



# Contents



<b>Welcome to Word Ladders!</b> . . .	5	All in the Family . . . . .	33
Eat Your Vegetables . . . . .	7	Give a Dog a Bone . . . . .	34
Money Matters . . . . .	8	Dinner's Ready . . . . .	35
Outerwear . . . . .	9	Happy Birthday . . . . .	36
Behind the Wheel . . . . .	10	Chew on This . . . . .	37
Give a Little . . . . .	11	Peaks and Valleys . . . . .	38
Things That Go Bump in the Night . . . . .	12	A Rose Is a Rose . . . . .	39
Toothsome . . . . .	13	Childhood . . . . .	40
Say Cheese . . . . .	14	Cheese Eaters . . . . .	41
Hat Head . . . . .	15	Frosty Fun . . . . .	42
In the Money . . . . .	16	Seaworthy . . . . .	43
Meet and Greet . . . . .	17	Sew Sew . . . . .	44
Cool Drinks . . . . .	18	Save Your Pennies . . . . .	45
Stars and Stripes . . . . .	19	Right or Wrong . . . . .	46
In My Room . . . . .	20	Precipitation Puzzle . . . . .	47
Sleepytime . . . . .	21	Snow Day . . . . .	48
Giving Thanks . . . . .	22	Winter Wear . . . . .	49
Express Mail . . . . .	23	Out of This World . . . . .	50
Stormy Days . . . . .	24	Fried Snacks . . . . .	51
Official Officers . . . . .	25	Candlelight . . . . .	52
Bucket Brigade . . . . .	26	Car Trouble . . . . .	53
Sweet Things . . . . .	27	Play Date . . . . .	54
Here to There . . . . .	28	Beautiful Day . . . . .	55
Good Eating . . . . .	29	Ruling the Roost . . . . .	56
That's Entertainment . . . . .	30	New and Not-So-New . . . . .	57
All Is Forgiven . . . . .	31	Midday Meal . . . . .	58
Go, Go, Go . . . . .	32	Growing Up . . . . .	59
		Wedding Words . . . . .	60



Friendship . . . . .	61	Fish Wish . . . . .	89
Rub-a-Dub-Dub . . . . .	62	From the Ground Up . . . . .	90
Underwater . . . . .	63	Strength Training . . . . .	91
Hear This . . . . .	64	Getting the Message . . . . .	92
Brainy Birds . . . . .	65	Medal Winners . . . . .	93
Itchy and Scratchy . . . . .	66	Fading Light . . . . .	94
Drinking Vessels . . . . .	67	Auto Adventures . . . . .	95
Good Books . . . . .	68	Where the Heart Is . . . . .	96
Land of the Free . . . . .	69	Quick Wit . . . . .	97
Corny! . . . . .	70	My Family . . . . .	98
School Days . . . . .	71	Family Ties . . . . .	99
Jobs for Grownups . . . . .	72	Greener Pastures . . . . .	100
Ship Shape . . . . .	73	Fur Facts . . . . .	101
Suppertime . . . . .	74	Woody Wonder . . . . .	102
Just a Spoonful . . . . .	75	Mind Your Manners . . . . .	103
Flower Power . . . . .	76	And the Winner Is . . . . .	104
24 Hours . . . . .	77	Dressing Up . . . . .	105
Horse Sense . . . . .	78	Directions . . . . .	106
Voting Booth . . . . .	79	Get Well Soon . . . . .	107
Sailing . . . . .	80	<b>Answer Key</b> . . . . .	108
Bunny Tales . . . . .	81		
Good Hare Day . . . . .	82		
Very Fishy . . . . .	83		
Beasts of Burden . . . . .	84		
Apple for Teacher . . . . .	85		
Art Smart . . . . .	86		
Uphill . . . . .	87		
Globe Guessing . . . . .	88		



# Welcome to Word Ladders!

In this book you'll find 100 mini-word-study lessons that are also kid-pleasing games! To complete each Word Ladder takes just ten minutes but actively involves each learner in analyzing the structure and meaning of words. To play, students begin with one word and then make a series of other words by changing or rearranging the letters in the word before. With regular use, Word Ladders can go a long way toward developing your students' decoding and vocabulary skills.

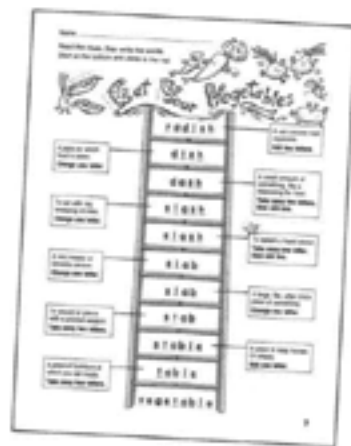
## How do Word Ladders work?

