

by Timothy Rasinski<br>Kent State University

To my children-Mike, Emily, Mary, and JennyWord Wizards in their own right.

## A father couldn't ask for better kids.



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## Welcome to Word Ladders!

In this book you'll find 100 mini-wordstudy lessons that are also kid-pleasing games! To complete each Word Ladder takes just ten minutes but actively involves each learner in analyzing the structure and meaning of words. To play, students begin with one word and then make a series of other words by changing or rearranging the letters in the word before. With regular use, Word Ladders can go a long way toward developing your students' decoding and vocabulary skills.

## How do Word Ladders work?

Let's say our first Word Ladder begins with the word walk. The directions will tell students to change one letter in walk to make a word that means "to speak." The word students will make, of course, is talk. The next word will then ask students to make a change in talk to form another word-perhaps chalk, or tall. At the top of the ladder, students will have a final word that is in some way related to the first word-for example, run. If students get stuck on a rung along the way, they can come back to it, because the words before and after will give them the clues they need to go on.

## How do Word Ladders benefit students?

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


How do I teach a Word Ladder lesson?
Word Ladders are incredibly easy and quick to implement. Here are four simple steps:

1. Choose a Word Ladder to try. (The first five pages feature easier ladders; you may want to start with those.)
2. Make a copy of the Word Ladder for each student.
3. Choose whether you want to do your Word Ladders with the class as a whole, or by having students work alone, in pairs, or in groups. (You might do the
first few together, until students are ready to work more independently.)
4. At each new word, students will see two clues: the kinds of changes they need to make to the previous word ("rearrange letters" or "add two letters"), 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 this way, up the whole Word Ladder.


Look for the Bonus Boxes with stars. These are particularly difficult words you may want to preteach. Or you can do these ladders as a group so that children will not get stuck on this rung.

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

- Grammatical categories. (Which words are nouns? Verbs?)
- Word structure. (Which words have a long vowel and which don't? Which contain a consonant blend?)
- Word meaning. (Which words express what a person can do or feel? Which do not?)


## Tips for Working With Word Ladders

To give students extra help, mix up and write on the board all the "answers" for the ladder (that is, the words for each rung) for them to choose from as they go through the puzzle. In addition:

- Add your own clues to give students extra help as they work through each rung of a ladder. A recent event in your classroom or community could even inspire clues for words.
- If students are having difficulty with a particular word, you might simply say the word aloud and see if students can spell it correctly by making appropriate changes in the previous word. Elaborate on the meanings of the words as students move their way up the ladder.
- If students are stuck on a particular rung of the Word Ladder, tell them to skip it and come back to it later.
- Challenge students to come up with alternative definitions for the same words. Many words, like lock, fall, and stock, have multiple meanings.

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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


Name


Name
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.
out when it has been used often.
Change one letter.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


To __ the race, you'll have to run fast.
Change one letter.

Last night, I the candles.
Change one letter.

## To cut off. Also, some rabbits are called_-eared. Take away one letter.

When you stand in a room, your feet are on the $\qquad$ _.

Take away one letter, then add two.

The toy car won't move unless you it up.
Add one letter.


Change one letter.

To whistle, put your __s together.
Change one letter.

To fall or drop heavily.
Take away two letters, then add one.

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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.

$\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.


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

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

A green, living thing that is not an animal. Change one letter.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


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


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


Name


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


©人栄 | $\begin{array}{l}\text { of wax that you } \\ \text { can light. } \\ \text { Change one letter. }\end{array}$ |
| :--- |



You can grip this with your hand.
Add two letters.

$\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


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


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


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


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


| To beat someone |
| :--- |
| in a game. |
| Take away |
| one letter. |

A stick used by magicians.
Take away one letter, then add another.

Today I swim; yesterday I $\qquad$
Change one letter.

Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


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

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


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


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


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


Change one letter.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


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

$\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.



More than bad.
Change one letter.

Name


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

It covers the floor.
Add two letters.


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


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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.

$\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


| Thanks |
| :--- |
| a great holiday. |
| Change one |
| letter. |


| To be alive. |
| :--- |
| Change two |
| letters. |

Past tense of lend.
Change one letter.
$\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


| Something a child <br> plays with. <br> Change one letter. l |
| :--- |

Not high.
Rearrange the letters.
A night bird that sits in a


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

Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

Name
Read the clues, then write the words.

