

# First Steps with Phonics

## Book I: AY and AI

by Mary Cooney



# The Six Steps

Step 1: See the Phonogram

Step 2: Hear the Phonogram

Step 3: Sound out words and read

Step 4: Build the words and spell

Step 5: Learn new vocabulary

Step 6: Write the words

## First Steps with Phonics

### Materials Needed:

- small sticky notes
- cardstock

### Optional (but recommended!):

- Montessori Green Language Series cards from The Little Spark Company

### Prerequisites:

Before starting on this program, your child should know:

- the names of all the letters of the alphabet
- the sounds of the consonants

### Tips:

- Print all pages with word cards, pictures cards, and segmenting boards on card stock and for durability and review. Save them for future lessons.
- Consider keeping a binder to keep sentence pages, sorting pages, and handwriting/spelling pages in. This will serve as a good tool for review.
- Store phonogram tiles and word and picture cards in separate envelopes or boxes.
- Establish a daily review drill. Each day practice reading (sounding out), segmenting (breaking up a word into its sounds), and building (spelling) previously learned phonograms and words.

Phonogram Tiles  
Print on card stock and laminate. Cut into cards.

ai

ay

b

d

f

h

j

k

l

m

n

p

qu



Phonogram Tiles  
Print on card stock and laminate for durability

**r**

**s**

**t**

**v**

**w**

**c**

**g**

**x**

**y**

**z**

# ay

says a at the end of words

—

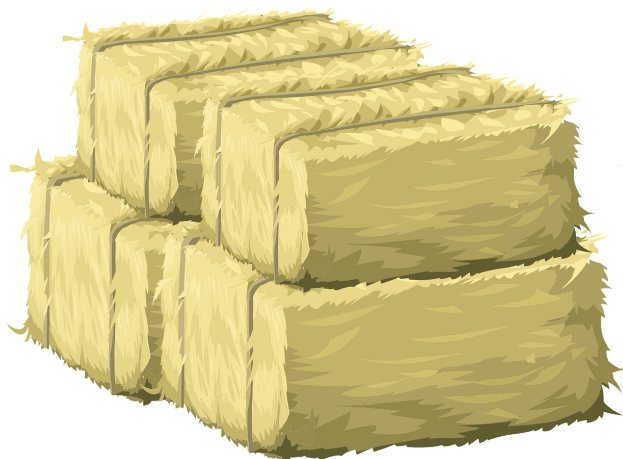
like:

ray

say

yay

day



Step 1: See the phonogram.

# Is it AY?

Cut out the phonograms. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and sorting them.

AY phonograms go into the "Yay!" pile. All other phonograms go into the garbage can.



ay

ay

k

w

ay

ay

l

m

Step 1: See the phonogram.

Is it AY?

Cut out the phonograms. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and sorting them.

AY phonograms go into the "Yay!" pile. All other phonograms go into the garbage can.

ay	ay	n	s
ay	ay	p	t
ay	ay	b	h
ay	ay	r	d

Step 1: See the phonogram.

Find AY



Circle all the words with AY phonograms. Cross out the other words.

Extension: Make more on sticky notes. Put them on the walls around the room. Help your child find the words with AY.

ray

the

you

say

hay

like

may

bay

**Remember** to go on an AY hunt around the house. Hint: Calendars are a good place to find them!

Step 2: Hear the phonogram.

# Does it have the sound of AY?

Cut out the pictures. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and naming them.

Listen to the word carefully. All pictures with an AY sound go into the "Yay!" pile.

All other pictures go into the garbage can.



words pictured are: pay, bike, day, feet, blue jay, cow



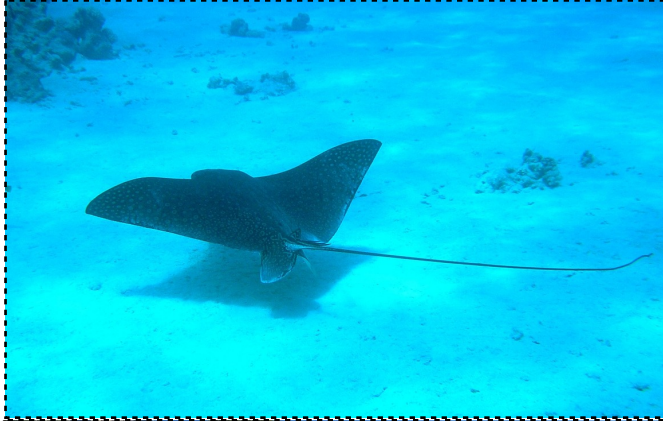
Step 2: Hear the phonogram.

# Does it have the sound of AY?

Cut out the pictures. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and naming them.

Listen to the word carefully. All pictures with an AY sound go into the "Yay!" pile.

All other pictures go into the garbage can.



