



# Story Star Countdown

**Theme: Dog Days**

**Phonics Focus: Short U**

**READ: *Mutt and Pug* by Kathleen Corrigan**

Have your child read aloud to you, reading the words they can while you help with challenging new words. Encourage them to solve unfamiliar words using the patterns they know, as well as use the pictures for more detail. Learning to read is all about building your toolkit of known words and sounds!

**Extension Activity:**

Work through the included activities at your child's pace. They should be challenged, but not frustrated, and these activities do not need to be done in one sitting. Directions are included for each activity. If your child has trouble, that's okay! You can help them, just try not to give them the answer. They should be doing most of the work.

**READ: *Hot Dog* by Doug Salati**

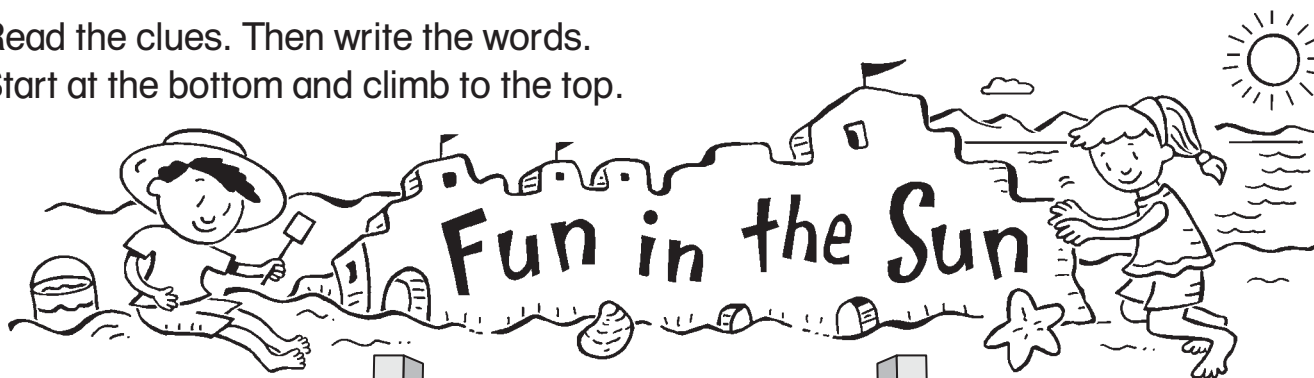
Read this book to your child. If able, let them read to you, or take turns. Along the way, talk with your child about what is happening and how they feel about the story. Ask questions like: why do you think the character did that? How would you solve this problem? What is the story trying to teach us? What was your favorite part of the story? All questions are good questions.

**WRITE and DRAW: Who is the coolest dog you have ever met?**

You can use notebook paper or the writing templates provided on our website. As your child writes, let them get their full thought down on paper before you correct anything. This is how they become a writer! As they spell, encourage them to use the rules they know. This is called invented spelling. Even if it doesn't look like what an adult would write, they are still practicing their phonics. Illustrations are always welcome!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

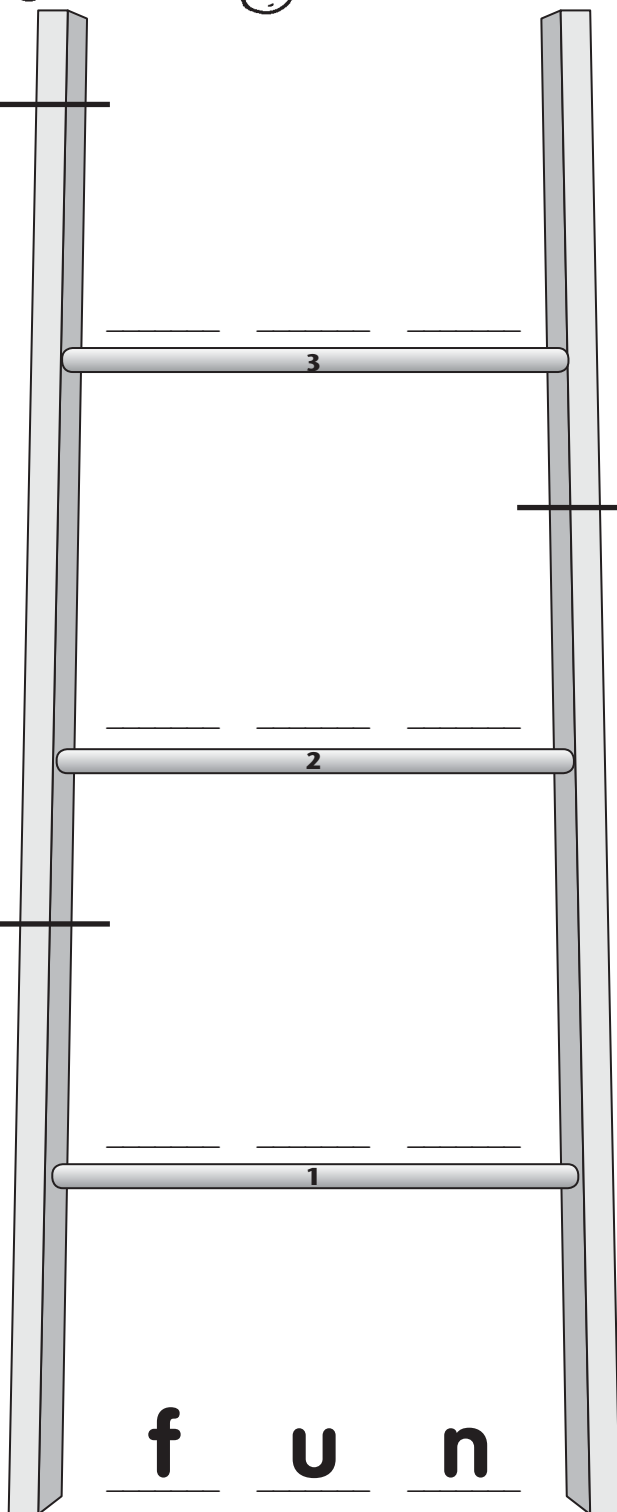
Read the clues. Then write the words.  
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



