and understand other people's stories) is an essential skill that children need to develop as they make their way in the world.

We seem to have an instinct for telling stories. Children as young as three or four, given the right support, are able to convey information in the form of a simple story.

Stories are more than just a string of sentences; they need to have a structure in order to make sense. We need to set the scene, say who was there, what happened and how we felt. Stories also need to take into account the listener's knowledge and needs.

There are many occasions at school when children are asked to describe their experiences ('What happened

*in the playground?', 'What did you do on holiday?', 'Who did you see in the park?'). And then of course there's the question that every parent asks: 'What happened at school today?'*

Storytelling exercises act as great communication workouts because they call on all the other skills, from paying attention and listening to vocabulary and sentence building. Being good at telling stories verbally is a good foundation for writing. It's unlikely that children will be able to write well-structured stories if they can't understand or express their own stories verbally.

The best way to encourage children to develop their storytelling abilities is to give your time as a listener. Respond to their stories ('That's amazing!'). Let your facial expressions reflect your interest. Ask gentle questions. If necessary, prompt them to tell you what happened next. Encourage storytelling around the house. It's important for children to hear stories in as many different situations and settings as possible.

Try to keep your stories simple and organised, with a clear structure and the right component parts.

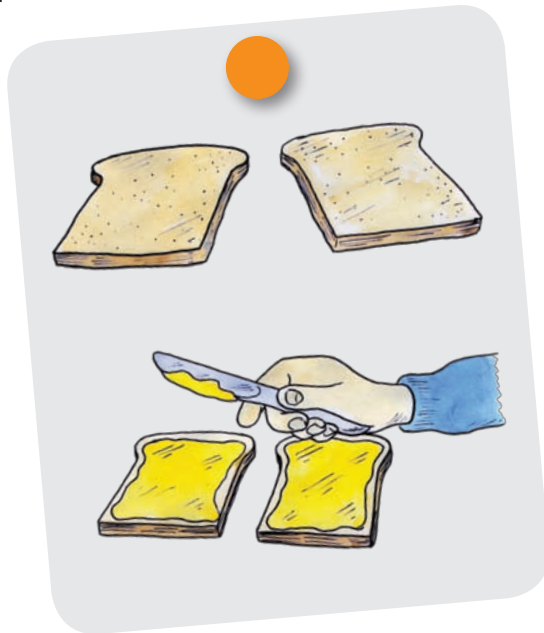
# Picture sequencing

This exercise helps children learn how to tell their stories in the right order.

## Setting up

First, create a set of pictures cards from the *Picture sequencing* sheet.

The cards show the various stages of making a sandwich. The child's task is to put them in the right chronological sequence.



## Getting started

Start by showing the children a part of the sequence and asking them to describe what's on the picture. Next, offer a choice of two pictures and ask: 'Which comes next?'

When they've got the hang of this, make the task a little harder by asking them to order all the cards on their own. Get them to describe how a sandwich is made, using the cards as a guide.

Place special emphasis on words that are to do with ordering and organising, such as first, second, next, last, beginning and so on. This will help at school with organising their writing.

## Variation

You can have great fun making up your own cards with a digital camera. For example, you could take a series of photographs of children getting ready for school in the morning - brushing their teeth, having breakfast, and so on. By playing the sequencing game with these photographs, you'll not only increase storytelling skills but will also familiarise them with the routine.

## Get talking

Use the exercise as an opportunity to chat. If the pictures are about getting dressed, you could chat about the difference between winter and summer clothes, and so on.

You can play an online version of this game at: [www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)

## Other ideas for sequences...

- What happens in the morning
- At playtime
- Going to school
- Going to the park
- Going to the cinema
- Getting dressed



'This is a bit like a story.'









# The basics of storytelling

This activity helps children to develop a good set of storytelling skills. It can be quite hard work compared to some activities, but it pays dividends.

The idea is to break down how you tell (and listen to) stories into a number of key steps, which you then practise with the children.

## How it works

Start with the skills of listening to a story. As with all good listening, the basics are: (a) sit still; (b) look at the person who is talking; (c) think about what the person is saying.

Explain that when you are listening to a story, there are five things to think about:

- Who is in the story?
- Where is the story taking place?
- When is it?
- What happens?
- How do the people in the story feel?

Tell them a story. It might be a real-life story, like *'What I did while you were at school today'*. Or it could be a story from a book, like *Little Red Riding Hood*.

After you've told the story, ask the children to talk about *who* was involved, *where* the action took place, *when* it took place, *what* happened, and *how* the people felt.

Repeat with other stories until you're happy that they understand and remember all the important parts of a story.

Remember to praise good story listening behaviours. *'Well done, you really listened to what was going on and where it happened!'*

## What's in the story

Now let's look at the skills of telling stories.

Get one of the children to tell a short story. It might be about something that happened in the playground or at lunchtime. Or it could be a familiar story, like *Snow White*.

Ask the children what they think they need to do to tell a story well. Listen to what they say, and thank them for their ideas.

Explain that the first step is to plan what you're going to say. Show the children how drawing a few rough pictures can help with the planning. For instance, if you are planning to talk about a birthday party, you could draw some stick people to remind you of who was there and some drawings of food to remind you of what you ate.

The next step is to make sure that you include all the right details when you tell your story. Use the drawing as a reminder:

- Who is in the story?
- Where is the story taking place?
- When is it taking place?
- What happens?
- How do the people feel?

## How to tell it

The final points you want to get across are about how to speak when telling a story.

- Look at the person you are talking to
- Speak loudly enough for everyone to hear
- Speak at a good speed – not too fast, not too slow
- Make the story sound exciting
- Use actions and pictures to bring your story to life

Ask each child to tell you a story and praise when they get things right: *'Well done. You spoke very clearly and you made the story sound really exciting.'*

### Day to day...

*When children tell you stories about what's happened during their day, you can help reinforce the basics by prompting them. Example: 'So you played with Miles today in the playground, WHEN was that? In the morning or the afternoon?'*



**'Now I know what I need to do to tell a story. The list helps me remember.'**



# Group story

Making up stories together is a fun way for children to become familiar with the different elements needed to make a story complete.

## Setting up

Cut out the cards from the *Group story* sheet. Each card represents an element of a story. They are:

- *Who*
- *Where*
- *What happened*
- *When*
- *Why*
- *How people feel*

Explain to the children that you are going to make up a story together and that each person in the group will be adding a different bit of the story.

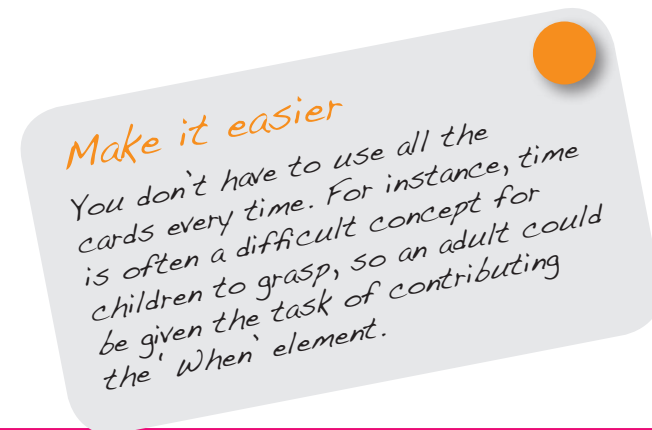


## Playing the game

Show the cards to the children and remind them of what each symbol stands for. Give examples for each symbol. For instance: *Where* might mean in the park, at the cinema or by the seaside. Another example: *How people feel* might mean John is feeling happy or Ramesh is feeling sad.

You could start by telling a story yourself. It might be a real experience (what you did on your holidays when you were a child) or a story from a book or comic.

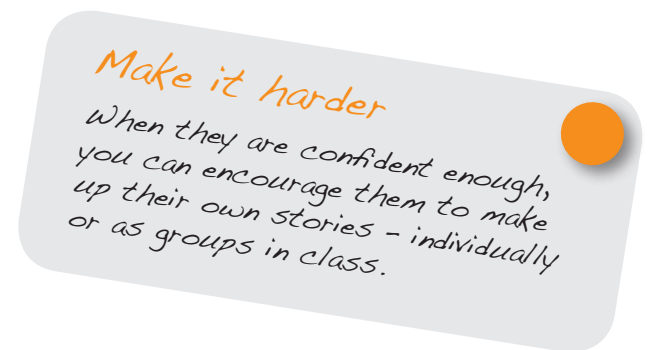
Encourage the children to retell the story, one element at a time. For example, the first child might be shown the *Who* card and asked to say who is involved in the story. The next child might be shown the *Where* card and asked to describe where the story took place. And so on...



## Taking it further

In a similar way, you can encourage the children to retell a story they are already familiar with. This could be an experience from their own lives or a story they've heard or seen on television.

**This activity is demonstrated on the DVD.**



# Important story words

The aim of this activity is to get children to identify the different elements within a story and to think of lots of different words for each category.

## How to do it

Cut out the cards from the *Important story words* sheet. The cards represent five kinds of words that are very important for storytelling. *Who* words. *When* words. *Where* words. *What* words. *End* words. Use these cards throughout the activity to remind the children of the five kinds of words.

Tell the children a very simple story that includes examples of the five kinds of words. For example: *'Daddy and me went to the cinema last night. We saw a very funny film and then ate fish and chips. I was tired but happy when I got home.'*



## The cards

Use the cards to help the children identify different types of information in a story.

- **Who words** Me and Daddy
- **When words** Last night
- **Where words** Cinema
- **What words** Saw a funny film, ate fish and chips
- **End words** I was tired but happy

Spend time brainstorming each category.

*'Let's think of some who words. That's right, there's you and me and Daddy and Mrs Brown.'*

## End words

*End* words tend to be a conclusion or final action of some sort. *'We stopped playing when it rained.'* They can also refer to how people felt, including the person telling the story. *'I was upset by how angry he was.'*







Over there

Here

Where?

LEARNING TOGETHER  
PMS



conversations





## Conversations

# Conversations make the world go around.

Friendships and family relationships thrive on them. The world of work depends on them. We use conversations to sort out problems, make plans and get things done. Huge amounts of our lives are conducted through conversations.

To see how important conversations are at school, take a look at children in a playground and see how many one-to-one and group conversations are going on. Children talk to each other about everything under the sun. Many of their spontaneous role-play games are completely dependent on talking. Even a playground football game involves lots of chatting. Without conversational skills, a child might struggle to make friends or to get their needs met effectively.

Being able to have conversations depends on all the other skills described in this book – paying attention and listening, having the right words to use, being able to construct sentences and tell stories. But even when they're doing all those things, the big challenge for many children is getting into the habit of taking turns. This is central to two-way communication, but is not always easy for children to take on board. That's why many of the exercises in this category focus on taking turns.

Children can be encouraged to take turns and interact with friends and family in lots of ways besides the

activities in this book. All sorts of ready-made games, from Ludo to Snakes and Ladders, encourage social interaction and taking turns.

Don't forget to praise children when they are taking turns or waiting nicely. It sounds simple but it works.

It's also worth noting that, while some conversations are purely social, many are functional – that is, they happen for a reason. They have a purpose. It might be to find out about someone's needs, to clarify something or to ask for help. Children need to become familiar with having conversations using their language for different purposes.

Remember also that commenting on what children are doing or saying, or giving information about yourself, can create much better conversations than simply asking lots of questions.

For instance, you might say: 'I noticed you playing tag with Sam in the playground this morning.' The child may respond with: 'We weren't playing tag, we were playing Harry Potter!' The conversation has begun. You can encourage it to flourish by saying: 'Oh, that sounds good.' 'Yeah, Zach is Harry and...'

