

# Teach Sight Words Most Efficiently Using Sight Words with Pictures Embedded in Them

I have experienced astonishing results over the past 12 years when I used sight words with pictures embedded in them to teach beginners or those who have struggled with reading. Whether tutoring one child, working with small groups learning to read or remediate reading, or teaching full classrooms—the results have been amazing in terms of the rapidity with which the children learned their high frequency words! Find them at [www.child1st.com](http://www.child1st.com).

## How it happened

It all began 12 years ago when I was teaching kindergarten. We'd work on learning a word using a phonetic approach of having the children decode the word; this traditional approach to teaching reading simply did NOT work with this particular group of kindergarteners. It got to be November and they were still painfully sounding out everything they came to. There were issues with this process that varied from child to child. Some could sound out the word and then say the whole word; others could sound out the word and then they said a word that started with the final sound instead of the first one. Still others would sound out the word and then look puzzled when it came time to say the word. The last issue we had was that the child would sound out and name the word correctly, but two seconds later, he'd act as if he'd never seen the word in his life.

Needless to say, reading was NOT FUN for these children, nor for their teacher. In desperation one day I began to focus on finding an approach to teaching sight words that might work better. So the process of designing pictures embedded in sight words began. It was a really great time for me because the children collaborated with me by giving me feedback on which words worked and which did not. The really cool thing was that my students began to rapidly learn words and recall them. They finally understood that reading meant not just sounding out words but really meant both recognizing words and knowing what they mean.

By March, this group of beginners could read [all the Dolch words with pictures](#) that I had created. ALL of them! Their reading level shot way up as well because as they learned the sight words from the cards with pictures, we also taught phonics concepts and sound spellings so that they were getting the best of both worlds: phonics instruction and instant whole word recognition.

I was so puzzled at why the sight word pictures worked so well and so quickly. I made a point of asking each time I was surprised again, "How did you know that word?" And invariably the answer had something very specific to do with the picture in the sight word. They would still see the sight word complete with embedded picture even though they were no longer looking at the picture! To me this is purely magical!

Over the years, others have reported having a similar experience with teaching their reluctant readers.

Here's one comment we recently heard from a parent: "I am pleased to say that my son for the first time said the other day that he actually is liking to read. He had struggled with his sight words since beginning to read. He heavily uses his phonetics and can read very large words, but has always had a problem with the sight words. Since getting the sight words and sentence book over Christmas break, we started to use the cards when we started back to school in Jan. He is reading so well and we are on list C already and almost done with it. He is reading much more fluently. Thank you so much, this has truly been a blessing for all of us. God bless your day." --Judy

## Why do sight word pictures work?

It is my theory that any child who struggles with learning to read needs to have other pathways to the brain besides being told what a word says or being taught how to sound out words. Those who struggle with reading all benefit tremendously from the pictures in the words because what happens is that their brains work like little cameras that snap pictures of the words complete with visuals and store the words away. So when the children encounter the word in reading later, what brings the word to mind is the whole picture that is stored in their brains. They actually report being able to still "see" the sight word picture.

The sight word picture cards also improve reading comprehension because the picture on the front combined with the word used in a sentence on the reverse of the card gives a context to the sight word and makes the learner focus on the meaning of the word and how to use it correctly. This automatically improves reading comprehension!

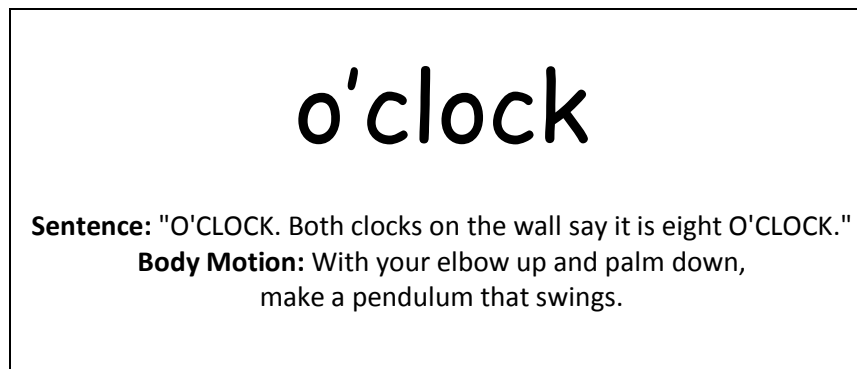
Finally, the body motion attached to each sight word picture provides yet another pathway into the brain—the brain learns when the body moves in a way that matches the image.

Here is an example:



In this sight word picture card, we have the word O'CLOCK with visuals embedded in it. Children love to inspect this picture because it has a spider in it, the little mouse is perched on the clock, and the pendulum is almost swinging for real! Elements in this picture that help the child remember the spelling of the word are that the clocks are both O's in the word. They remember the spider web that is connecting the "o'cl" in the word. Notice also that the black letters in the word look somewhat similar. Both segments have a C and then a tall letter in them. Pretty cool, right?

The back of this card looks like this:



The sentence that includes the sight word refers to the picture that contains two clocks, the clocks the children just saw in the sight word picture. Next, their body motion is mimicking the swing of the pendulum. They are having a full body, fun, engaging learning experience that only took a few seconds!

When I was a Title 1 teacher, our motto was "work smarter, not harder." This motto was prominently displayed in my room because my goal was that the students realize that their style of learning was just fine. It only makes sense to work smarter—in other words, most consistent with how the brain learns best—than to spend so many hours ineffectively drilling and drilling!

The side benefit is that when students begin to succeed at learning, several really wonderful things happen.

1. They realize their brains are fine. They CAN learn.
2. They learn to help themselves study other things by creating helps that aid in memory.
3. They begin to love learning because it is no longer the dreaded task at which they have always failed before.

It is so worthwhile to see a student go from discouraged defeat to successful enthusiasm. It is like seeing a rebirth. For me, there truly is very little more rewarding than having a small part in this process.