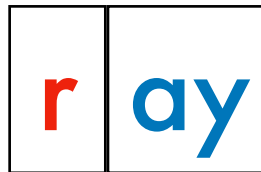
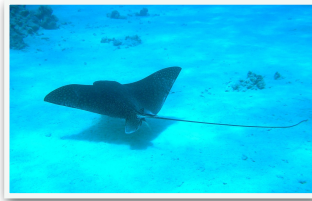
words pictured are: hay, tree, manta ray, goat, bay, pie

Step 3: Sound it out and read.

# Let's read words with AY!

## Activity 1 - Word tiles and picture cards

1. Lay out the following pictures from the previous activity: *hay*, *ray*, and *bay*. Help your child name them. Say the words slowly.
2. **Demonstrate.** Using the tiles, spell “ray”. Slowly demonstrate how to sound out the word, pointing to each phonogram as you say it. Then ask your child to choose the correct picture. Repeat with all the AY picture cards.



3. **Collaborate.** Repeat the activity again, this time inviting your child to sound out only the *last* phonogram (AY) after you sound out the first letter.  
For example: You say “rrrrrr”  
Your child says “aaaay”.  
Together you say, “rrrrraaaaaay..... ray. Ray!”  
Repeat this process with all the words.  
Repeat the activity again with each of the words, inviting your child to sound out only the first letter , while you add “ay”.
4. **Fade your aid.** Eventually, encourage your child to sound out both phonograms, always pointing to them, and then choose the correct picture.



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

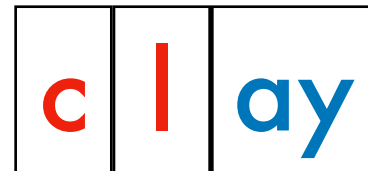
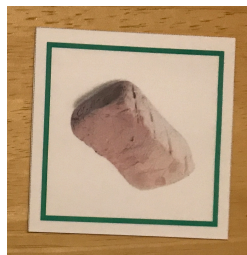
# Let's read words with AY !

## Activity 2 (Optional) - Montessori picture and word cards

1. Take out all the AY picture and word cards: *jay*, *pay*, *hay*, *clay*, *tray*, and *crayon*.
2. Lay out the picture cards for *jay*, *pay*, and *hay*. Help your child name them and then say the words slowly, listening to the AY sound.
3. Show your child the *hay* word card. Help your child to sound out the word and place it beneath the correct picture. Repeat with *jay* and *pay*.



4. Lay out the picture card for *tray*, *clay*, and *crayon*. Help your child name them and then say the words slowly, listening to the AY sound. These are much harder words to sound out. So...
5. Show your child the word *clay*. Spell it with the tiles. Tell your child these are much harder to sound out because they have three sounds instead of two. Count the tiles.



6. Slowly demonstrate how to sound out the word, pointing to each phonogram as you say it. Do not, at this point, require your child to sound these out.
7. Help your child match the word to its picture. Repeat with *clay* and *crayon*.
8. Invite your child to sound out *clay*, *tray*, and *crayon*, but this time, you sound out the *first two* letters, and your child sounds out AY.  
For example: You say "c - l - "  
Your child says "aaaaay"  
Together you say "c-l-aaaaay. Clay. Clay!"
9. Repeat with *clay* and *crayon*.

Step 3: Sound it out and read.

# Let's read words with AY !

Cut out these word cards. Match them with their pictures from p. 7-8.

hay

pay

day

jay

bay

ray

Step 3: Sound it out and read.

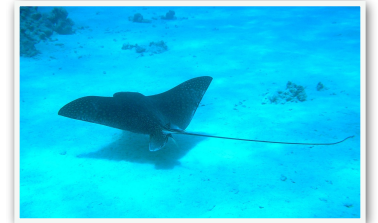
## Let's read words with AY !

Cover each picture with a small sticky note. Help your child find and sound out all the AY words. Then, help your child read the following sentences. Uncover the picture after your child reads each sentence.

I see hay.



I see a ray.



I see a bay.



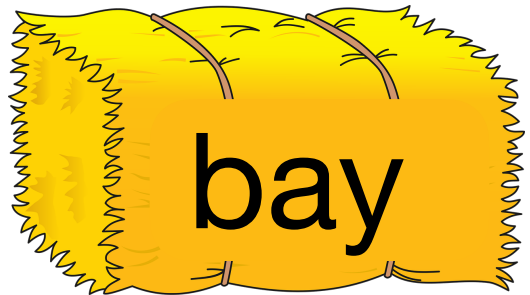
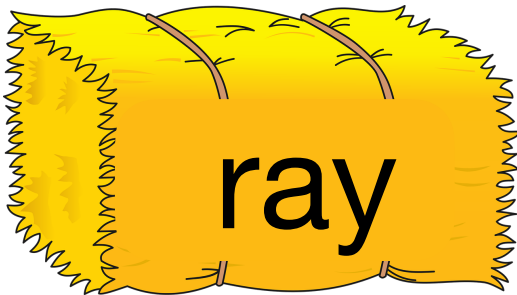
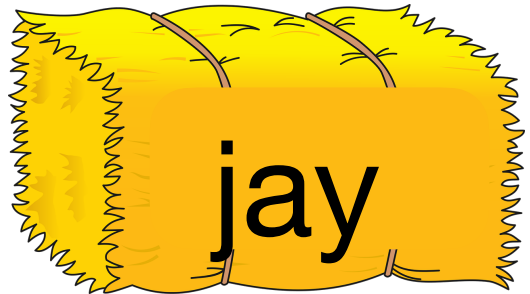
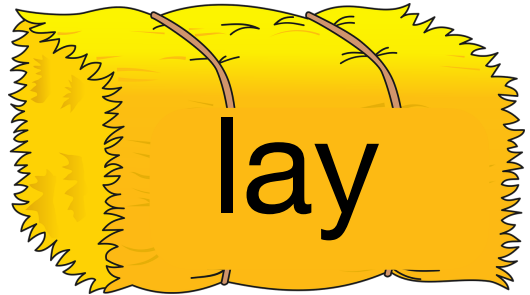
I see a jay.