There's an online game to practise understanding conversations at [www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)







# Spot the difference

This game is a great way to build children's conversation skills – and have wonderful fun doing it. Being attentive to changes in someone's appearance can be a good starting point for a conversation.

## How it works

One of the group (Person A) leaves the room or puts on a blindfold. Someone else in the group changes their appearance in some way.

Person A returns to the room (or takes off the blindfold) and is asked to say what has changed. The next person leaves the room, and so on.

## Getting started

It's best to start with changes that are pretty obvious; for example, take a shoe off, turn a jumper inside out, two people swap places, etc.

As the children get better at the game, you can make the changes more subtle. Example: roll up one sleeve higher than the other.

## How to support

Encourage the children to work out what you need to do well to be good at the game.

- 'You need to look very carefully.'
- 'You need to remember things.'

*Day to day*  
 What's different in the class today? Can we work out who is missing? What's different about Mrs Jones today? She's had her hair cut. Shazia has something different - she's lost a tooth. What about George? He's got new shoes.

*Make it harder*  
 Change something about your appearance while in the classroom or out and about and see if the children can spot the difference.

*Make it easier*  
 Have the person leaving the room be the one to change their appearance. Get the rest of the children to guess what's changed.

**Remember**  
 Talk to the children about how it feels when people notice and comment on new things about their appearance.





# Finding out

This exercise helps children to become confident at finding out about other people.

## Setting it up

Gather the children into a circle. Explain that the object of the game is for the children to find out new things about their friends. They are to take turns at asking and answering questions.

As the adult, your first job is to introduce the question.



## Playing the game

Say something like: *'I'd like to find out what everyone's favourite television programme is.'* Turn to the first child in the circle and ask: *'Carlos, what's your favourite programme?'* After Carlos has answered the question, he turns to the next child in the circle and asks the same question. *'Mohamed, what's your favourite programme?'* The question is passed around the circle, until everyone has answered, including you.

## Taking it further

Introduce other questions for everyone to ask and answer in turn. What was the most enjoyable thing you did on holiday? What present would you most like for your birthday? What's your least favourite food? Who is your best friend, and why?

Once the children are familiar with the activity, you can ask them to come up with their own questions.

## Remember

Being able to learn about other people is a very important skill to develop. Making friends or joining in games is much easier if you are able to discover things you have in common with other children.



**'It's good finding out about my friends'**





# 3 conversation games

These games provide children with the opportunity to practise their skills at conversation.

## 1. Introductions

Say your name very clearly and then add a detail about yourself that begins with the same sound as your name. For example: 'My name is Jane and I like jogging.' The children take turns at making their own statements. 'My name is Ramesh and I like rhubarb.'

You can change the style of the introduction. For example: 'My name is Matthew and I don't like mice.' 'My name is Christopher and I don't like carrots.'

## 2. True or false

Take turns at giving a fact about yourself, which can be either true or false. The others have to guess which it is.

For example: 'My hair used to be ginger!' (False)  
'My brother is captain of his football team.' (True)

## 3. Presents for all

Children take turns at saying what they would buy each other for a birthday or Christmas present - and (very importantly) why.

Example: 'I'd buy Jane a Dr Who money box because Dr Who is her favourite TV show.'

## Remember

Remind children how important it is to take turns and do good listening.

Once the children are familiar with the game, let them each have a go at being the group leader.

It's important for you to join in and play an active role.

Don't forget to praise helpful behaviours. 'That was lovely listening, Kim. You knew exactly what Darren said.'

## Tips for groups

Work in a circle.

Children on chairs, carpet tiles or mats works better. Between 6-8 is a good number - especially for quieter children.



'Now I know Jane likes Dr Who, I will ask her to play a Dr Who game at play time'



# Let's talk about it

These four games are designed to stimulate conversations around simple topics.

## Loves and hates

Collect a range of items and place one of them in the centre of a circle of children. For instance, the item might be a jumper or packet of food. Explain to the children that they should stand close to the object if they like it, or move far away if they hate it.

Ask the children to explain why they stood close or far away. Encourage them to exchange points of view with each other. *'I hate the jumper because it's too small.'* *'I like beans because they fill me up.'*

Point out similarities between children so that they can see they have things in common. *'That's interesting. David and Ryan both like soap because they say it smells nice.'*

## What's my job?

Cut out pictures of people doing different jobs. For instance, someone looking after people in hospital, serving food in a restaurant, driving an ambulance, or mending a car.

Give a picture to a child and ask them to describe what the person is doing. Others in the group have to guess what their job is.

## Special person

From the circle of children, choose someone as the 'special person'. This person then receives a compliment from everyone in the group. *'Mary is very kind.'* *'She shares her sweets.'* *'Michael makes me laugh when I am sad.'*

When children are new to this game, they can find it hard to think of things to say. In this case, send the special person out of the room, so you can help the group to work out what they want to say. The special person then comes back in the room and each child says something they like about them. Make sure all the children get a chance to be the special person.

**This activity is demonstrated on the DVD.**

## Fruit salad

Each child chooses the name of a fruit. Alan decides to be a grapefruit. Miya decides to be an apple, and so on. The group leader (initially, you) says the names of two fruits and these children have to swap places. When you say: *'Fruit salad'*, all the children must swap places. Once children are familiar with the game, get them to take turns at being the leader.

**This activity is demonstrated on the DVD.**

## Variation

You can choose words from any vocabulary - types of animals, vegetables or shapes, for instance. Alternatively, let the children choose.



*'It's great playing these games with my friend.'*





# How communication-friendly is your home or classroom?

One of the most useful things you can do to help children develop their communication abilities is to make sure they live and learn in a communication-friendly environment.

A communication-friendly environment is one that encourages and supports children in all their efforts to communicate. It's an environment where children find having conversations natural, easy and enjoyable.

As adults, we all know it's easier to talk in some situations than others. It depends, for example, on who we're talking to, what we're talking about, the mood we're in or even just how noisy it is. These factors apply just as much to children.

By playing the games and activities in this book you'll gain a good understanding of how children learn to communicate and how you can best help them. Just being more aware of the importance of communication and having some simple activities at your fingertips is a brilliant start to creating a

communication-friendly environment, at home or in the classroom.

It's also important to recognise how influential your own behaviour is. You are a big part of a child's environment. Think for a moment of some of the conversational habits other adults have that put you off communicating with them.

- Not recognising when you have something important to say.
- Ignoring your feelings or dismissing your ideas.
- Only half-listening.
- Interrupting before you've had time to finish.
- Talking about things that only interest them, not you.
- Not finishing their sentences.

Remember, children find these behaviours as damaging to communication as you do!







# 20 great ideas to help you create a communication-friendly environment.

## 1. Use the right level of language

Use the words children understand as the basis for your conversations. Pushing a child's development by using language too far beyond their current capability doesn't work. It can, in fact, be counterproductive.

It's helpful to understand what the next stage of the child's development entails. That way you reduce the risk of either holding a child back or pushing them too hard. For example, if a child is comfortable using short sentences, then they are ready to move to the next stage, when you can start using longer, more complex sentences.

If you realise that the language you are using is too advanced, think about ways to simplify it. For example, break down a complex sentence into simpler chunks. Instead of giving a long list of instructions, divide it into steps.

## 2. Get down to the level of the child

Conversations are easier with children if you get down to their eye level, which may well mean squatting on the floor when you talk with them.

## 3. Keep the atmosphere fun

Remember to have fun with language. Try to make your time together enjoyable and relaxing. You want the children to associate communication with pleasure rather than stress.

## 4. Use a child's name before giving instructions

Remember to attract the attention of a child before you speak. Wait until you have their attention before giving instructions.

## 5. Give children time to respond

Children process language slower than you, so allow them plenty of time to think and formulate a response – even if it seems like a very drawn-out process to you.

## 7. Eliminate distractions

Children generally find it harder to focus their attention than adults, so make it easier by eliminating as many distractions as you can. Simple measures, like turning off the TV and radio, or finding a quiet corner to talk in, can make a huge difference.

## 9. Praise achievements

When a child does well at a language task, praise them. Make sure the praise is specific. Rather than simply say: 'Well done,' be more detailed – 'I loved the way you described your new friends. They sound very nice.'

## 10. Encourage children to admit when they are confused or unclear

It's important to let children know it's okay for them to say if they're unsure about something. In fact, it's essential for learning. Respond positively if a child says: 'I don't understand.'

## 6. Be a role model for the language you want to hear

Children learn best from the adults around them. They pick up on the way we use language and listen to them. One of the best ways to support children's language and communication development is to be a good role model for the language, listening and conversation skills you would like to see in the children.

## 8. Use visual support

Use drawings, symbols and photographs to support the development of a child's language. For example, picture cards or clippings from magazines are a great way to reinforce vocabulary.

Create visual timetables to familiarise children with important sequences, like the tasks they need to do in the morning before school.



## 11. Offer comments rather than ask questions

It's very easy to ask too many questions. Rather than stimulating conversation, questions can actually inhibit it. They can make a conversation feel like an interrogation.

An alternative approach is to comment on what the child is doing rather than ask direct questions. So instead of asking: 'Why didn't you paint the tree green?', you could make a comment like: 'I see you've painted the tree red. That's an interesting idea.' Another example. Instead of asking: 'Why haven't you eaten your fish fingers?' you might simply comment: 'You've eaten all your beans but you've hardly touched your fish fingers.'

## 12. Create opportunities for conversations

Get creative. Make deliberate mistakes for children to correct. Set up situations where they have to communicate to get what they want. Encourage children to take control. Get them to tell you what to do, even at a very simple level. 'John, what do you think I should I do with this shopping?' The more varied the situations the better. Get them to talk with lots of different people – shopkeepers, neighbours and so on.

## 13. Tell children what skills they are practising

On the instruction page for each activity, the cartoon character *Boo Cat* highlights the skill being taught by the game. While it's important for the children to have fun, what helps make the learning 'stick' is to get them to understand why they're doing what they're doing and what skills they are practising.

## 14. Talk about what's going on in their world

It's important for children to talk about the things that interest them. Sometimes their choice of topic may be boring for an adult, but it's good for children to feel listened to. Use their favourite topics as a way to expand and develop their communication skills.

## 15. If you let them watch TV, do it together

There's a lot of debate about TV and how much children should watch. Sharing a TV programme with children can easily provide the basis for conversation as well as give you the chance to explain the things they are seeing on the screen. You could also incorporate favourite TV characters into the activities. ('Guess which cartoon character I'm thinking about?')

## 16. Mistakes are a good thing!

It's important to let children know that mistakes are OK. If they get the answer wrong, they can be encouraged with 'Good try' or given some specific information, like, 'You're right. The koala bear is an Australian animal, but it's not the one that jumps. Have another think.'

## 17. Encourage conversation

For quieter children, research has shown that some things help encourage conversations more than others. These are the most effective things adults can do:

- Make encouraging noises ('Wow!') or comment on what the child is doing ('The paint is dripping.')
- Say something about themselves ('I went on holiday to the seaside.')

These work less well:

- Asking too many questions
- Asking children to repeat themselves

## 18. Don't just give instructions, make it two-way

It's easy to allow instructions to dominate our conversations with children. 'Get your coat on.' 'Come and get your dinner.' 'Put your toys away.' 'Get your book out.'

