



Level: Preschool

Cost: None

Mess factor: None

Suggested location: In the car or walking in the neighborhood



For this activity you and your child will be detectives, trying to uncover the mystery of words. How many words are there in your neighborhood? How many words have the letter “T” in them? Set out with your child to collect clues and discover a whole new world of words.

Children will experience:

- Reading
- Writing



Materials:

- Something for your child to write with
- A small notebook or several sheets of paper folded over many times and stapled to create a mini-book

Beginning:

Tell your child that there are many mysteries around the world that detectives are trying to figure out. Add that you both will be detectives today, trying to answer some important questions about letters and words.



Share that all detectives have a notebook in which they write down their clues or information they collect. Give the child a notebook that has “Detective (your child’s name)” written on it.

You can do this activity while you are walking around your neighborhood, a local park, or even driving in the car. *Change the questions to meet the needs of your location.*

Middle:

Tell the child that there are many questions that need to be answered. Have the child pick one or maybe two from the list below to try and figure out:

- How many words can you find in our neighborhood?
- How many cars have a letter *R* in the license plate?
- Can you find any words in the neighborhood that have the same letter that starts your first name?
- How many letters are in our street’s name?
- How many different words can you find?
- How many places do you find letters? (dog tags, license plates, house plaques, street signs, yard signs)
- What is the longest word in our neighborhood?



**End:**

If you are driving while doing this activity, end it as you get to your location or home. If you are walking, make sure to end it and make it back home before your child becomes too tired to walk.

**Cleanup:**

Let your child decide where to keep his or her detective book until it is needed for the next mystery.

Younger children:

- Give children an empty toilet paper tube and let them walk around the neighborhood “spying” on letters.
- Give children the detective book, but let them draw pictures if they can’t record letters or words. Once they draw a picture, then you can label the picture.

**Older children:**

- When you get home, have children write the answers to the detective questions in full sentences. Help them to capitalize and put punctuation at the end of the sentences.
- Let them think of questions they want answers to. Follow their lead, and help them gather clues to answer their questions.
- Have them break down the words they find into syllables.
- When you get back to the house, look at all the words they have collected. Help children to put them in alphabetical order.

**Hints:**

- This activity is a playful approach to learning letters, but it also helps children to see the important role that letters and words play in their environment.

More!

- Use the theme of solving mysteries, and have children answer science questions instead. Here are some suggestions:
 - Where do ants march?
 - What do birds eat in our yard?
 - How many insects can you find?

**Special Needs Accommodations:**

- If writing a whole word is too taxing, then let children simply write the first letter of each word they find.
- Provide a flat surface for writing in the car or, if you are walking, let children sit on the sidewalk as they write their information.
- For a child with limited vision, you might need to lift him or her up to read a street sign.
- If you can’t stray too far from home, you can always write with chalk on the sidewalk around your home and let your child find those letters instead!