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

# Let's Build a Big Haystack!

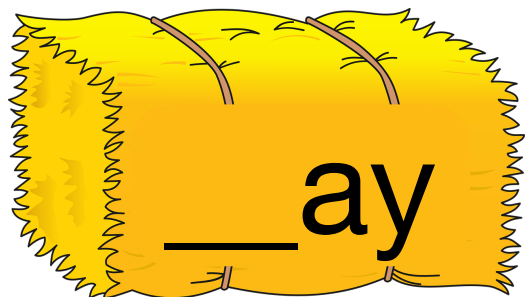
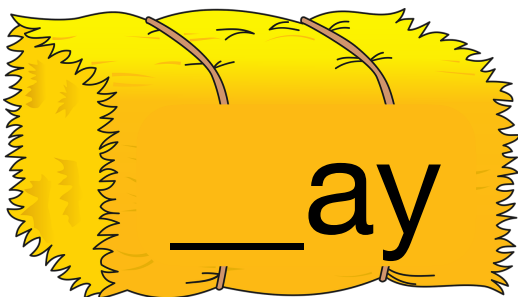
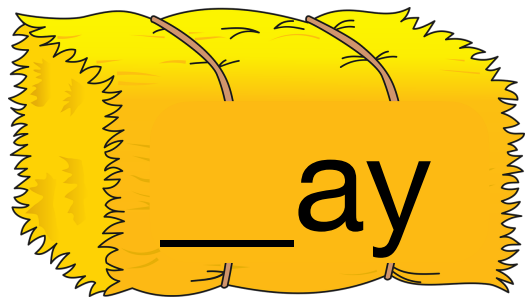
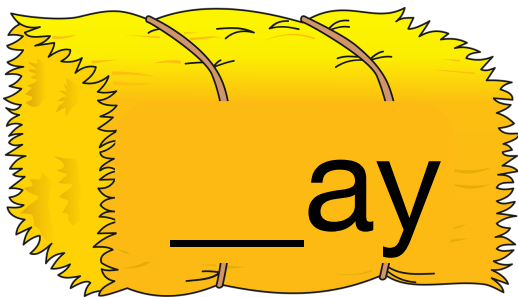
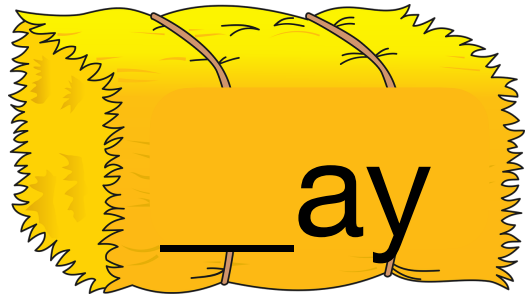
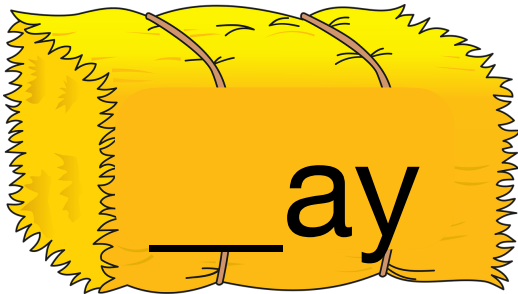
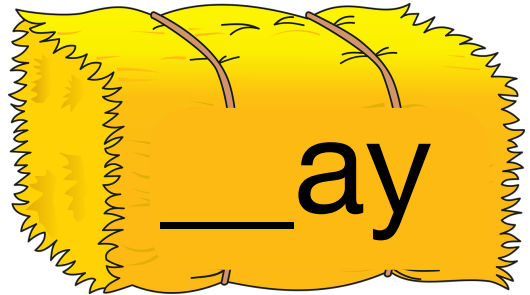
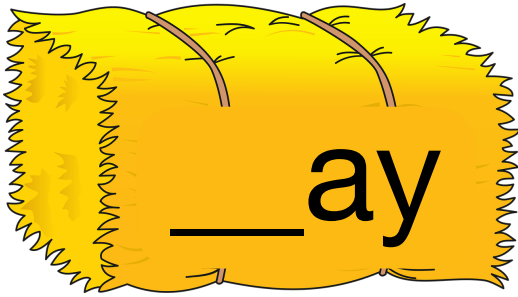
Cut out the haystacks. Read the words and glue them onto page 13.