Language has many other uses, like praising ('Fantastic!'), questioning ('What did you do at school today?'), commenting ('I see you're making a rocket'), negotiating ('OK, five more minutes play, then bed time') or clarifying ('Do you mean yesterday or tomorrow?'). It's good to have a balance in the different ways we use language.

## 20. Respond positively to curiosity

Anything that builds a child's sense of inquisitiveness is worth pursuing, since curiosity is the engine that drives learning. Be particularly careful to react positively to questions.

## 19. Name the emotion

If a child is experiencing a strong emotion, name it so they can start to build their own vocabulary of emotions. Try to connect the emotion to an event or experience to reinforce the idea that feelings don't come from out of the blue. So, for example, you might say: 'You're feeling angry because your toy was left out in the rain.' When children realise that someone recognises how they're feeling, this often has a strong calming effect.

# Stages of language development

By the age of five, most children have mastered the major building blocks of language. As they grow older and vocabulary continues to expand, children develop and refine the way they combine sentences, communicate with others and use language to perform increasingly complex tasks. The table opposite shows the major stages in this crucial process for 4-6 year-olds.





## Listening and attention

Children enjoy listening to longer stories.  
They still find it difficult to concentrate on more than one thing at a time, like playing and listening.

BY  
4  
YEARS

Children can understand and follow instructions without stopping what they're doing to listen.  
Their concentration and attention is more flexible.

BY  
5  
YEARS

Children now have better attention and can concentrate for longer.  
They can stay longer with one activity.  
They can listen better with one other person or in a group.

BY  
6  
YEARS

## Understanding

Children can understand questions and instructions with two separate parts, like: *'Get your jumper and stand by the door.'*

They can understand the question *'why?'*

They start to understand the *idea* of time – *yesterday, today* – though they might not have these words yet.

Children can follow a simple story without pictures.

They can understand instructions containing sequencing words, *'first... after... last'*.

They begin to understand jokes.

They understand time in relation to daily routines: *'After lunch we will do games.'*

Understanding of new vocabulary keeps growing.

Children understand more words for subjects and activities in school.

They understand longer and more complex structures, for example passive sentences, like: *"The dog was chased by the cat,"* and embedded clauses, such as: *"The boy, with the brown hair, is called Jack."*

## Speech sounds and talk

Children can use sentences of four to six words.

They use the past and future tenses, but may continue to have problems with irregular words, such as *'runned'* for *'ran'*.

They might still make a few mistakes with speech sounds such as l/r/w/y, f/th, s/sh/ch/dz/j.

Children use well formed sentences but there may still be some immaturities.

They can explain the meaning of simple words.

They may have problems with harder sounds such as *'th', 'r'* and three consonant combinations like *'scribble'*.

They ask the meaning of words they are not sure of and might try to use them.

Children can tell a story that involves different characters and objects.

They have lots of ways of describing things and can say which objects belong to different categories and why.

Their speech is generally clear, though they may make little mistakes, and they are more confident in their talking.

## Social skills

Children can understand how to take turns with others.

They can start conversations with others.

They enjoy playing with friends.

Children choose their own friends.  
They are generally co-operative with playmates and can plan play activities.

They can take turns in longer conversations.

They can ask for information, negotiate, discuss feelings and ideas, and give opinions.

Children can be good group members, taking turns to speak and listen to others.

They can think about other people's points of view.

They can use language to consider and explain things, for example to think about why things have happened or what might happen next.

## What's on the DVD



Don't forget to check out the *Communication Cookbook* DVD, which you'll find at the back of the book. There are four fascinating items for you to look at.

### All about the Cookbook

Listen to a group of parents, teachers and experts explain why they believe a foundation of communication skills is absolutely vital for every child's all-round development. They also talk about their personal experiences of using the *Cookbook*, at home and in the classroom, and the difference it can make. One teacher, for instance, says: '*Prepare to be amazed!*'

### Activities masterclass

Watch Wendy Lee demonstrate a selection of activities from the book, working with a group of primary-school children. She analyses how she interacts with the children, identifying what works well and what she could have done better. The demonstrations give you lots of clues about how to get the most out of the activities yourself.

### The growth of language

This unique video shows the development of children's communication abilities, stage by stage, from birth onwards. It's not only fascinating to watch, the video will also help you evaluate the progress of a particular child, bearing in mind that not all children develop at the same rate.

### Tips and techniques

Wendy suggests half a dozen ideas for things you can do as part of your everyday routine to support speaking and listening.



## What's on the website



Visit the *Communication Cookbook* website and you'll discover a whole range of useful ideas. Here are some of them, but to find out exactly what's available make sure you visit more than once because we're adding items all the time.

[www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)

### Fantastic interactive games to build children's skills

Our online games manage to be both entertaining and very effective at developing skills. By combining animation, interactive play and simple controls, the games hold the attention of children while providing them with a genuine learning experience.

### Additional activities

Download instruction sheets for additional games, organised into the same thrive-on-five skills as the book – attention and listening, vocabulary, sentence building, telling stories and conversations.

### Links

When you're on the website, you're only a few clicks away from information on just about every aspect of children's communication. No matter what your interest or concern, this is the place to start.

### Picture cards

Download and print out a brilliant set of picture cards, drawn by Jon Rowley and based on the 'living language' vocabulary lists devised by Ann Locke\* (and used with her kind permission). Ann's lists identify the words most useful for a child to learn. Use them with the activities in the book or in your own versions of games like lotto and snap. The cards are available in black and white as well as colour.

### Print your own version of the book

Download a PDF and print copies of the book, for your own use or to give to other parents/teachers. Alternatively, print out instructions for individual activities for use in the classroom.

\*Locke, A. (1995) *Living Language*, NFER Nelson

## Further resources

**I CAN** works to develop speech, language and communication skills for all children, by providing information, training, support and online resources for families and professionals.

[www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

**BT Better World Campaign** offers a superb range of free resources from its website for teachers, parents and carers, all aimed at developing children's communication abilities. The resources include DVDs, publications, comics and online activities.

[www.btbetterworld.com](http://www.btbetterworld.com)

**Talking Point** run by ICAN, provides a comprehensive range of information for parents, carers and professionals. If you are worried about a child, get in touch directly with your local speech and language therapy service, which you can find on the Talking Links section of the site.

[www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk)

**The Communication Trust** aims to raise awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication across the children's workforce and enable practitioners to access the best training and expertise to support all children's communication needs. The Trust was founded by Afasic, BT Better World Campaign, CDC (Council for Disabled Children) and I CAN. Its work is supported by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and other funders. The Trust is hosted by I CAN and works to a representative board.

[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)

**Primary Talk** transforms your whole school into a communication supportive environment and ensures effective practice around communication for all children, including those with speech, language and communication needs.

[www.ican.org.uk/primarytalk](http://www.ican.org.uk/primarytalk)

**Afasic** has a wide variety of free, downloadable handy hints for helping children with speech, language and communication needs, and a helpline for parents.

[www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk)

**The Council for Disabled Children (CDC)** is the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector in England, with links to the other UK nations.

[www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)

**The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists** is the professional body for speech and language therapists and support workers.

[www.rcslt.org](http://www.rcslt.org)

**The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)** provides information and resources to support speaking and listening in primary schools. The Primary National Strategy supports teachers and schools to raise standards across the whole curriculum.

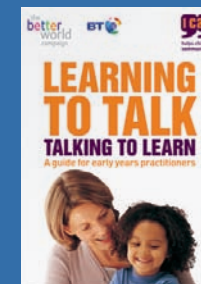
[www.dcsf.gov.uk](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk)

Go to [www.talkingpoint.org.uk](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk) for links to many more organisations that can help.

**I CAN, working with the BT Better World Campaign and Openreach, has developed some great books and DVDs to support parents and early years practitioners.**



Chatter Matters, a DVD presented by Dr Tanya Byron, offers dozens of brilliant ideas to help you develop children's speaking and listening skills throughout their pre-school years.



Learning to Talk is a self-study DVD resource supporting all workers in the early years sector to create communication-rich environments.

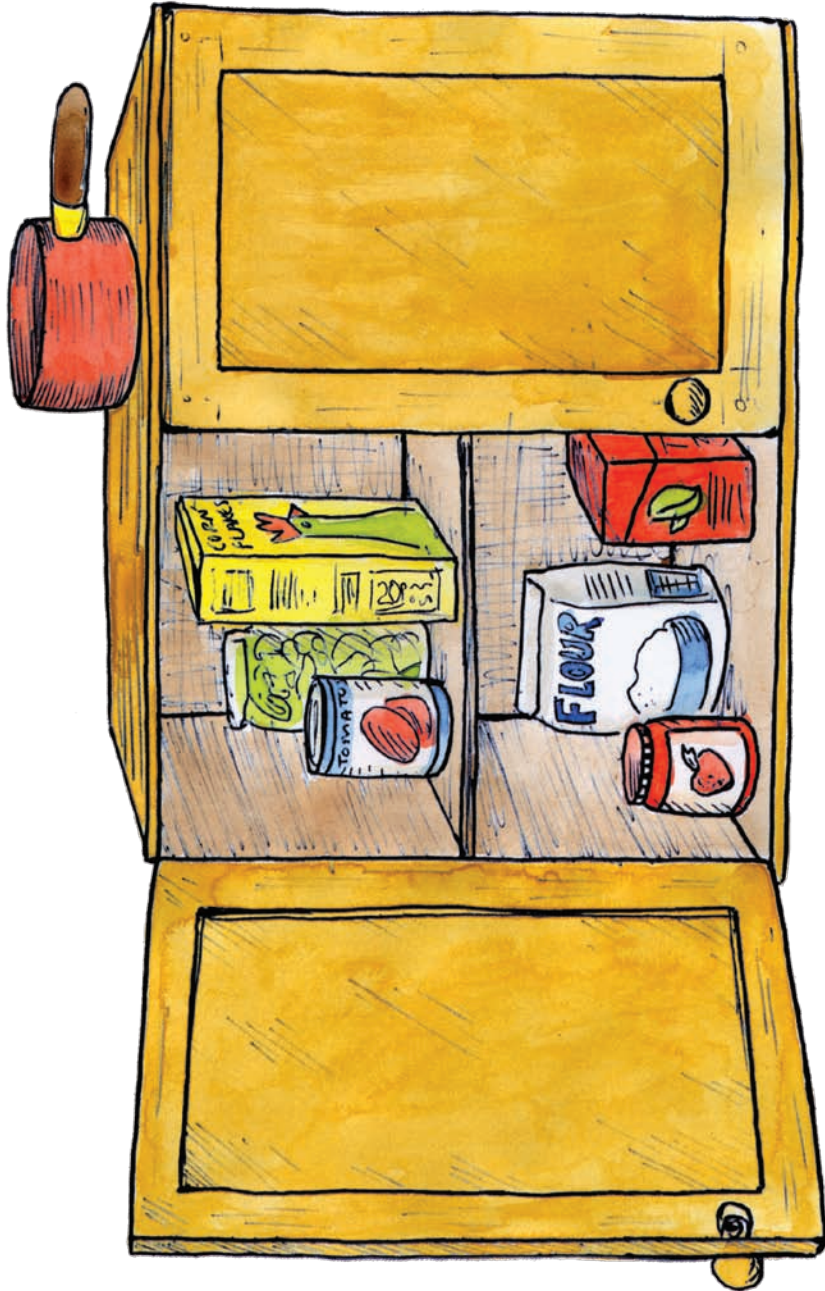


Ready Steady Talk! is a fun-filled activity pack which helps 2-3 year-olds develop the speech, language and communication skills they need.

