

Parents, Caregivers & Educators Guide

Dirt Dog's 3-Letter Word Builder

A Personal Note from Lisa

It has been a true joy to create literacy games for children as they learn their letters, sounds, and first words. At a time when many children need additional support in developing strong reading skills, I believe the encouragement they receive from the adults around them matters tremendously.

These games are designed to make practice engaging and joyful while supporting - not replacing - the important role of parents, caregivers, and educators. Dirt Dog and his friends invite you to become part of our Friendship Falls family as we work together to help children discover the confidence, accomplishment, and joy that can come from learning to read.

Not Ready for 3-Letter Words Yet?

Every child begins in a different place. If your child or students are not yet ready to build three-letter words, Dirt Dog & Friends offers earlier literacy practice, too.

Dirt Dog's Alphabet Adventure helps children practice letter recognition and letter sounds, while Dirt Dog's Uppercase & Lowercase Shelf Match gives children practice matching uppercase and lowercase letters.

These games can be used with an entire class or as additional practice for individual children who may need more time strengthening foundational skills. A child who needs extra practice does not have to miss out on the fun or feel left behind. Choose the game that meets the learner where he or she is, then build from there.

Different starting points. Same goal: helping every child grow as a reader.

You can find these and other learning activities on the Dirt Dog & Friends Activities & Games page at dirtdogandfriends.com.

About This Game

Dirt Dog's 3-Letter Word Builder gives beginning readers practice building simple three-letter words using short-vowel sounds. Children hear individual letter sounds, choose letters, and build words such as CAT, BED, PIG, DOG, and SUN.

The game progresses through five short-vowel levels: Short A, Short E, Short I, Short O, and Short U.

The goal is not simply to finish a level. Children are encouraged to listen, think, try, practice, and eventually build each word independently.

Why Short-Vowel Words Matter

Three-letter consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) words are an important part of early phonics instruction. Words such as cat, hen, pig, dog, and sun give children practice connecting the sounds they hear with the letters that represent those sounds.

Working with CVC words supports practice with phonemic awareness, letter-sound relationships, blending, decoding, and early word reading. Recognizing and working with these common sound patterns can help children build a foundation for reading increasingly complex words.

How the Game Works

Choose a Short-Vowel Level

Children can select Short A, Short E, Short I, Short O, or Short U. The levels do not have to be completed in a rigid sequence. Teachers can select the vowel pattern currently being taught, and children can return to earlier levels when additional practice would be helpful.

A child sees a picture and can hear the word, then uses the available letter sounds to build that word. Children can tap or click the letter choices to hear their sounds before deciding which letters belong in the word. They then move the letters into the three spaces to build the word.

When a child builds a word correctly without assistance, that word is earned and added to the child's collection. If a child is having difficulty, the game provides additional support after several unsuccessful attempts. A word completed with assistance is placed back into the practice sequence so the child has another opportunity to build it independently.

This allows the game to provide help without treating assisted practice as independent mastery.

Hear It -> Build It -> Earn It -> Color It!

- **HEAR IT** - Listen to the word and individual letter sounds.
- **BUILD IT** - Choose and arrange the letters to make the word.
- **EARN IT** - Build the word independently to add it to the collection.
- **COLOR IT** - Earned word pictures become available in the coloring studio as an immediate reward for progress.

Children do not have to complete an entire vowel level before enjoying the words they have already earned.

The Coloring Studio

- Choose an earned word and decorate its picture using the digital coloring tools.
- Select from the available crayon colors.
- **BIG** creates a larger drawing stroke.
- **SMALL** creates a smaller drawing stroke for details.
- Eraser removes coloring from the picture.
- Undo reverses the most recent drawing action.
- Start Over clears the child's coloring from the current picture so the child can begin again.
- Save My Picture preserves the child's colored artwork in the browser on the device being used.
- Back to My Words returns the child to the word-building portion of the game.

The original black outline remains visible over the child's coloring so the picture stays recognizable while still allowing plenty of room for creativity.

Digital or Paper? Both!

Children can color their earned pictures directly in the game without needing a printer or art supplies. Printable coloring pages are also planned for the Dirt Dog & Friends website for families and classrooms that prefer an off-screen coloring option.