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

# Let's Build a Big Haystack!

Option 2: Cut out the haystacks. Say an AY word and help your child fill in the missing letters. Then paste them onto p. 13.



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

# Let's Build a Big Haystack!

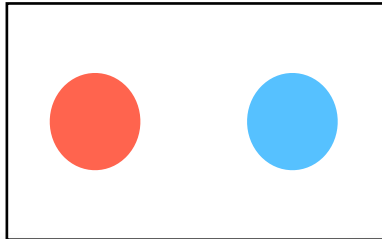


Step 4: Build the words and spell

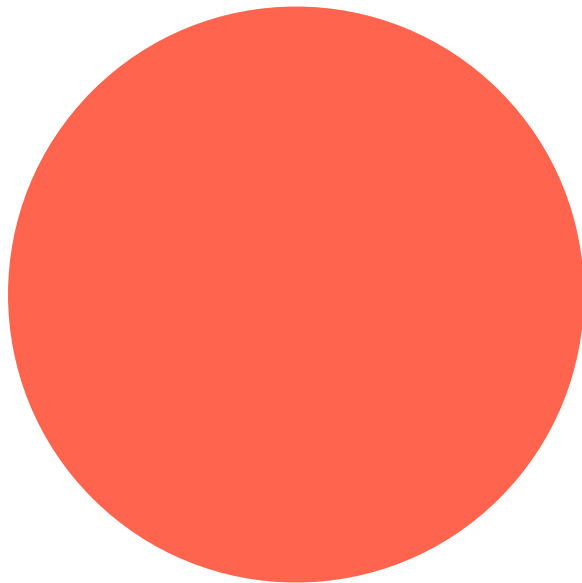
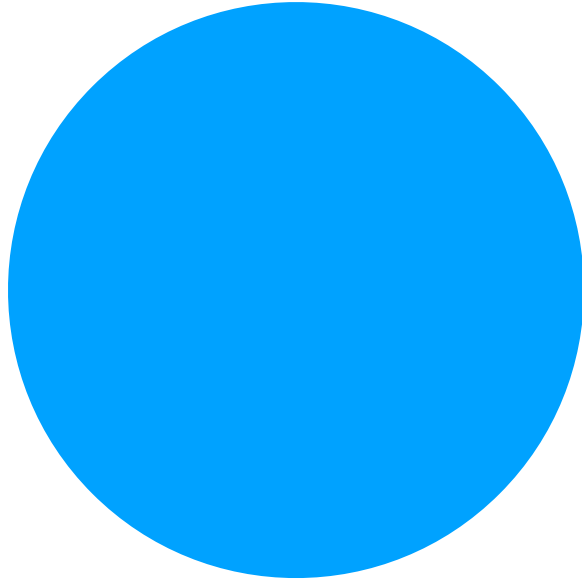
# Let's build words with AY !

## Activity 1 - Segment AY words

1. Take out: AY picture cards, and the segmenting card on the next page.
2. Take out the picture of the manta ray. Ask, "What's this?" After your child names it, say, "I'm going to say the word very slowly. Listen to the sounds."
3. Say "rrrrr-aaaaay". As you say "rrrrr", put your fist on the red dot. As you say "aaaaay", your fist to the blue dot. Repeat this several times.
4. Invite your child to imitate. Together say the word "rrrrraaaaaay". As your child says "rrrrrr", put your fist on the red dot. As he/she says "aaaaay" move, your fist to the blue dot.



5. Repeat this several times, moving your fist then your child's fist over the appropriate dots as you slowly say the sounds in the word.
6. Repeat with the following pictures and words: *hay*, *say*, *jay*, *bay*, and *pay*



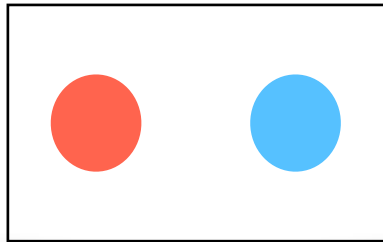


Step 4: Build the words and spell

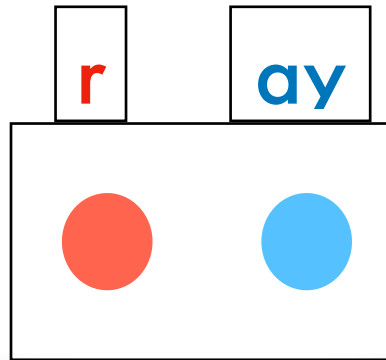
# Let's build words with AY !