**Order these resources from [www.ican.org.uk/products](http://www.ican.org.uk/products)**



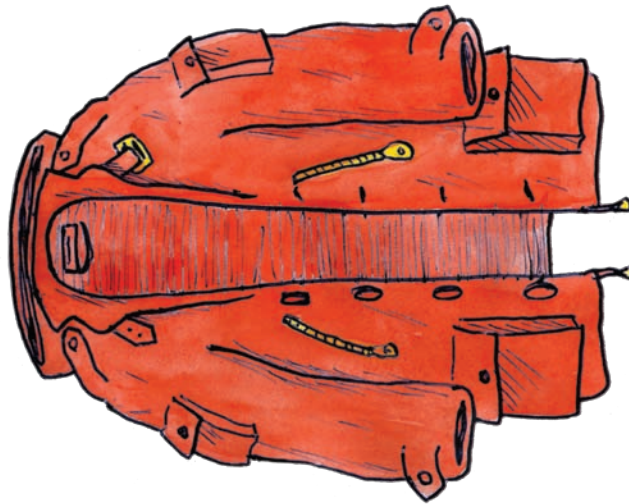
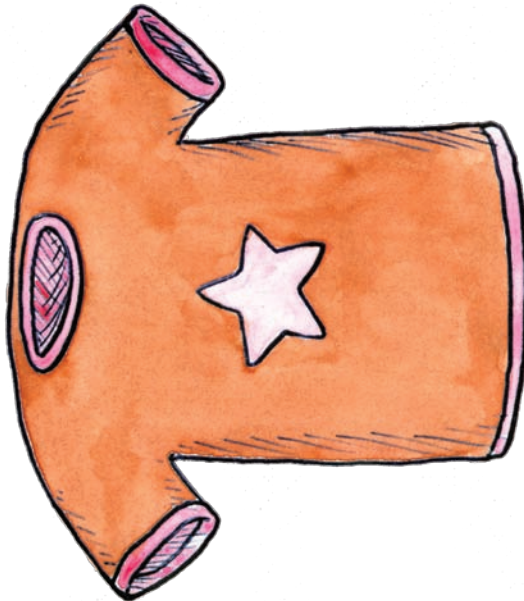
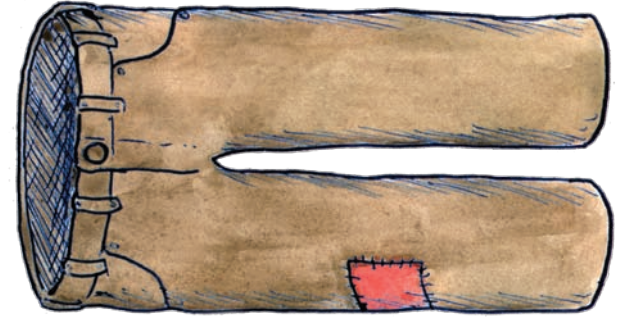
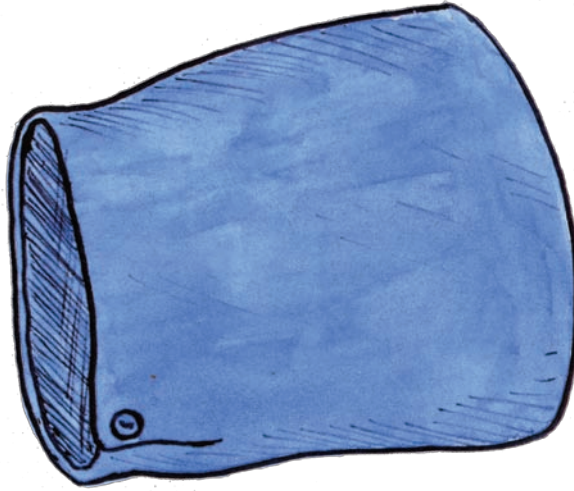
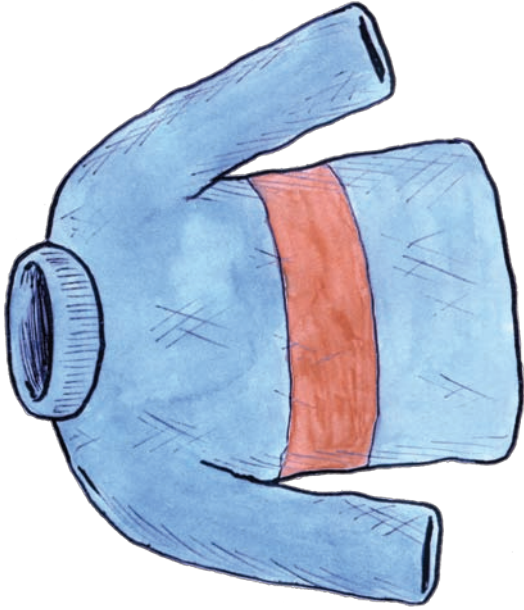
# Boo Cat sorts things out







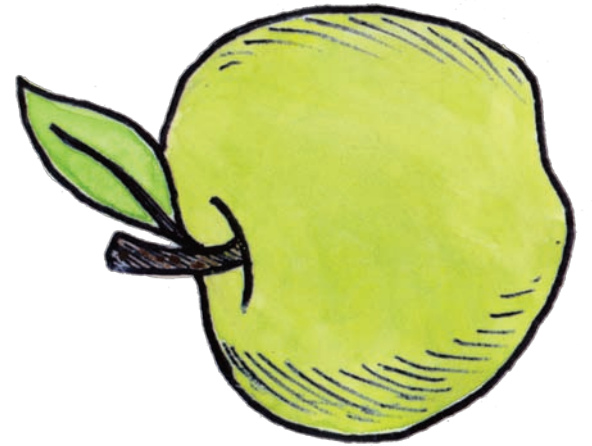
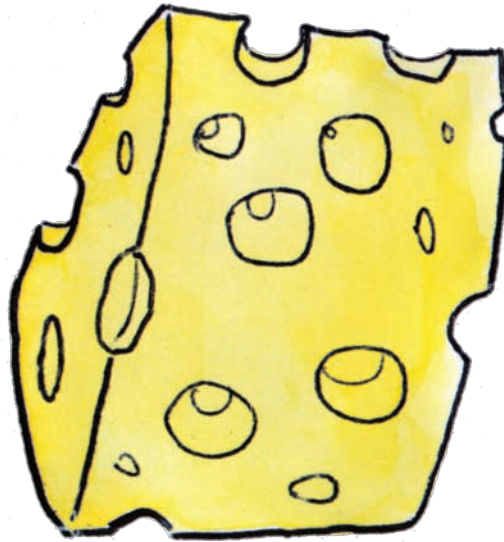
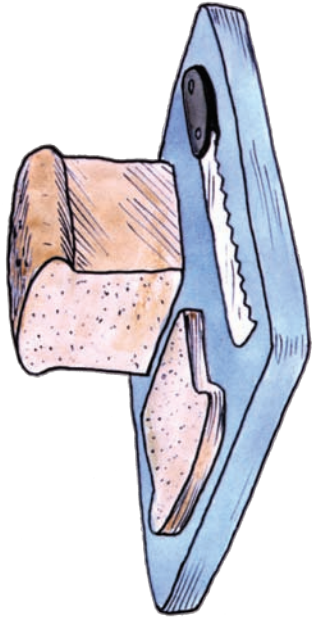
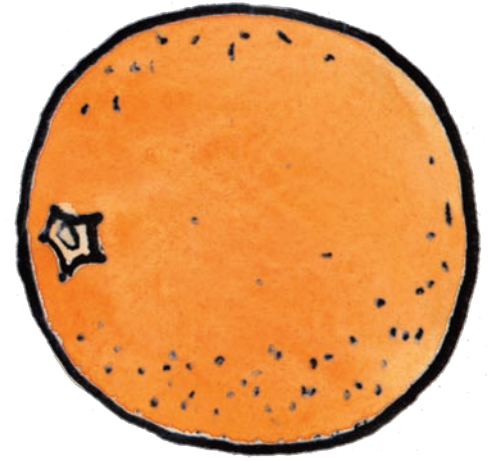
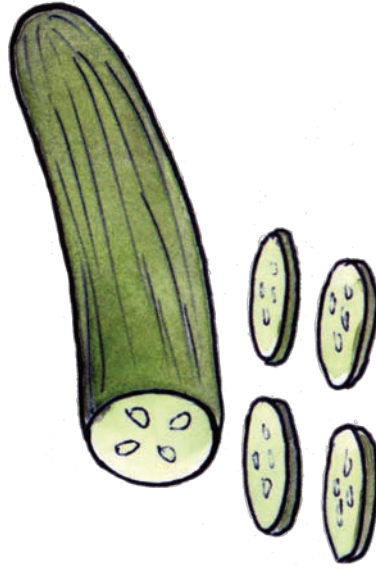
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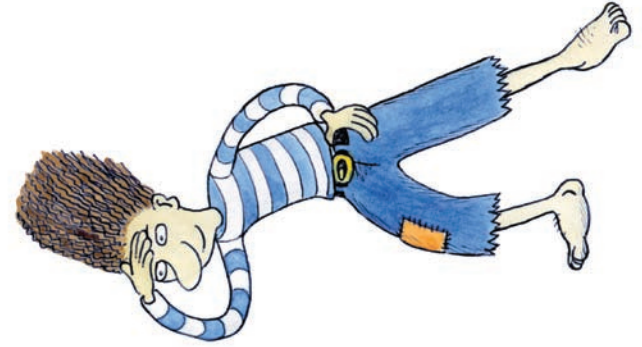
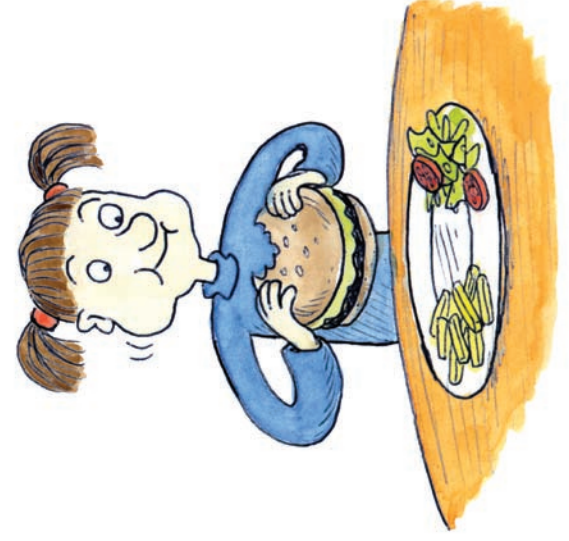
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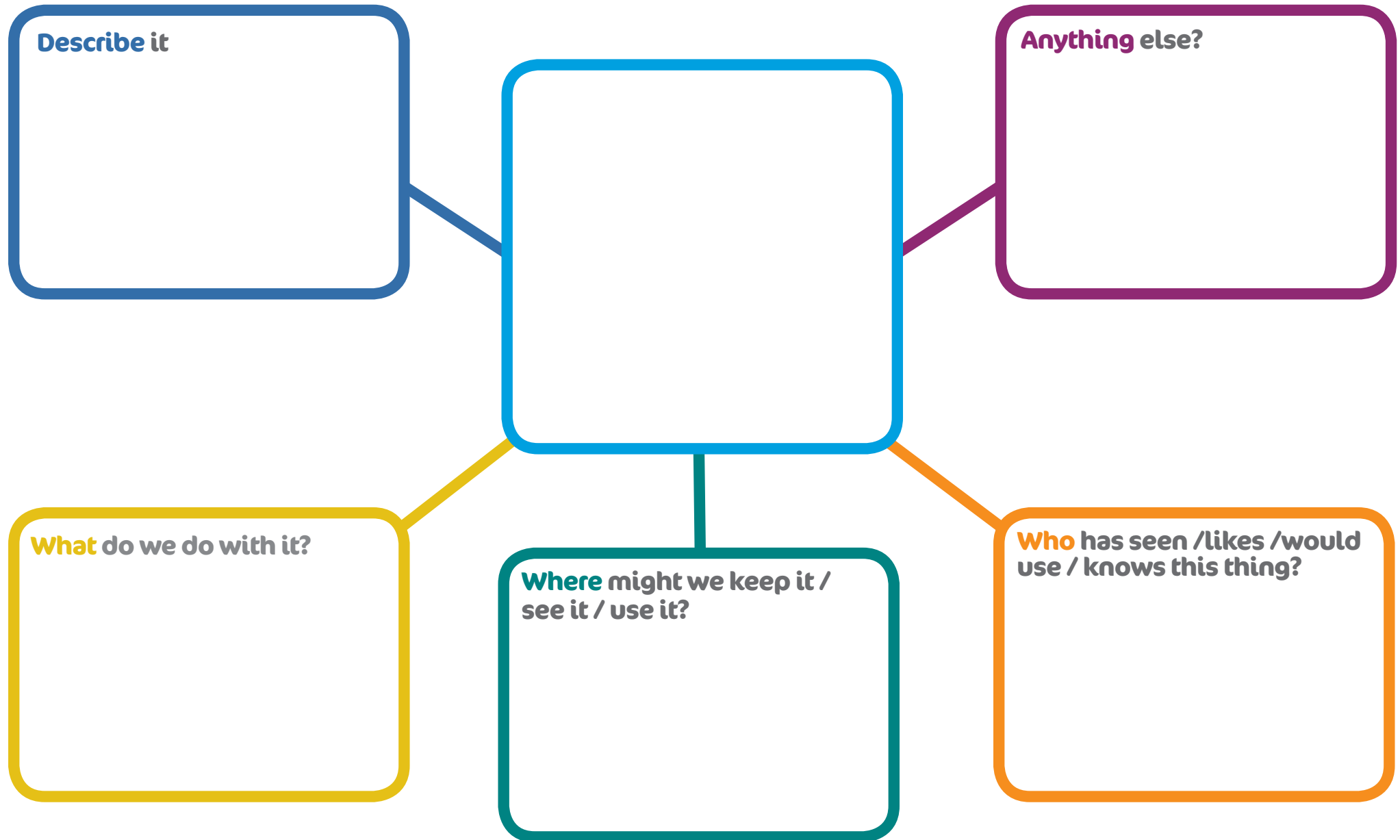
Action time