Let's say our first Word Ladder begins with the word *walk*. The directions will tell students to change one letter in *walk* to make a word that means "to speak." The word students will make, of course, is *talk*. The next word will then ask students to make a change in *talk* to form another word—perhaps *chalk*, or *tall*. At the top of the ladder, students will have a final word that is in some way related to the first word—for example, *run*. If students get stuck on a rung along the way, they can come back to it, because the words before and after will give them the clues they need to go on.

## How do Word Ladders benefit students?

Word Ladders are great for building students' decoding, phonics, spelling, and vocabulary skills. When students add or rearrange letters to make a new word from one they have just made, they must examine sound-symbol relationships closely. This is just the kind of analysis

that all children need to perform in order to learn how to decode and spell accurately. And when the puzzle adds a bit of meaning in the form of a definition (for example, "make a word that means to say something"), it helps extend students' understanding of words and concepts. All of these skills are key to students' success in learning to read and write. So even though Word Ladders will feel like a game, your students will be practicing essential literacy skills at the same time!



## How do I teach a Word Ladder lesson?

Word Ladders are incredibly easy and quick to implement. Here are four simple steps:

1. Choose one of the 100 Word Ladders to try. (The last three pages are the hardest ladders in the book, so avoid starting with those.)
2. Make a copy of the Word Ladder for each student.
3. Choose whether you want to do your Word Ladders with the class as a whole, or by having students work alone, in



pairs, or in groups. (You might do the first few together, until students are ready to work more independently.)

4. At each new word, students will see two clues: the kinds of changes they need to make to the previous word (“rearrange the letters” or “add two letters”), and a definition of or clue to the meaning of the word. Sometimes this clue will be a sentence in which the word is used in context but is left out for children to fill in. Move from word to word this way, up the whole Word Ladder.



Look for the **Bonus Boxes** with stars. These are particularly difficult words you may want to preteach. Or you can do these ladders as a group so that children will not get stuck on this rung.

That’s the lesson in a nutshell! It should take no longer than ten minutes to do. Once you’re done, you may wish to extend the lesson by having students sort the words into various categories. This can help them deepen their understanding of word relationships. For instance, they could sort them into:

- Grammatical categories. (Which words are nouns? Verbs?)
- Word structure. (Which words have a long vowel and which don’t? Which contain a consonant blend?)
- Word meaning. (Which words express what a person can do or feel? Which do not?)

## Tips for Working With Word Ladders

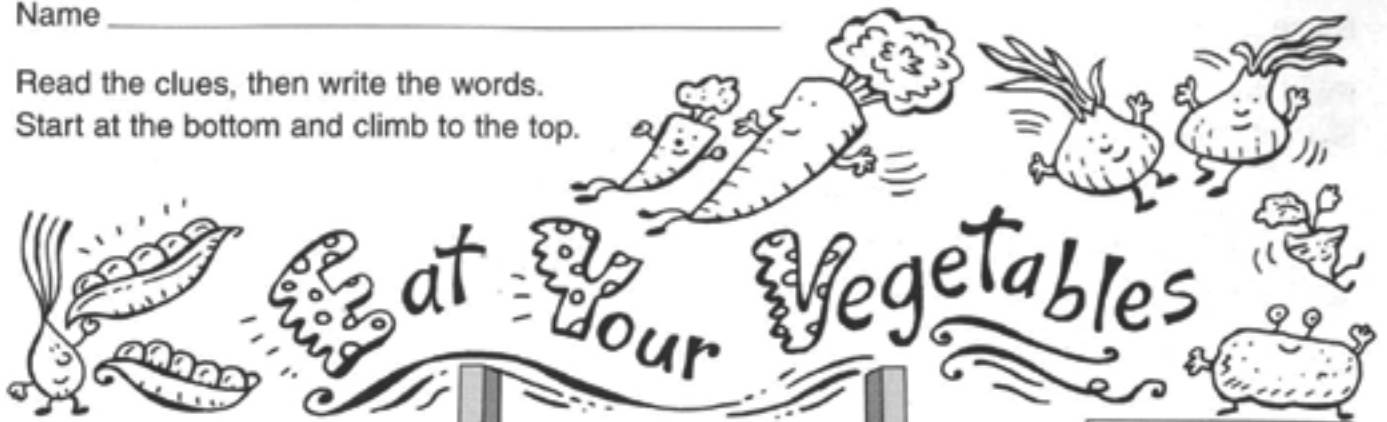
To give students extra help, mix up and write all the “answers” for the ladder (that is, the words for each rung) on the board for them to choose from as they go through the puzzle. In addition:

- Add your own clues to give students extra help as they work through each rung of a ladder. A recent event in your classroom or community could even inspire clues for words.
- If students are having difficulty with a particular word, you might simply say the word aloud and see if students can spell it correctly by making appropriate changes in the previous word. Elaborate on the meanings of the words as students move their way up the ladder.
- If students are stuck on a particular rung of the Word Ladder, tell them to skip it and come back to it later.
- Challenge students to come up with alternative definitions for the same words. Many words, like *lock*, *fall*, and *stock*, have multiple meanings.