Bread for a  
hamburger  
**Change the first  
letter.**

To jog quickly  
**Change the first  
letter.**

This shines during  
the day.  
**Change the first  
letter.**



# Welcome to Word Ladders!

## How do Word Ladders work?

Let's say our first Word Ladder begins with the word *web*. The directions will tell children to change one letter in *web* to make a word that means "not dry." The word children will make, of course, is *wet*. The directions for the next word will then ask children to make a change in *wet* to form another word—perhaps *pet* or *set*. Children will form new words as they work up the ladder until they reach the top rung. If children get stuck on a rung along the way, they can come back to it, because the words before and after will give them the clues they need to figure out the word. Of course, you can also provide additional clues to help them figure out difficult words.

## How do Word Ladders benefit children?

Word Ladders are great for building children's decoding, phonics, spelling, and vocabulary skills. When children add, take away, or rearrange letters to make a new word from one they have just made, they must examine sound-symbol relationships closely. This is just the kind of analysis that all children need to do in order to learn how to decode and spell accurately. And when the Ladder adds a bit of meaning in the form of a definition (for example, "what you make when you sit down"), it helps extend children's understanding of words and concepts. All of these skills are key to children's success in learning to read and write. So even though Word Ladders will feel like a game, children will be practicing essential literacy skills at the same time!

## How do I teach a Word Ladder lesson?

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

1. Choose a Word Ladder to try. Each teaches a particular phonics lesson, like short-a words or r-controlled vowels.
2. Make a copy of the Word Ladder for each child.
3. Choose whether you want to do the Word Ladder as a whole class, or have children work alone, in pairs, or in groups. If children are emergent readers, you might read the clues to them and use a think-aloud method to model how to complete the activity. In addition, you might display a copy on an overhead projector to demonstrate how to fill in the word on each rung. As their skills develop, kids can work on the ladders independently.
4. At each new word, children will see two clues: the changes they need to make to the previous word ("change the first letter," "add a letter to the end," and so on), and a definition of or clue to the meaning of the word. Sometimes this clue will be a sentence in which the word is used in context but is left out for children to fill in. Move from word to word in this way, up the whole Word Ladder. Feel free to add clues if the word is challenging—letter position of the change; other sentence clues; or just tell students the word.

That's the lesson in a nutshell! It should take no longer than ten minutes to do. Once you're done, you might extend the lessons by having children sort the words into various categories. This can help them deepen their understanding and use of the words. For instance, you could sort them into:

- Grammatical categories (Which words are action words? Which words name people, animals, places, or things?)
- Word structure (Which words end with a silent e? Which words contain a consonant blend?)
- Word meaning (Which words express what a person can do or feel? Which do not?)

## Tips for Working With the Ladders (Try these tips to give children extra help in doing Word Ladders.)

- List all the "answers" for the ladder (that is, the words for each rung) in random order on the board. Have children choose words from the list to complete the puzzle.
- Add your own clues to give children extra help as they work through each rung of a ladder. A recent event in your classroom or community could even inspire clues for words.
- If children are stuck on a particular rung, you might simply say the word aloud and see if they can spell it correctly by making appropriate changes in the previous word. Elaborate on word meanings as children move up the ladder.
- Challenge children to come up with alternative definitions for the same words. Many words, like *bat*, *pet*, *bill*, and *lot*, have multiple meanings.
- Once children complete a ladder, add the words to a word wall. Encourage children to use the words in their speaking and writing.

**Answers!** Fun in the Sun (page 1)  
*fun, sun, run, bun*



## My Uncle's Umbrella



**Short u** makes the sound you hear at the beginning of **umbrella**.

To help you remember the short-u sound, stretch out the beginning of the word like this: u-u-u-umbrella.

My uncle needs to buy a new umbrella! Help him find the umbrellas that have pictures with the short-u sound. Color these umbrellas with red and blue stripes. If the picture does not have the short-u sound, write *NO* on the umbrella.



**This is where rockets go. It is where you look to find the moon. It means the opposite of down. It begins with the short-u sound. What is it? Name five things that can go this way.**



**Page 1**

short-*u* words: drum,  
plug, duck, bug, rug,  
gum, sun, sub;  
up