$\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.

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


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


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

Not big.
Add one letter.


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


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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


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

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


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


A flower with thorns.
Rearrange letters.

Not all of something, but $\qquad$ -.

## Change one letter.

Painful. Change one letter.

A city in Italy.
Rearrange letters.
Opposite of less. Add two letters.

Golfers yell this as a warning. Rhymes with more.
Change one letter.


When dry logs are lit with a match, it makes this. Change one letter.
answer if someone asks how you are.
Change one letter.

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

$=$ A small, sweet fruit with tiny seeds.
Take away two letters, then add one.

## What you do to the gas tank in your car. <br> Change one letter.



Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.

Two things that are alike are the $\qquad$ Add one letter.

Meat that comes from a pig.
Change one letter.


A wager or guess. Take away one letter.

It makes a ringing noise.
Change one letter.
ball

Something you play.
Change one letter.

Short for Samuel. Change one letter.

The edge of a piece of clothing.
Change one letter.

To gain or receive something.
Change one letter.

It holds up pants.
Change one letter.

Name


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


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

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


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

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


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


綵

Tigers and lions belong to this animal family.
Change one letter.


What you do in a chair.
Change one letter.

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


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


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


Name $\qquad$
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top.


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


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


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


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

Name
Read the clues, then write the words. Start at the bottom and climb to the top. Change one letter.

| A long, flexible rope. |
| :--- |
| Change one letter. |

You eat this on or off the cob. Change one letter.

Opposite of hot. Change one letter.

Confined or shut in, as in " __ up."
Rhymes with rent. Change one letter.

A tame animal.
Take away four letters.
You wear this around your waist.
Change one letter.
A streak of lightning is also called a" $\qquad$ ." Change one letter.

## trumpet

| Twisted or dented. |
| :--- |
| Change one letter. |

Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


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


| The end. |
| :--- |
| Add three letters. |

A fish uses this to move in the water. Take away one letter.

| To locate |
| :--- |
| something. |
| Change one |
| letter. |

Nice or gentle.
Change one letter.

| To tie something |
| :--- |
| up. If you a |
| book, you fasten |
| its pages together |
| and put a cover |
| on it. |
| Change one |
| letter. |



Another word for brain.
Change one letter.

Name
Read the clues, then write the words.


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


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


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


## Counting Up, page 7

few, new, now, mow, meow, men, hen, ten, tan, man, many

## Home, Sweet Home, page 8

wigwam, wig, wag, sag, Sam, same, some, home

In the Doghouse, page 9
dog, dot, Don, nod, cod, code, coke, cone, bone

## Shrinking Sizes, page 10

little, lit, it, ill, mill, mall, small

## All Wet, page 11

wet, we, well, bell, belt, bet, bat, bad, Brad, bran, ran, rain

## Go, Team!, page 12

team, meat, tame, take, tale, tall, toll, ton, torn, worn, work

## Sweet Seasons, page 13

spring, string, sting, sing, sling, slim, slime, slimmer, simmer, summer

## Art Smart, page 14

art, cart, car, cat, scat, sat, saw, raw, straw, draw

Sleepytime, page 15
sleep, seep, sheep, peep, peel, pail, pal, lap, clap, slap, sap, nap

More or Less, page 16
most, mast, mask, cask, cast, coast, cost, lost, last, least

## Barbershop, page 17

hair, chair, char, chart, charm, harm, arm, ram, rat, rut, cut

## Inside Out, page 18

door, floor, flop, lop, lip, lit, wit, win, wind, window

## Weighty Matters, page 19

pint, paint, pant, chant, chart, cart, tart, part, art, quart

## Restful Vacation, page 20

hotel, hot, hat, hate, haste, host, shot, shoot, sheet, sleep

## Gardening, page 21

flower, flow, slow, show, shower, shopper, shop, stop, top, pot

## Birdsong, page 22

bird, bid, bed, shed, sled, slid, ship, hip, chip, chirp

## Shady Glade, page 23

shade, shape, shame, same, Sam, sap, sip, seep, see, tee, tree

## School Days, page 24

school, cool, coal, coat, cat, can't, cent, gent, dent, student

## Transportation, page 25

boat, float, moat, mat, pat, pan, plan, plank, plant, plane

## Good Cooking, page 26

fried, freed, feed, fed, bed, bad, bar, bark, barn, bare, baked

America's Pastime, page 27
base, bass, mass, miss, mist, mast, melt, mall, small, ball