## Activity 2 - Build AY words

1. Take out: phonogram tiles, AY picture cards, and segmenting card no. 1.
2. Take out the picture of the manta ray. Ask, "What's this?" After your child names it, say, "Let's say the word very slowly. Listen to the sounds."
3. Practice segmenting the word "ray" while helping your child move his/her fist on the segmenting card.



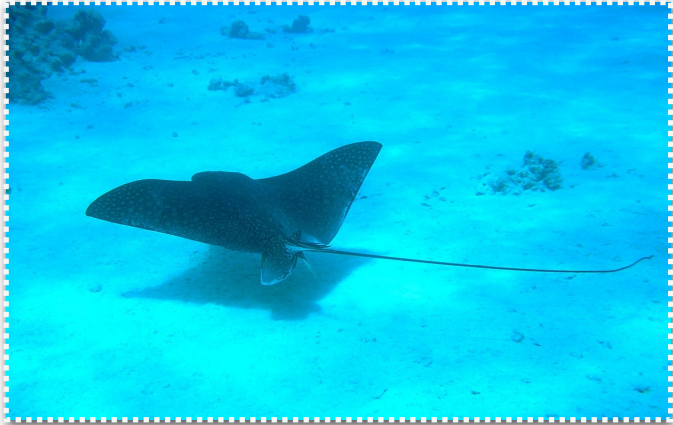
4. Lay out the R tile and the AY tile. Ask your child which tile should go above the red dot, and which should go above the blue dot.



6. Remove the segmenting card and push the tiles together. Say, "You just spelled ray! Yay!"
7. Repeat all the above steps with *say*, *hay*, *bay*, *jay*, and *pay*. Always give your child 3-4 phonograms to choose from, but no more.
8. For additional practice, help your child segment and spell the following: *may*, *lay*, *way*, *day*

# The Three Meanings of Ray

“Ray” has three meanings:



**Manta - Ray** is a sea creature that has fins that look like wings.



**Sun ray** is a beam of light coming from the sun.



**X - ray** is a picture of the inside of your body.

**Tip:** Cut these pictures out and add them to your AY word and picture pile.

Step 5: Learn new vocabulary

## Fill in the blanks.

Read the sentences for your child. Help him/her choose the correct answer to glue on the blank.

The doctor took an \_\_\_\_\_  
of my broken leg.

---

At the aquarium, I saw a  
\_\_\_\_\_ swimming in the water.

---

The \_\_\_\_\_ are bright and  
warm.

sun rays

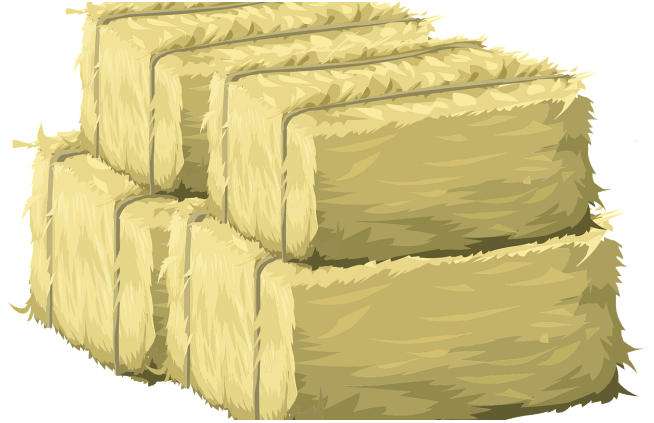
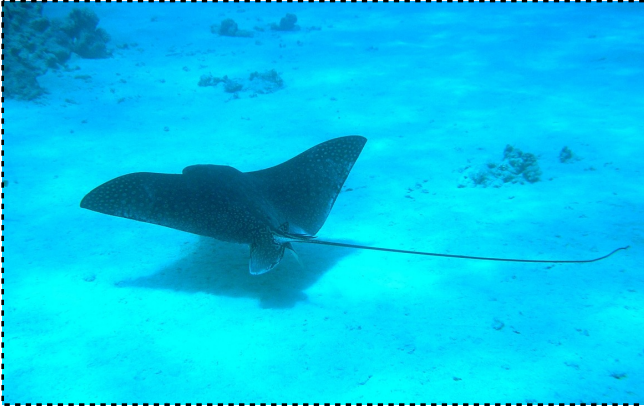
x-ray

manta ray

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AY !

Help your child say the word, fill in the missing letter, trace the word, and copy the word.



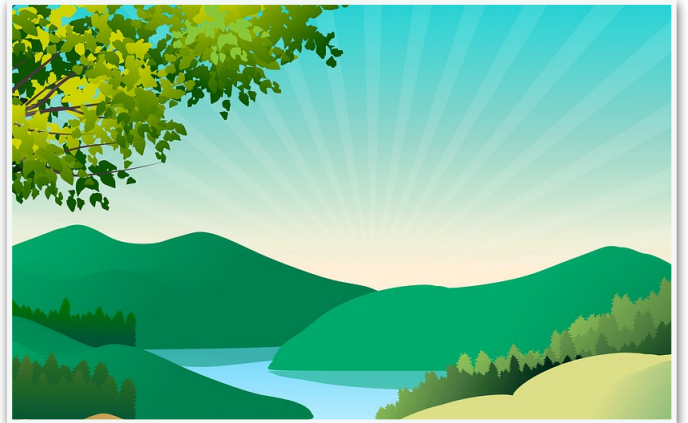
ay

ay

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AY !