Timothy Rasinski is a professor of literacy education at Kent State University, with a special focus on young and struggling readers. Dr. Rasinski has served on the board of directors at the International Reading Association and as president of the College Reading Association. He is the author of numerous books and professional articles on effective reading instruction.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Read the clues, then write the words.  
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



A plate on which food is eaten.  
**Change one letter.**

To cut with big, sweeping strokes.  
**Change one letter.**

A very messy or slovenly person.  
**Change one letter.**

To wound or pierce with a pointed weapon.  
**Take away two letters.**

A piece of furniture at which you eat meals.  
**Take away four letters.**

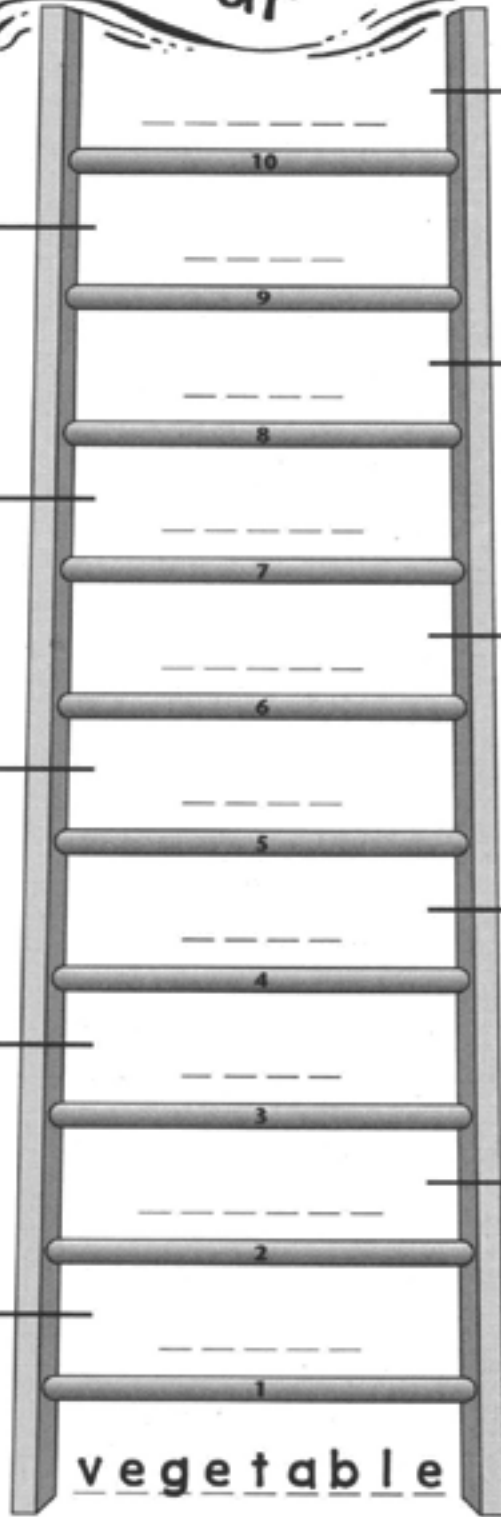
A red-colored root vegetable.  
**Add two letters.**

A small amount of something, like a seasoning for food.  
**Take away two letters, then add one.**

To splash a liquid about.  
**Take away the last letter, then add two.**

A large, flat, often thick piece of something.  
**Change one letter.**

A place to keep horses. Or steady.  
**Add one letter.**



v e g e t a b l e

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Read the clues, then write the words.  
Start at the bottom and climb to the top.



# Mind Your Manners



A polite expression.  
**Add one letter.**

-----  
11



A contract that lets you rent someone else's possessions.  
**Take away the last letter, then add two.**

To rest your body against something for support.  
**Rearrange the letters.**

-----  
10

Another name for street or road.  
**Take away one letter.**

Another name for a flying machine.  
**Add one letter.**

-----  
9

A program of action to achieve a goal.  
**Take away one letter.**

A heavy, thick board.  
**Change one consonant.**

-----  
8

A mischievous trick.  
**Add one letter.**

Captain and private are \_\_\_\_\_s in the military.  
**Change the first letter.**

-----  
7

A container used to hold liquid or gas.  
**Take away one letter.**

To express gratitude.  
**Take away one word.**

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6

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5

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4

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3

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2

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1

**t h a n k y o u**