Sweet Treats, page 28
candy, can, cat, sat, Sam, seem, seam, seat, sweat, sweet


Finish Line, page 29
start, tart, cart, cast, cash, wash, wish, dish, fish, finish

Fireworks, page 30
fire, tire, tile, pile, pill, hill, hall, hand, handle, candle

Opposites Attract, page 31
black, block, clock, lock, look, loot, lot, hot, hit, white

Seasoning Selection, page 32
salt, sat, hat, hot, shot, shop, hop, pop, popper, pepper

## Displays of Affection, page 33

hug, hog, hoe, shoe, show, slow, low, lot, lit, kit, kite, kiss

Neigh-bors, page 34
horse, hoe, hop, hope, cope, cone, bone, bond, pond, pony

Giving and Receiving, page 35
present, sent, gent, bent, belt, bet, bit, lit, lift, gift

Getting There, page 36
walk, talk, stalk, stall, tall, tell, ten, tent, rent, runt, run

## Splish Splash, page 37

swim, swam, swan, wand, wind, win, wind, wild, wood, wool, pool

## Fancy Footwear, page 38

shoe, shop, shot, shock, sock, dock, dot, hot, hoot, boot

## Shopping Spree, page 39

shop, ship, hip, hill, hall, shall, small, mall

## Sweet Things, page 40

candy, sandy, sand, hand, hang, sang, sad, sat, swat, sweat, sweet

Woodsman, page 41
chop, shop, slop, loop, coop, hoop, hood, food, wood

Thar She Blows!, page 42
whale, while, whole, hole, home, some, sole, sold, sod, pod

## Holiday Candy, page 43

candy, Andy, and, sand, band, brand, bran, brain, rain, main, mane, cane

Car Trip, page 44
car, care, dare, date, late, slate, state, ate, gate, gape, gap, gas

## Friendship, page 45

friend, end, trend, tend, send, sand, band, bad, pad, pal

## Great Grapes, page 46

grape, grope, rope, rose, raise, raisin

## Busy Bees, page 47

bee, bet, bat, bit, hit, fit, fin, fine, file, fire, five, hive

## Ship Ahoy, page 48

ship, shop, stop, step, steep, sleep, sheep, sheet, sleet, fleet

## Score!, page 49

home, Rome, more, mare, rare, rate, rat, rut, run

## Personality Change, page 50

nice, mice, mine, mint, pint, pinto, into, ton, ten, men, mean

## Ride 'Em, page 51

horse, worse, worm, warm, war, par, park, perk, pork, pony

## Love Life, page 52

love, dove, dome, home, hole, mole, mule, mile, Mike, like

Underfoot, page 53
rug, bug, bag, rag, rat, tar, star, scar, car, carp, carpet

## Bare Feet, page 54

shoe, show, shot, hot, hat, at, ant, and, sand, sandal

## Color Change, page 55

blue, clue, club, cub, rub, rug, rig, rip, rim, rid, red

## Deep Freeze, page 56

ice, nice, twice, lice, slice, slick, lick, luck, suck, sub, cub, cube

In the Kitchen, page 57
pots, spot, pot, pet, pets, step, stop, top, tap, apt, Pat, pans

## Giving Thanks, page 58

thanks, think, thin, then, hen, Ben, bent, lent, lint, live, living, giving

On the Range, page 59
cow, bow, bowl, blow, flow, fowl, owl, low, tow, toy, boy
Vehicles, page 60
truck, tuck, tack, stack, stuck, stick, stir, star, tar, tart, cart, car

## Hungry!, page 61

lunch, bunch, bunk, bank, ban, bun, bin, din, dinner

## Opposites Attract \#2, page 62

black, lack, lick, chick, chin, win, wine, fine, fin, fit, hit, white

## Nap Time, page 63

nap, pan, pantry, try, tree, tee, tea, sea, see, seep, sleep

## City Living, page 64

city, pity, pie, tie, toe, Tom, tot, tow, town
Air Travel, page 65
air, pair, pain, Spain, span, pan, pant, plant, plan, plane