Visit dirtdogandfriends.com for additional games, books, activities, and literacy resources as they become available.

Take the Success Home!

Part of the reward is giving children something they can proudly share. A colored word picture becomes more than an art activity - it can open a quick conversation about learning: "What word did you build?" "What sound does it have in the middle?" or simply, "Tell me about what you did today."

The goal is to help children experience the satisfaction of learning something new and sharing that success with someone who matters to them.

What Does "Celebrate" Mean?

When a child has independently built all five words in a short-vowel level, the Celebrate option recognizes completion of that vowel set.

The coloring reward and the mastery celebration intentionally serve different purposes:

- Coloring celebrates progress.
- Celebration recognizes independent completion of the five-word vowel set.

A child can therefore enjoy success along the way without having to wait until every word has been mastered.

Game Progress and Teacher Verification

Game results can provide useful information about a child's practice, but completing a game should not automatically be considered formal evidence of reading mastery.

A child may receive help from an adult, sibling, classmate, or another source while practicing at home. For that reason, game progress is best viewed as practice evidence.

Teachers may wish to follow game practice with a brief individual check in which the child reads, identifies, or builds similar words independently. The goal is to use technology to support instruction - not replace the teacher's professional judgment.

Understanding the Practice Summary

After a child completes practice, the **Practice Summary** gives parents, caregivers, and educators a simple snapshot of the session.

Words Completed shows the number of words completed during practice. **Independent From the Start** shows words the child completed without first reaching the game's assistance point. **Needed Assistance First** shows words for which the child initially needed the game's letter hint before completing the word.

The **Progress Across Practice** section can help adults notice changes over repeated practice sessions, such as a decrease in the number of words needing assistance.

Children Learn at Different Rates

A child who needs additional practice with one short vowel should not be prevented from participating when a class moves to another vowel sound. The game allows children to practice vowel patterns, revisit skills that need additional work, and continue learning with their classmates.

Progress should help adults understand what a child is practicing - not become a label for the child.

Supporting English Learners

Dirt Dog's 3-Letter Word Builder may also provide helpful practice for children who are learning English. The combination of pictures, spoken English words, individual letter sounds, repeated practice, and opportunities to try again gives children multiple ways to connect what they hear with the letters and words they see.

Parents, caregivers, and educators can help by allowing children time to listen to the word and letter sounds more than once, encouraging them to say the sounds aloud, and celebrating progress without rushing. Children who are developing English-language skills may also need vocabulary explanation or additional support.

This game practices English short-vowel CVC patterns; it is not intended to teach Spanish phonics. A Spanish-language version of this adult guide can help Spanish-speaking families understand how the English literacy game works and how they can support the learner.

For Home Practice

Parents and caregivers can help by encouraging children to listen carefully before choosing a letter. Rather than immediately supplying an answer, try prompts such as:

- "What sound do you hear first?"
- "Listen to the word again."
- "What sound do you hear at the end?"
- "Which letter makes that sound?"

A little productive struggle can be valuable. The game's built-in assistance is there when the child truly needs it. And don't forget to celebrate the small victories: a newly earned word represents successful independent work.

A Note About Saved Artwork

Colored artwork can be saved in the child's browser on the device being used. Browser-based saved information generally stays with that particular browser and device, so artwork created on one device should not be expected to appear automatically on another.

The Final Celebration Gallery

When a child masters all 25 words, the final celebration includes a special gallery with five gold frames. When saved artwork is available, the gallery can display the child's own colored word pictures. If saved artwork is not available for a short-vowel family, a Friendship Falls vowel image appears in that frame.

For the fullest personalized finale, encourage the child to color and save at least one earned picture from each short-vowel level.

Designed for Flexible Use

Dirt Dog's 3-Letter Word Builder can be played on phones, tablets, and computers. It is intended to make phonics practice feel encouraging and achievable while giving children opportunities to listen, try, make mistakes, receive support, try again, and succeed.

Because learning isn't about getting everything right the first time.

It's about growing one sound, one word, and one success at a time.

More Friendship Falls Fun Is on the Way!

More Games, Books & Resources are COMING SOON!

Visit dirtdogandfriends.com for new games, printable activities, books, and family and educator resources as they become available.