

*Early Literacy Article November 2008*  
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## **Reading Games**

Jared read his book aloud. “Saw it dig! Sammy left small.” Jared’s grandpa, who was reading with him, tilted his head in confusion. Jared frowned too. His initial enthusiasm about learning to read was starting to wane. Jared had trouble remembering some of the words he had already learned. He mixed up letters that looked similar, never sure if the letter was a “b” or “d”; a “p” or “q”. Jared frequently shifted the placement of letters in words too. Instead of “felt” Jared might read “left”; instead of “saw” he often read “was”. The meaning of printed words was jumbled and bewildering.

Jared’s grandpa realized that asking Jared to read the same paragraph over and over or drilling Jared with word or letter flash cards would kill any motivation either of them had for reading together. What Jared really needed was fun and games.

So grandpa came up with games that would help Jared sharpen his visual perception and help him hold visual images in his memory. They found cards to play games of concentration. They played with dominos and puzzles. Grandpa also thought up other visual games that didn’t have to be purchased.

They played Blind Art. Grandpa started. He asked Jared to blindfold him and tell him what object Jared wanted him to draw. Jared immediately said “Rex” their dog. Without lifting his pencil grandpa drew a barely recognizable long-tailed dog. It was Jared’s turn to be blindfolded. Grandpa reminded Jared to think about the shape of the whole object before starting to draw. “Don’t lift your pencil from the paper until your drawing is complete, Jared. Draw a hockey stick.” Jared loved this game. They drew silly basketballs, ice-cream cones, and even Jared’s sister. Jared was strengthening his ability to recall visual images. Grandpa knew that, since words are images too, this game could help Jared with reading skills.

Jared and his grandpa decided to add competition to some of their games. Sometimes they used one of Jared’s library books. Sometimes they chose grandpa’s fishing magazine. Grandpa explained that a paragraph is a block of words. They would need to decide on just one paragraph for their game. Jared picked a letter he wished to look for in that paragraph. If it was a “d” Jared counted all upper and lower case “d” letters in the entire paragraph. Grandpa picked a different letter to count. Whoever found the highest number of letters in the paragraph won. They had re-matches and, like a good hockey game, the best out of five matches won the game.

Jared and grandpa looked through family photos and magazines together too. After each page turn in the album or magazine, they took turns asking one another questions about what they had seen on the previous page. “What colour hat was Uncle Doug wearing?” “How many birds were on the telephone wire?”

After weeks of game playing, Jared read words he hadn’t understood before. “Was it big! Sammy felt small.” And Jared smiled.