## Snack Food, page 66

chocolate, late, plate, plane, plan, plant, chant, champ, chimp, chip

A Matter of Size, page 67
large, late, lame, lime, slime, smile, mile, male, mall, small

## Catnip, page 68

cat, scat, spat, sat, rat, hat, hot, home, hose, house, mouse

## Showers and Flowers, page 69

April, lip, slip, sip, ship, shop, hop, mop, map, May

## Coffee Break, page 70

coffee, fee, feet, sheet, sleet, sleep, sheep,
steep, tee, tea

## Simon Says, page 71

stand, sand, sad, said, paid, maid, mad, bad, bid, bit, sit

Wet and Wetter, page 72
damp, ramp, cramp, tramp, trap, part, wart, want, went, wet


## After Dinner, page 73

dessert, desert, resort, sort, sore, rose, Rome, rope, ripe, pie

## Bookworm, page 74

book, boom, room, rum, hum, him, rim, rid, red, read

Daily Journey, page 75
home, come, some, Rome, more, sore, core, cord, cool, school

## Top to Bottom, page 76

arm, ram, ham, hat, cat, scat, scab, cab, lab, lag, leg

## Finders Keepers, page 77

find, fine, fire, fore, or, more, Rome, some, sore, rose, lose

## Tolling Time, page 78

bell, ball, bull, full, fall, fill, fig, rig, ring
Some Like It Sweet, page 79
sweet, tweet, wee, we, wet, set, pet, put, out, our, sour

## Feelings, page 80

happy, pappy, sappy, sap, tap, tip, lip, lid, lad, sad

## Bright Light, page 81

light, lit, fit, fist, mist, mitt, mutt, butt, bull, bulb

Play Ball!, page 82
ball, bell, belt, bet, get, gem, hem, ham, Sam, same, game

## Good, Clean Fun, page 83

clean, lean, bean, beat, bet, bat, cat, cart, dart, dirt, dirty

Gently Down the Stream, page 84 row, throw, crow, crowd, cow, cod, cot, coat, float, boat

Better and Better, page 85
good, hood, hid, hit, wit, wet, wetter, better, bet, best

Winter Weather, page 86
cold, bold, fold, mold, old, sold, sole, lose, nose, now, snow

## Brrrrr!, page 87

frost, lost, most, mist, list, lit, bit, kit, kite, bite

Baby Animals, page 88
bear, bar, bare, care, car, scar, star, tar, tab, tub, cub

## Fizzy Drinks, page 89

pop, pep, pet, pit, spit, sit, Sid, sad, sod, soda

## Animal Enemies, page 90

dog, fog, fig, fit, sit, sat, spat, splat, pat, cat
Five Senses, page 91
see, sea, tea, team, steam, steal, stealth, health, heal, hear

## Shop 'til You Drop, page 92

shop, slop, stop, top, toy, toe, tore, pore, spore, store

## Cross-Country, page 93

east, beast, least, stale, tale, late, rate, rat, pat, pet, wet, west

The Whole Story, page 94
begin, being, bring, ring, rang, fang, fan, man, men, mend, end

Rags to Riches, page 95
rich, Rick, sick, stick, stock, sock, lock, look, loop, polo, pool, poor

Insect Incline, page 96
ant, chant, champ, clamp, lamp, lump,
limp, imp, chimp, chill, hill

## In the Service, page 97

army, arm, harm, charm, chart, cart, car, care, cave, wave, wavy, navy

Tidying Up, page 98
dirty, dirt, dart, part, pant, paint, pain, pan, can, clan, clean

## Outerwear, page 99

jacket, jack, jock, joke, poke, pole, hole, hold, cold, colt, coat

## Crybaby, page 101

baby, bay, hay, ham, ram, cram, cramp, tramp, trap, tray, try, cry

## Utensils, page 102

spoon, spool, stool, tool, toll, tall, talk, tack, pack, park, pork, fork

## Wildlife, page 103

bird, bind, mind, kind, rind, find, fin, finish, fish

Boo!, page 104
trick, track, crack, rack, race, trace, grace, grate, great, treat

Bedridden, page 105
sick, sack, sank, sink, stink, ink, mink, milk, mill, ill

## Brass Band, page 100

trumpet, pet, pelt, pent, bent, belt, bolt, colt, cold, cord, corn, horn