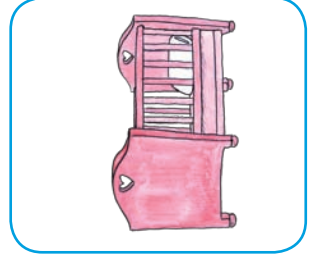
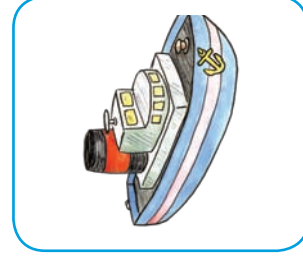
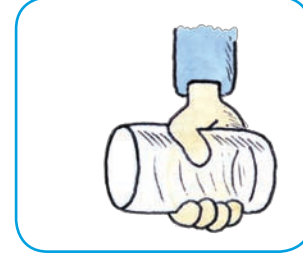
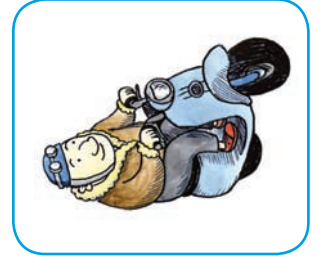
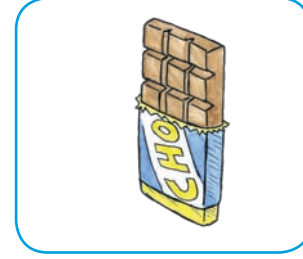
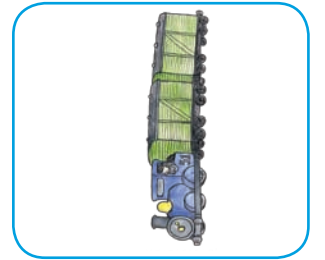
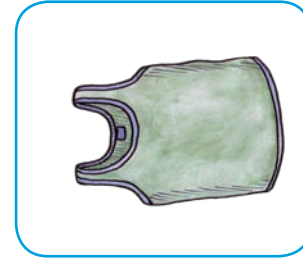
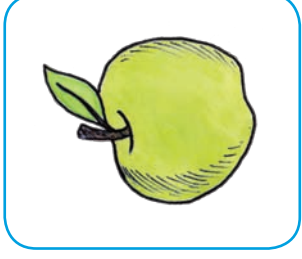
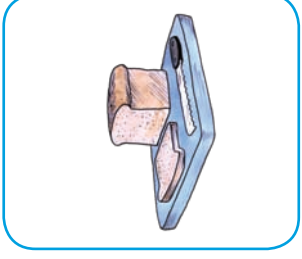
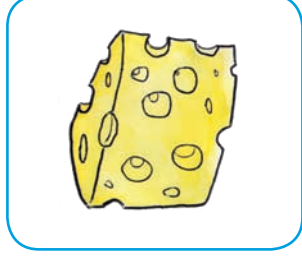
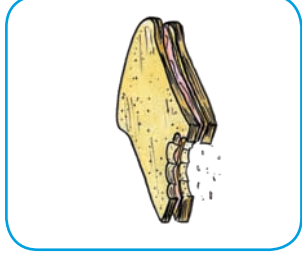
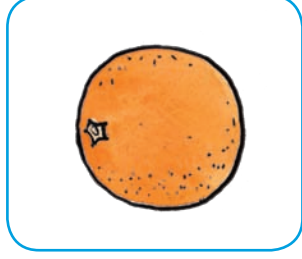
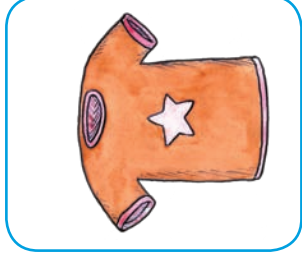
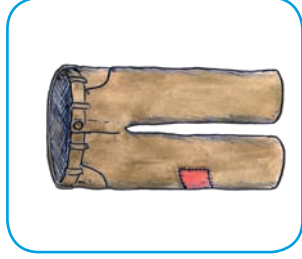
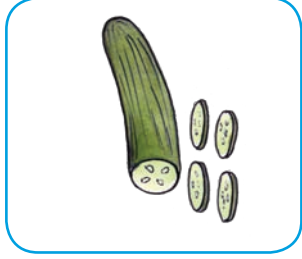
## Word magic