Help your child say the word, fill in the missing letter, trace the word, and copy the word.



ay

ay

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AY !

Help your child say the word, fill in the missing letter, trace the word, and copy the word.



r

j



# ai

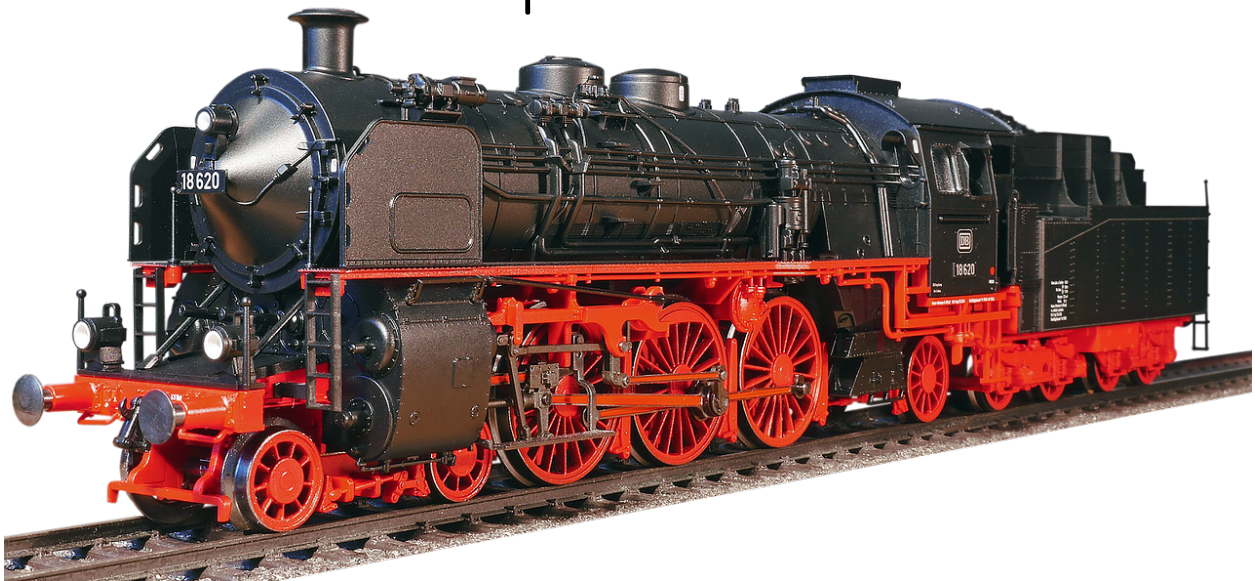
says /ay/ in the middle of words

like:

rain

train

paint



Step 1: See the phonogram.

# Let's Sort Phonograms

Cut out the phonograms. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and sorting them.  
AY phonograms go into the "Yay!" pile. AI phonograms go into the mailbox pile. All other phonograms go into the garbage pile.



ay ay

ay ay





Step 1: See the phonogram.

# Let's Sort Phonograms

Cut out the phonograms. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and sorting them.

AY phonograms go into the "Yay!" pile. AI phonograms go into the mailbox pile. All other phonograms go into the garbage pile.

ai	ai	b	c
ai	ai	d	f
ay	ay	i	h
ai	ai	k	r

Step 1: See the phonogram.

## Find AI



Circle all the words with AI phonograms. Cross out the other words.

Extension: Make more on sticky notes. Put them on the walls around the room. Help your child find the words with AI.

rain

see

ray

pail

train

the

may

mail

**Remember** to go on an AI hunt around the house.

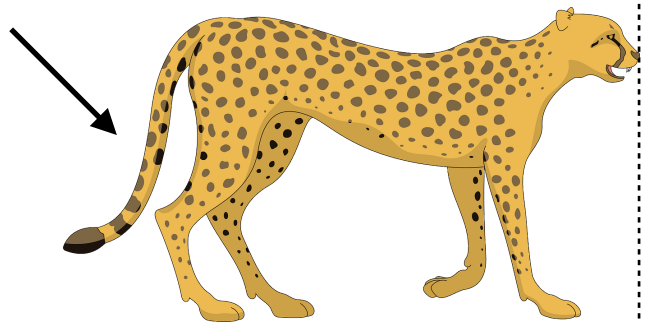
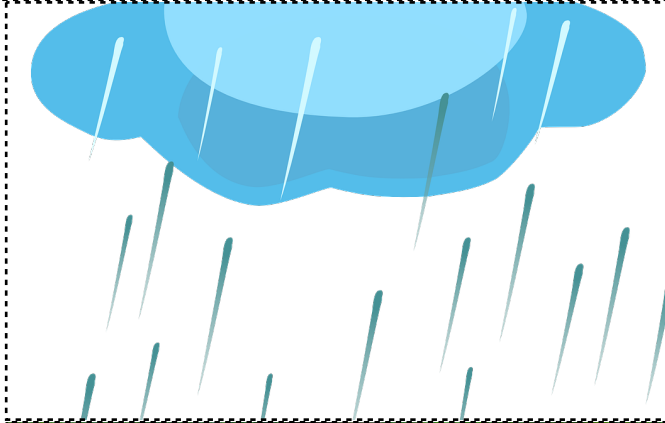
Step 2: Hear the phonogram.

