

Phonics Treasure Hunt

By the end of kindergarten, kids have spent a lot of time developing their “phonemic awareness”—the ability to hear sounds and connect them to letters. They've worked especially hard on “initial sounds”, such as the way “ball” starts with B or “cat” starts with C.

This whimsical, challenging treasure hunt calls on that knowledge of initial sounds and helps kids string those sounds together to start to decode words. It's a great activity for kids working in teams, allowing them to work together and share what they know. Don't be surprised if it's still lots of fun throughout first grade. Whether you're five, six, or seven, it's hard to overdo phonics practice, and there's no such thing as too many treasure hunts.



What You Need:

- Set of “Spykinder” cards (find examples of pictures here)
- Several sheets of blank paper
- Pencil for your treasure hunt decoders
- “Treasure route” around your home, yard or park
- Pack of 5-8 crayons or different colored markers to serve as a prize for each treasure hunter

What You Do:

1. Prepare some Spykinder cards. Each card has a picture of an object, such as a banana, that begins with a clear letter sound. Cut each picture out. Write the initial letter for each picture on the back of each card. For bee, for example, write “b”.
2. Set the game up by planning a route around your house, yard, or park, with 5-8 locations that kids will find. At each location, hide one crayon or marker from the prize set.
3. Now gather your treasure hunters and explain to them that their bounty can only be revealed if they crack a secret “spykinders” code. Give each treasure hunter a sheet of paper and a pencil.
4. Lay out the cards, picture side up, so the first letter of each object is a letter in the word you want to spell. For example, the word “bag” would be a bee, apple, and grapes. Make each word or phrase a location in the treasure hunt.
5. Challenge the kids to crack the code by identifying the first letter sound of each object, then writing the letter on their sheet of paper. Once they have all the letters, have them sound the whole word out. When they have conquered the challenge, send them off to that location to find their prize.
6. While the kids are running off, arrange your next “spykinder” code word or phrase, and continue the process until the kids have found all the markers or crayons.
7. Once everyone has found all the markers, the game ends—but don't be surprised if the kids beg you for more. There's something irresistible running around with your friends while discovering how letters and sounds make words, and words make tangible meanings that help you find great things.
8. Finally, once you've used up all the cards, wrap up the activity by challenging your kinders to identify the one letter of the alphabet they didn't encounter.