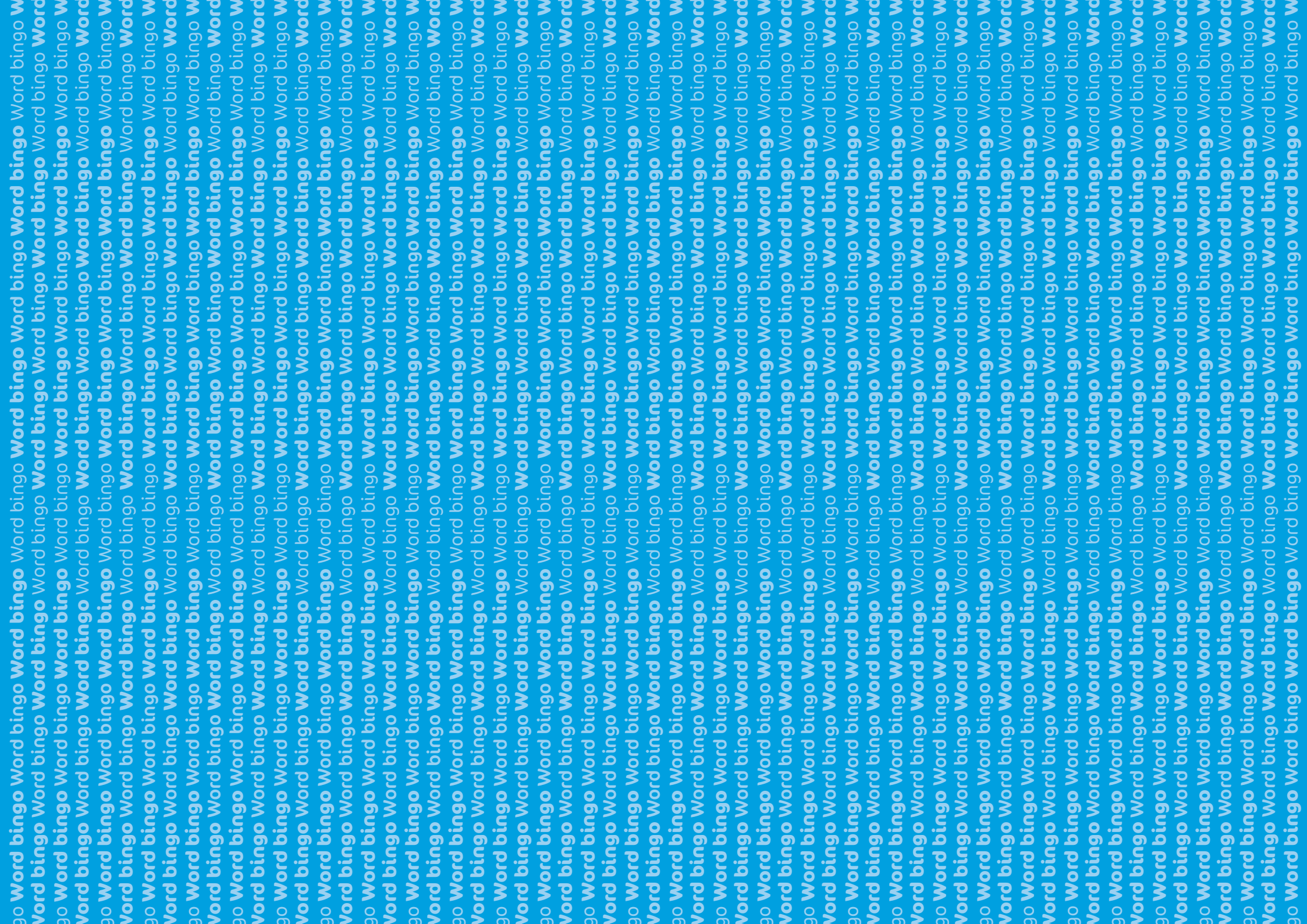






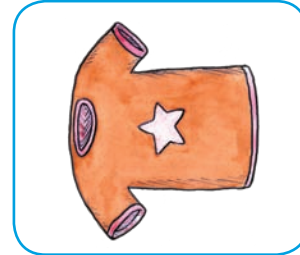
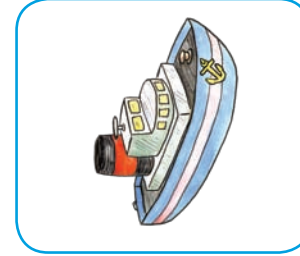
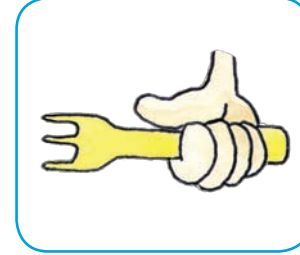
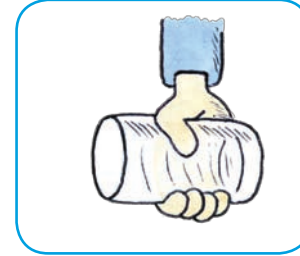
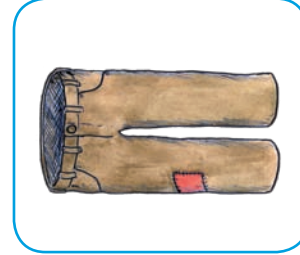
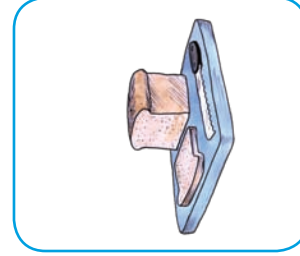
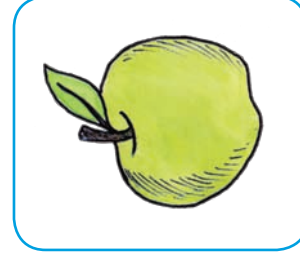
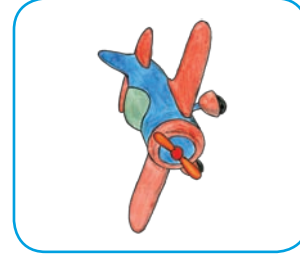
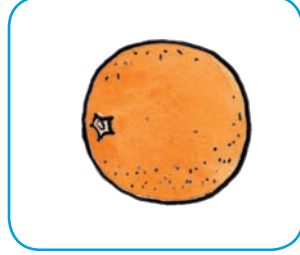
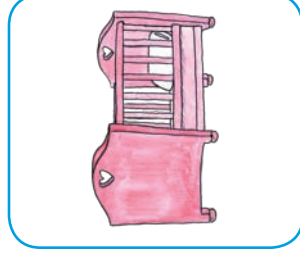
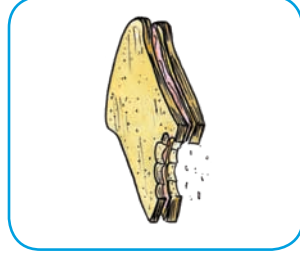
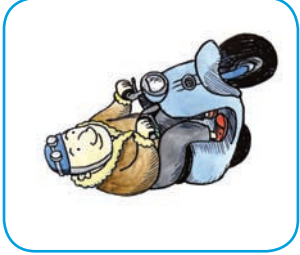
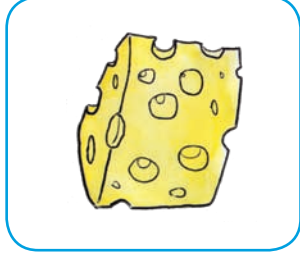
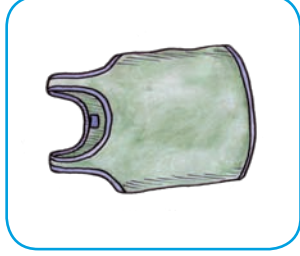
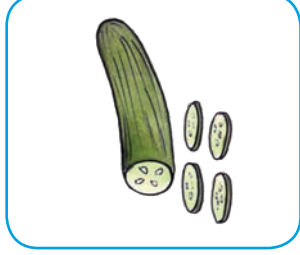
# Word bingo







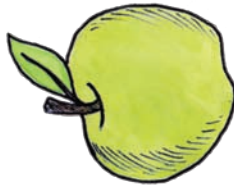
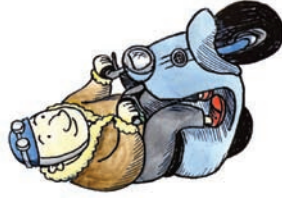
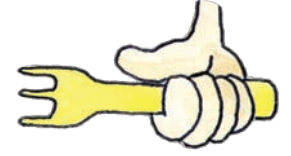
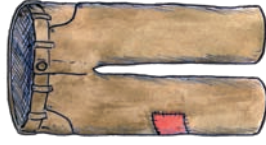
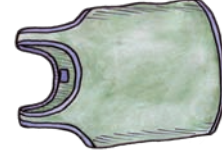
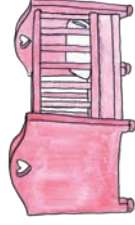
# Word bingo

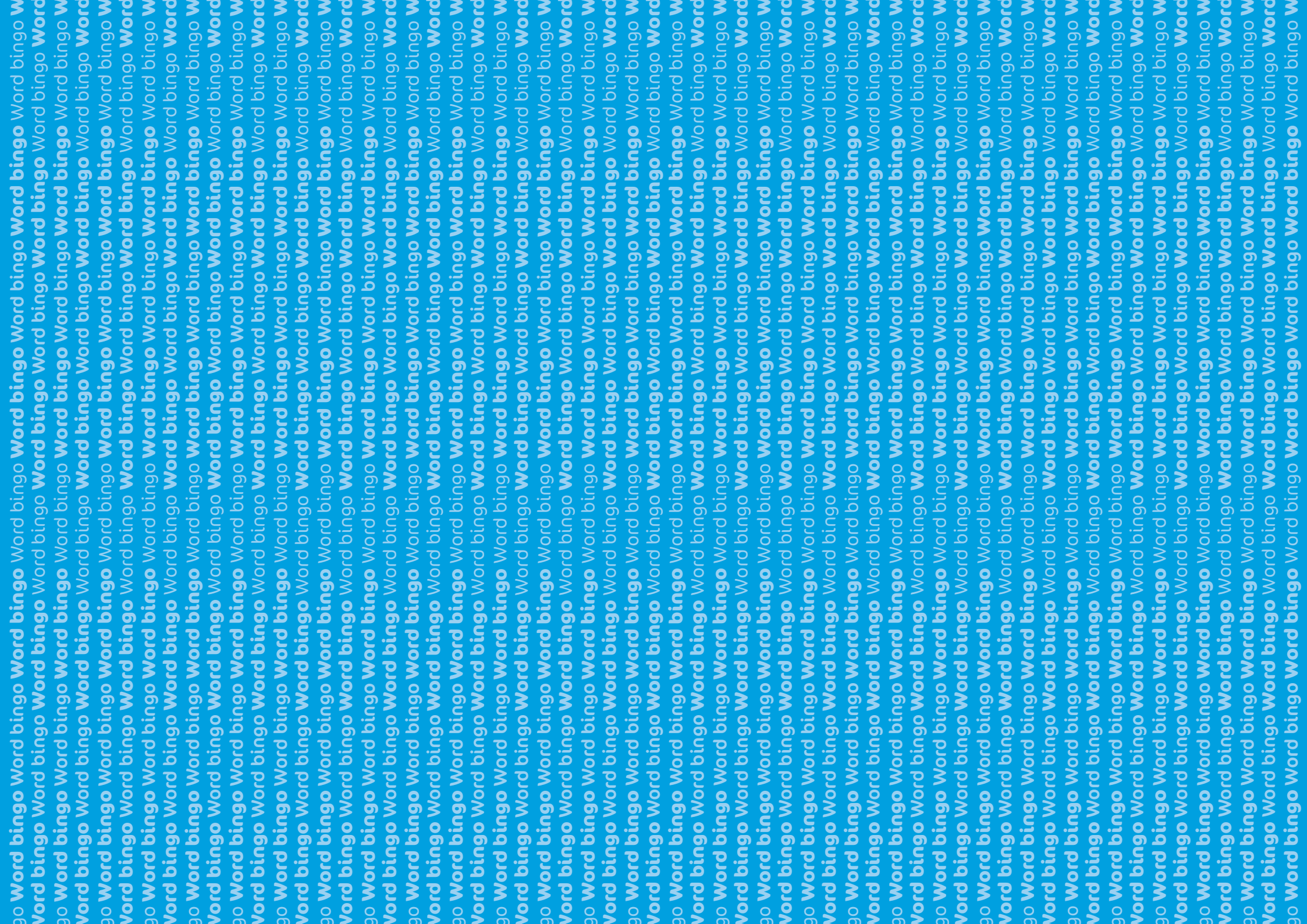






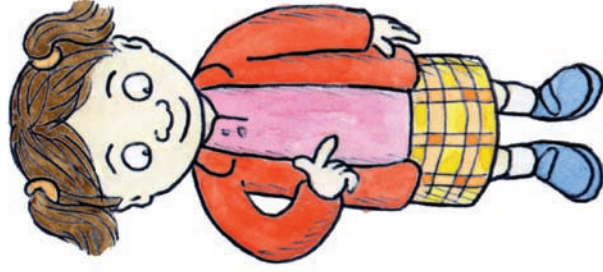
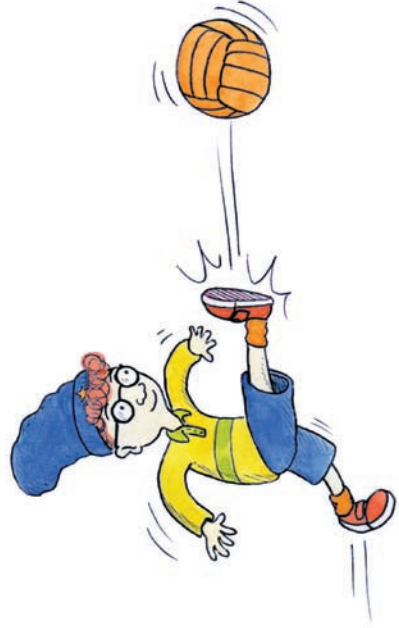
# Word bingo reference







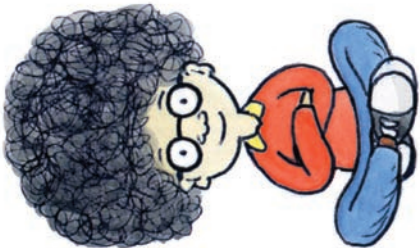
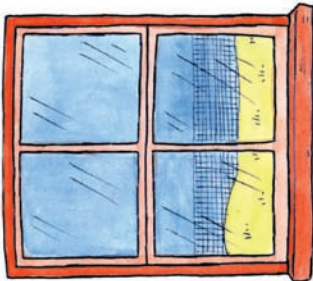
Do as bossy Boo Cat says