# Does it have the sound of AI?

Cut out the pictures. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and naming them.

Listen to the word carefully. All pictures with an AI sound go into the mailbox pile.

All other pictures go into the garbage can.



words pictured are: aim, mail, rain, wait, tail

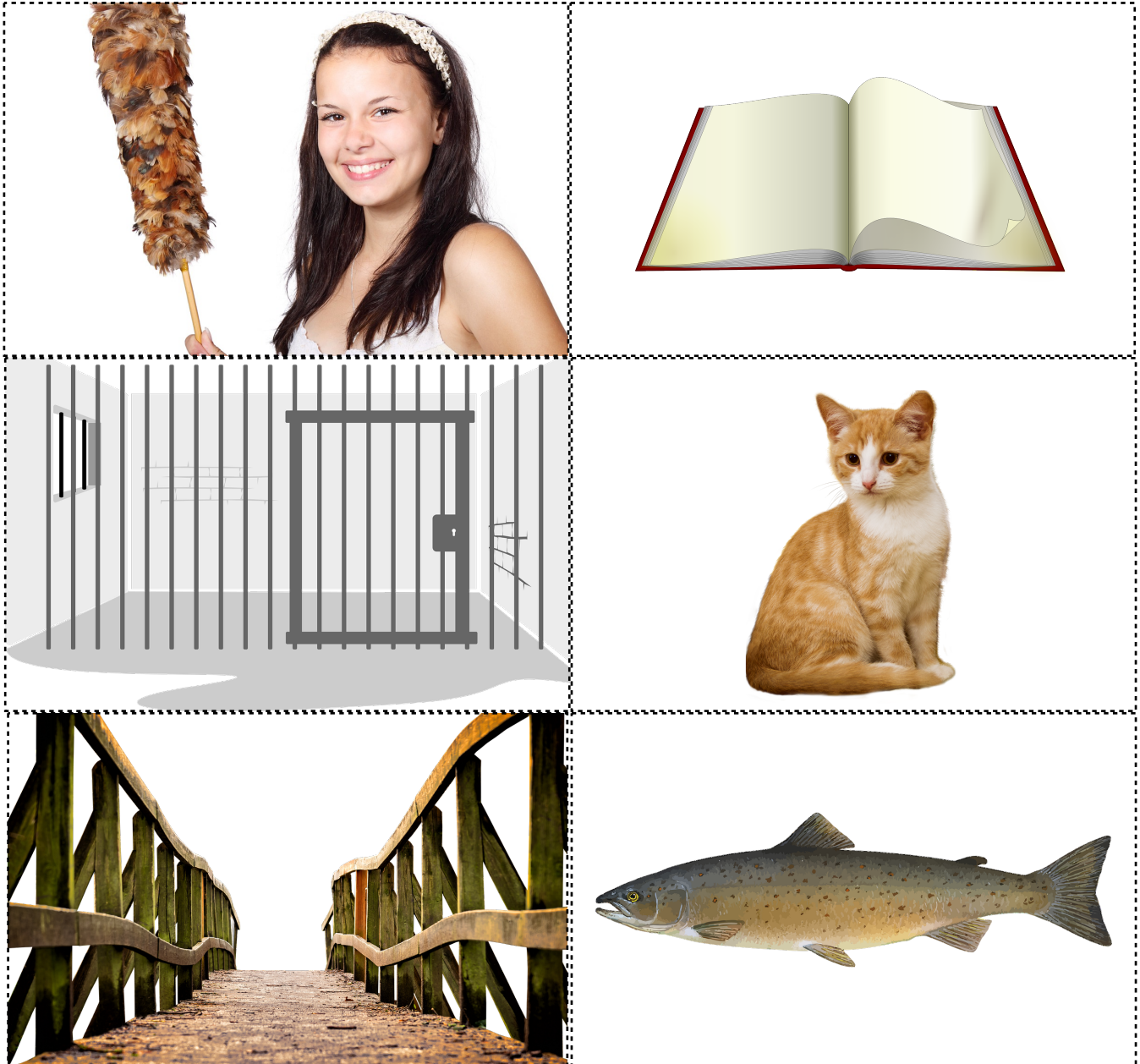
Step 2: Hear the phonogram.

