Split Digraphs

Find out why children might have problems spelling words with a split digraph. This suggested teaching approach and these activities can help children understand the relationship between two graphemes.

The issue

Children who are having problems in spelling words with a split digraph will have met these words in their reading. However in writing, they will usually include the correct letters, but in the wrong order. This is because they do not understand the relationship between the two graphemes, for example: i-e, a-e, u-e, etc.

Teach

Follow this suggested approach to teach children about split digraphs:

- Make some cards with the graphemes t, m, p, n and ie.
- Invite the children to build the word tie.
- Ask the children how it can be changed to time.
- Hold the m against tie to show tiem, ‘sound-talk’ it and explain that although there are graphemes for each phoneme this is not the correct spelling of time.
- Cut the ie grapheme card and explain that this grapheme needs to be separated with the final sound in between.
- Repeat with pie and pine.
- Demonstrate other high-frequency words which use the split digraph, for example lie to like, mad to made. Each time, draw a line linking the vowel with the /e/.

Practise

Suggested activities

These activities give children the opportunity to practise what they have learnt about split digraphs.

- Invite the children to ‘Quickwrite’ on their whiteboards a series of words using the split digraph (select according to maturity). For example:
  - came, like, bone, rule
  - game, even, home, cube
• amaze, extreme, inside, envelope
• computer, explode, complete, escape

Check each time and ask children to link the split digraph to show their understanding.

• Collect examples of words using the split digraphs a-e, i-e, u-e, o-e.
• Play bingo: make bingo cards with a range of words containing split digraphs. Children must read out the words when they have ‘won’.

Guess my word

This game could also be used as a useful whole-class activity as it consolidates knowledge about word structures.

• A child writes a word containing a split digraph and his/her partner can try to guess the word in four questions. For example, ‘huge’:
  ◦ How many letters?
  ◦ What is the middle vowel?
  ◦ What does the word begin with?
  ◦ Give another meaning of the word

• Older children could use more-complex words and perhaps five or six questions. For example ‘explode’:
  ◦ How many letters?
  ◦ Does the word have a prefix?
  ◦ What is it?
  ◦ What is the vowel before the final consonant?
  ◦ What is the final consonant?

• For some children it may be helpful to provide examples of questions and to model the process but other children could use the idea to create their own riddles for others to guess. For example, for the word ‘envelope’:

‘My word has eight letters

The vowel before the final consonant is o

The final consonant sound is p

It begins with the prefix en

What is it?’

(Envelope)