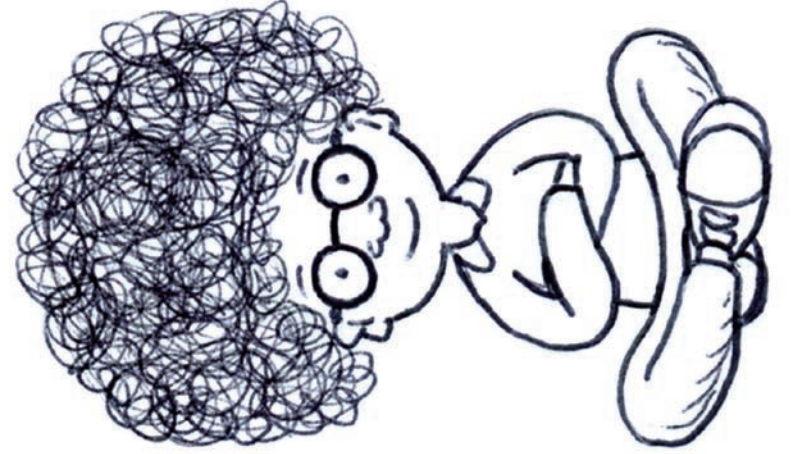
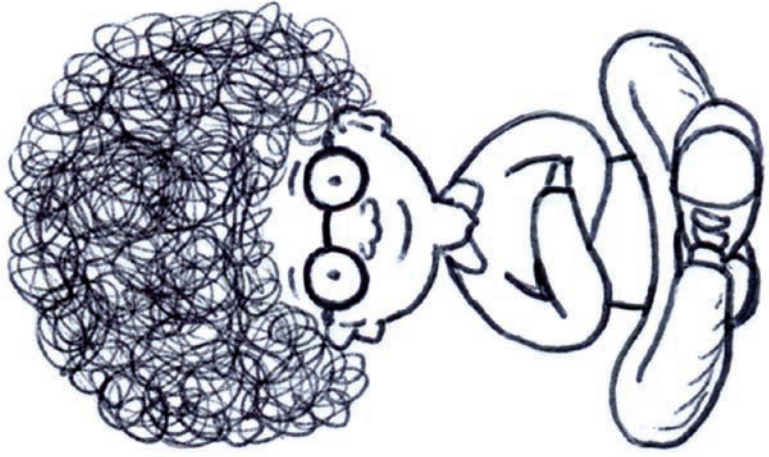
Do as bossy Boo Cat says







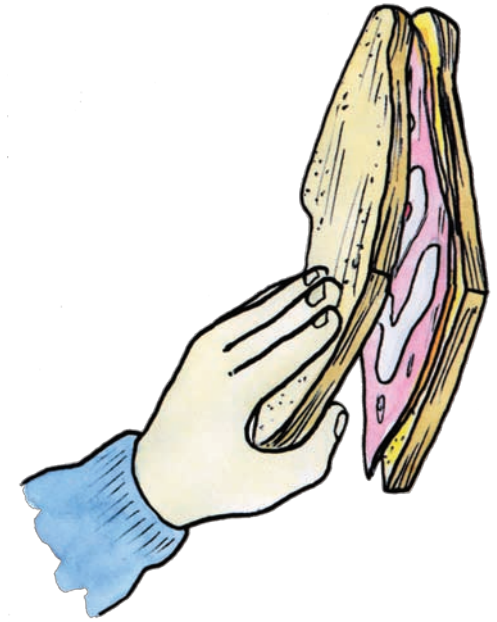
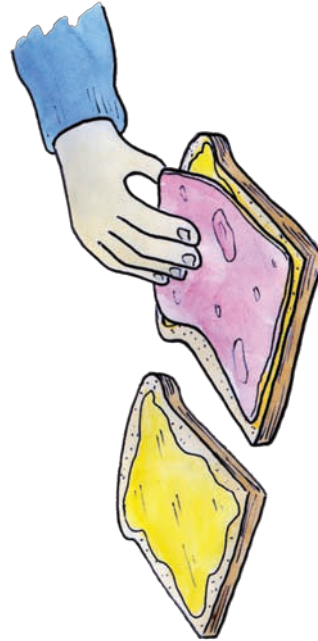
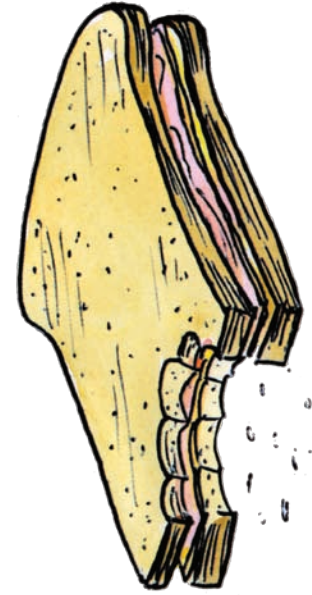
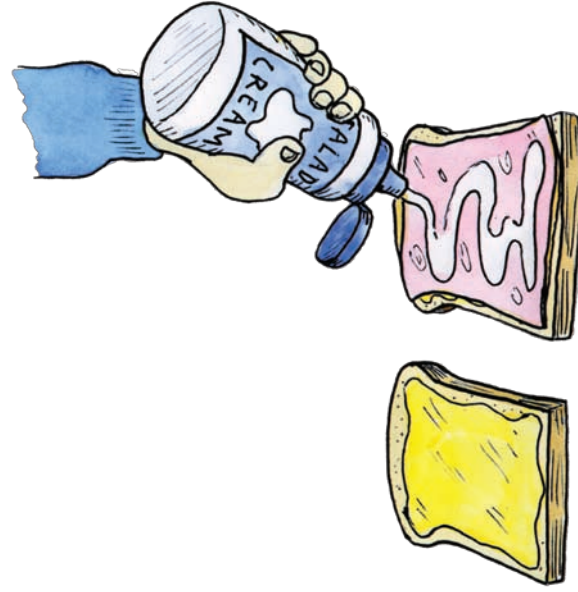
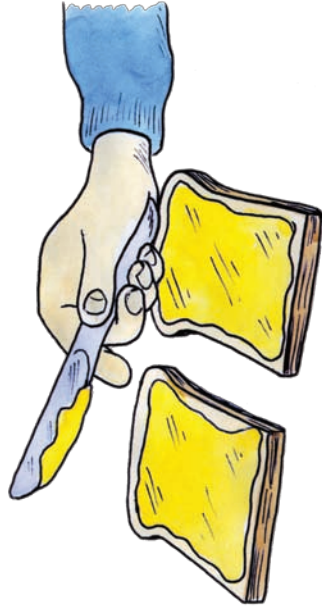
# Barrier games

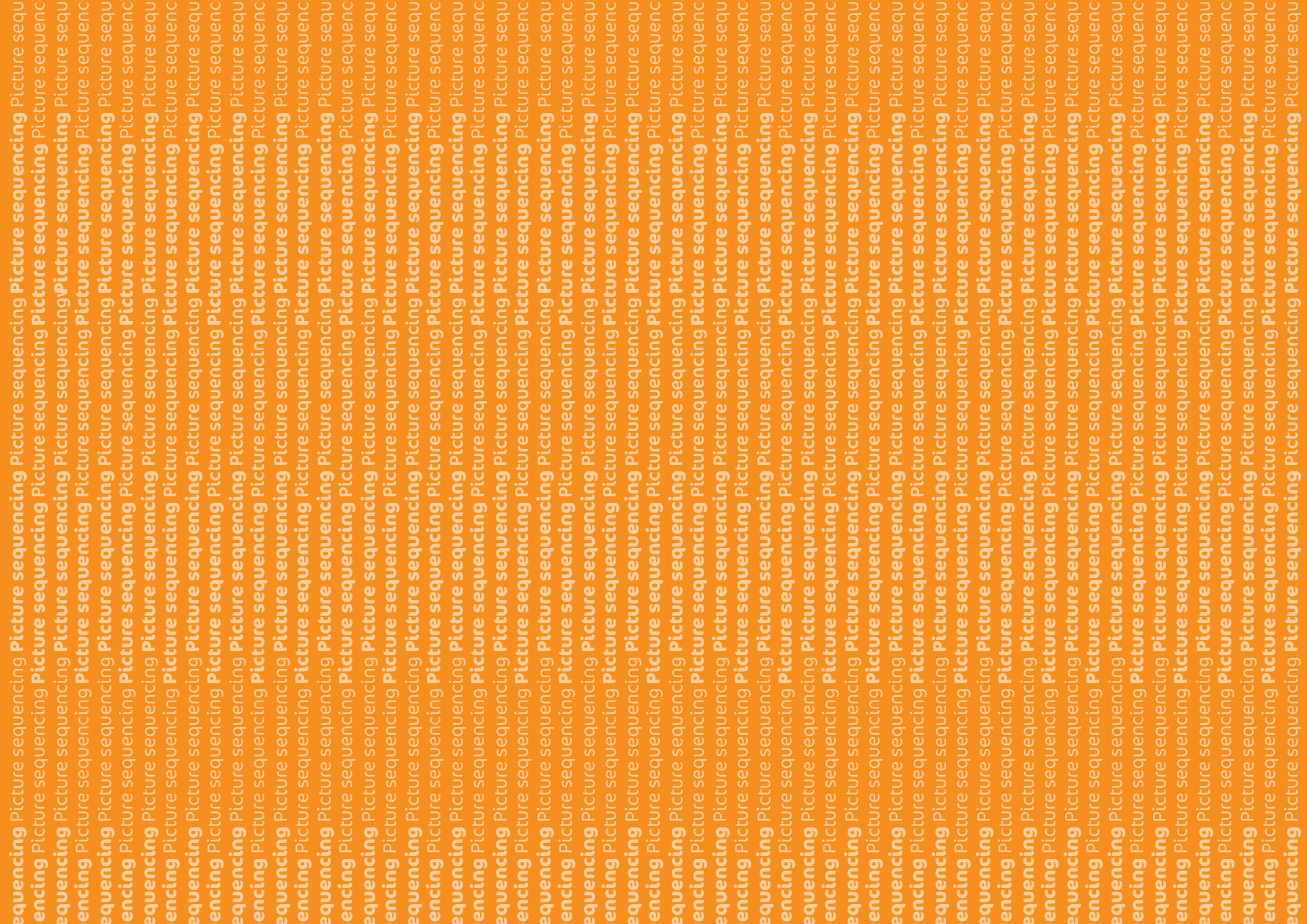






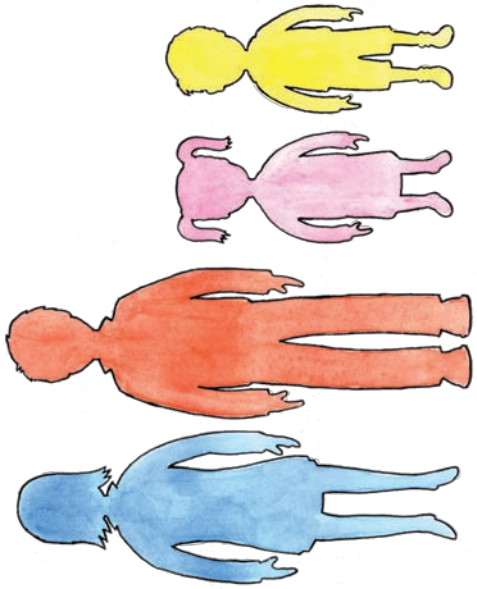
# Picture sequencing



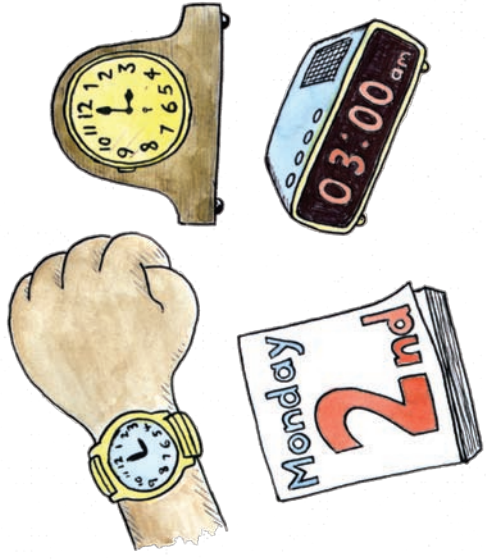




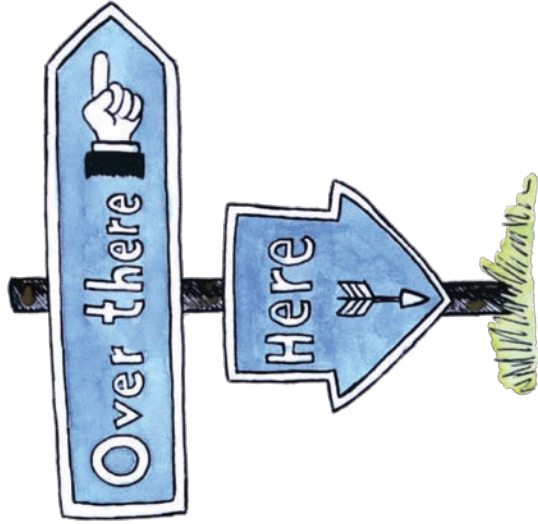
Group story



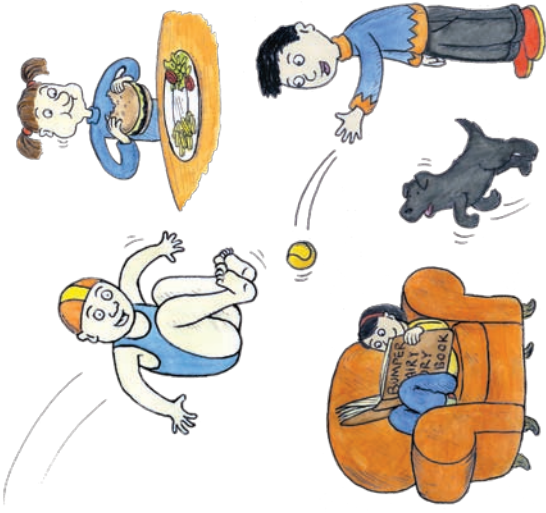
Who?



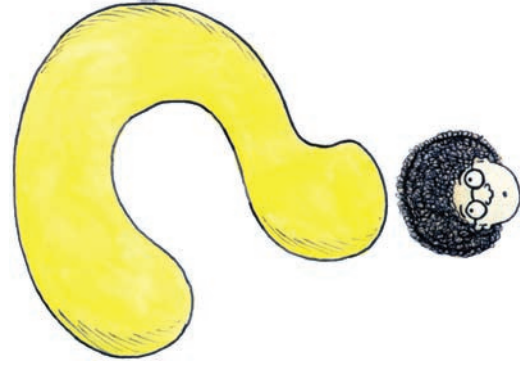
When?



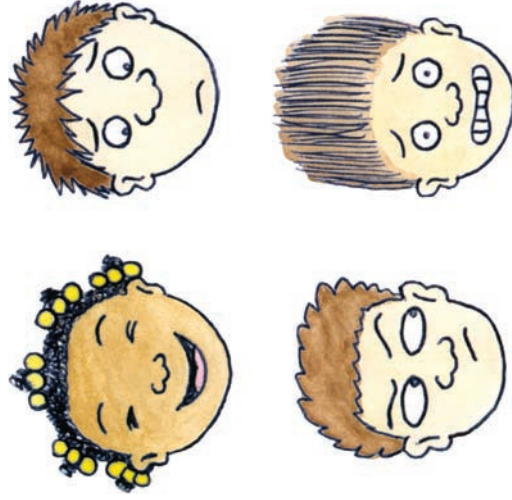
Where?



What?

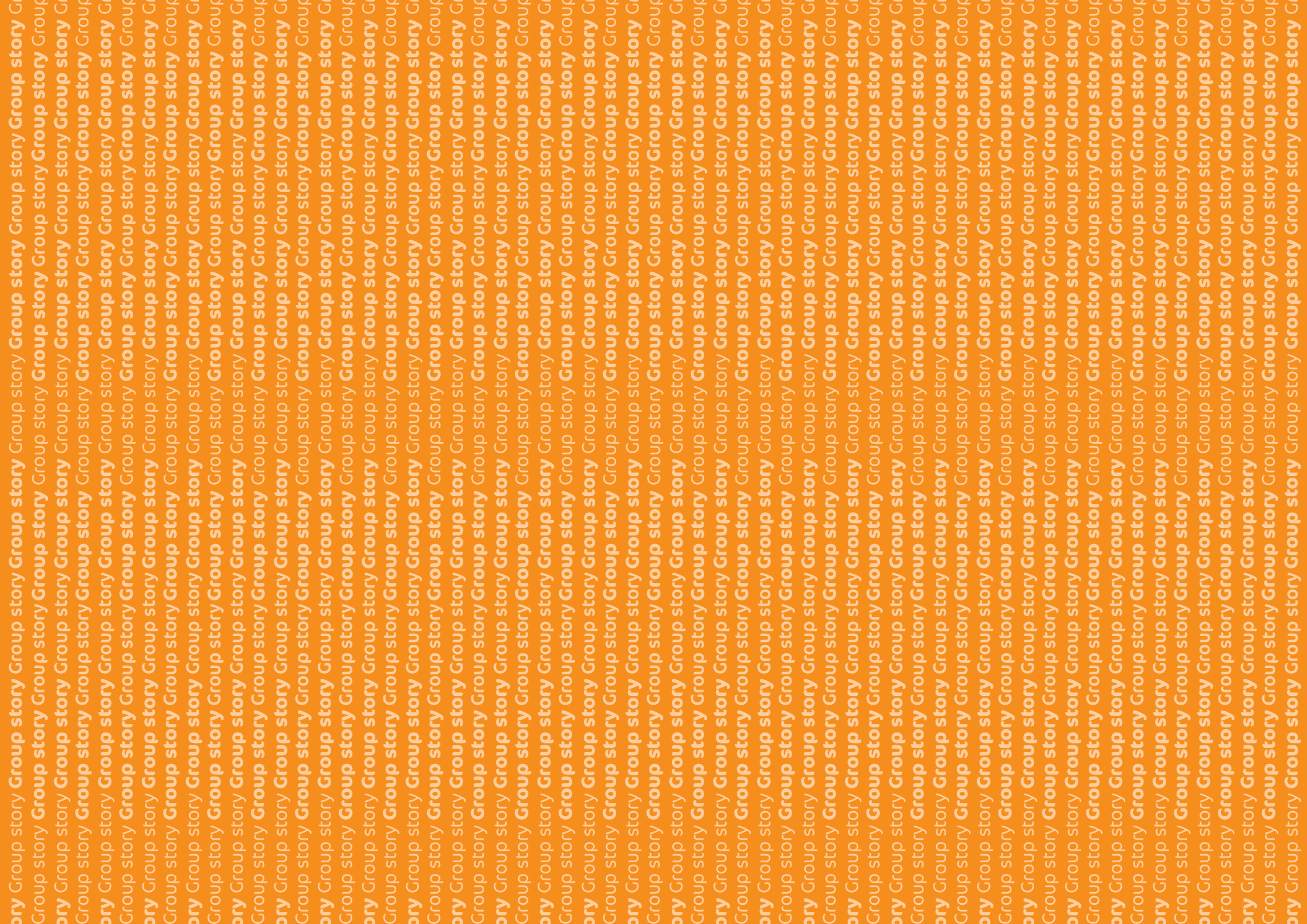


Why?



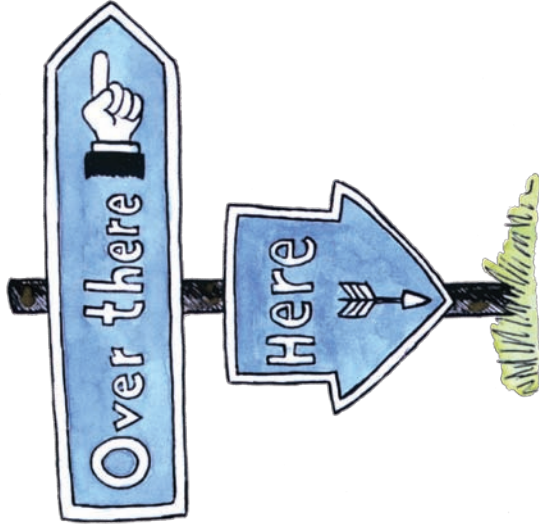
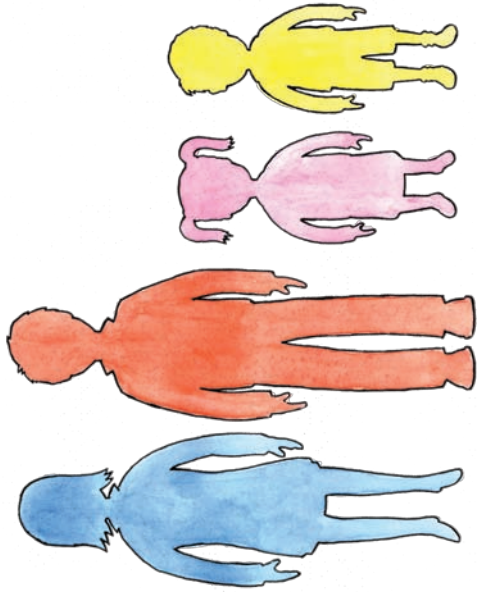
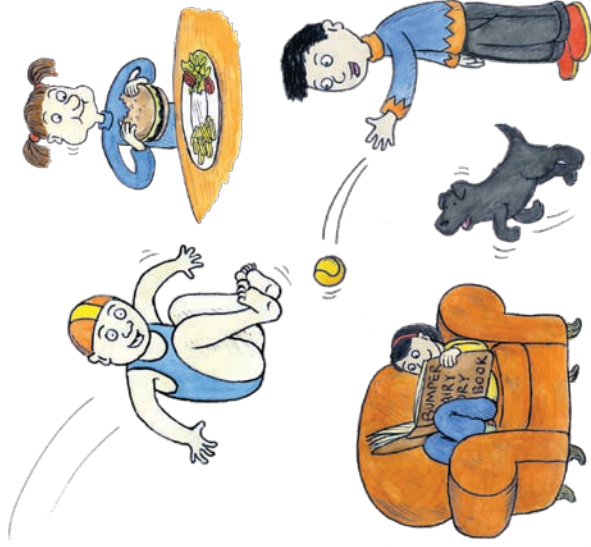
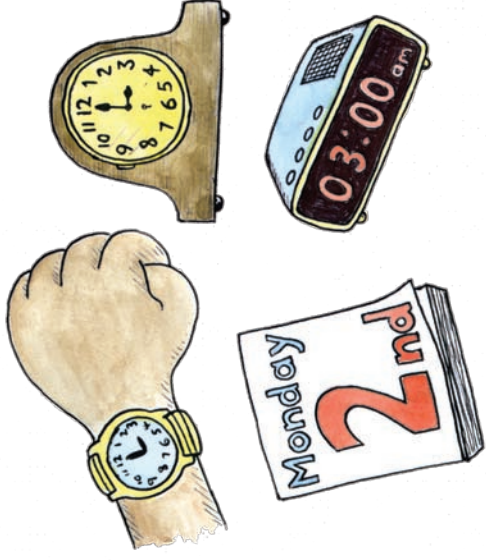
How people feel







Important story words









Don't forget to visit me on the  
Communication Cookbook website.  
[www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)



# The Communication Cookbook

The ability to communicate is fundamental to every aspect of a child's overall development. *The Communication Cookbook* is full of advice and activities for teachers and parents to help 4-6 year-olds develop the speech, language and communication skills they need.

The 'recipes' in this book are based on the five key ingredients for good communication:

**Attention and listening** **Vocabulary** **Building sentences**  
**Telling stories** **Conversations**

Helping children develop these skills is one of the most important jobs a parent or teacher can do. The good news is, with this book, you will have a lot of fun doing it.

For even more activities and games visit

[www.communicationcookbook.org.uk](http://www.communicationcookbook.org.uk)