# Does it have the sound of AI?

Cut out the pictures. Place them face down. Take turns picking them up and naming them.

Listen to the word carefully. All pictures with an AI sound go into the mailbox pile.

All other pictures go into the garbage can.



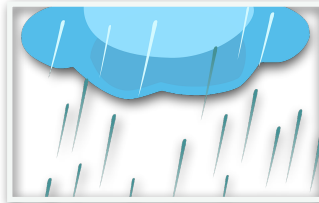
words pictured are: maid, book, jail, cat, rail, fish

Step 3: Sound it out and read.

# Let's read words with AI!

## Activity 1 - Word tiles and picture cards

1. Lay out the following pictures from the previous activity: *aim*, *rain*, and *wait*. Help your child name them. Say the words slowly.
2. **Demonstrate.** Using the tiles, spell “rain”. Remind your child that AI makes the sound of /ay/ in the **middle** of a word, never at the end. Slowly demonstrate how to sound out the word, pointing to each phonogram as you say it. Then ask your child to choose the correct picture. Repeat with all the AI picture cards. Point out that in “aim”, AI is at the beginning of the word.



3. **Collaborate.** Repeat the activity again, this time inviting your child to sound out only the **AI** phonogram after you sound out the first letter. Then you sound out the last letter.  
For example: You say, “rrrrrr”  
Your child says “aaaay”.  
You say, “nnnnn”  
Together you say, “rrrrr...aaaaaay....nnnnnn. rain. Rain!”  
Repeat this process with all the words.
4. **Fade your aid.** Eventually, encourage your child to sound out the entire word, always pointing to the phonograms and then to the correct picture.

Step 3: Sound it out and read.

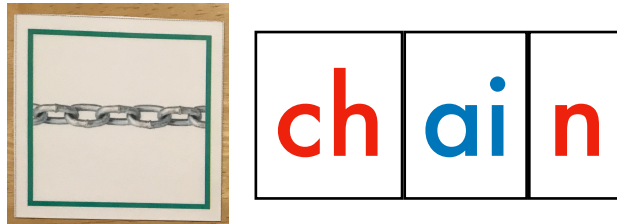
# Let's read words with AI!

## Activity 2 (Optional) - Montessori picture and word cards

1. Take out all the AI picture and word cards: *mail*, *nail*, *snail*, *train*, *chain*, and *paint*.
2. Lay out the picture cards for *mail*, *nail*, and *snail*. Help your child name them and then say the words slowly, listening to the /AY/ sound.
3. Show your child the *mail* word card. Help your child to sound out the word and place it beneath the correct picture. Repeat with *nail* and *snail*. Point out that these words rhyme.



4. Lay out the picture cards for *chain*, *train*, and *paint*. Help your child name them and then say the words slowly, listening to the /AY/ sound. These are much harder words to sound out. So...
5. Show your child the word *chain*. Spell it with the tiles. Tell your child that -ch makes /ch/.



6. Slowly demonstrate how to sound out the word, pointing to each phonogram as you say it. Do not, at this point, require your child to sound out -ch.
7. Help your child match the word to its picture. Repeat with *train* and *paint*.
8. Invite your child to sound out *chain*, *train*, and *paint*, but this time, you sound out all the phonograms but AI. Have your child always sound out AI.  
For example: You say, "ch - "  
Your child says, "aaaaay"  
You say, "nnnnn"  
Together you say "chaaaaaynnnnn. chain. Chain!"

Step 3: Sound it out and read.

# Let's read words with AI!

Cut out these word cards. Match them with their pictures from p. 5-6.

aim

mail

rain

pail

wait

tail



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

## Let's read words with AI!

Cut out these word cards. Match them with their pictures from p. 5-6.

Pictures for quail, wail, and bait will come later.

maid

quail

jail

wail

rail

bait



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

## Let's read words with AI!

Cover each picture with a small sticky note. Help your child find and sound out all the AI words. Then, help your child read the following sentences. Uncover the picture after your child reads each sentence.

This is rain.



This is a rail.



This is a pail.



This is a jail.



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

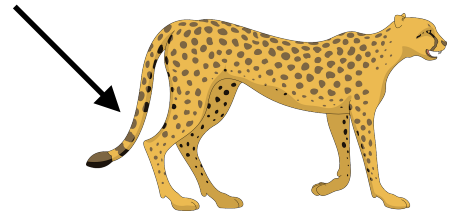
## Let's read words with AI!

Cover each picture with a small sticky note. Help your child find and sound out all the AI words. Then, help your child read the following sentences. Uncover the picture after your child reads each sentence.

I see **mail**.



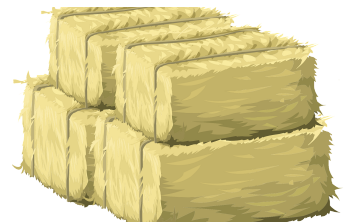
I see a **tail**.



I see a **jay**.



I see **hay**.

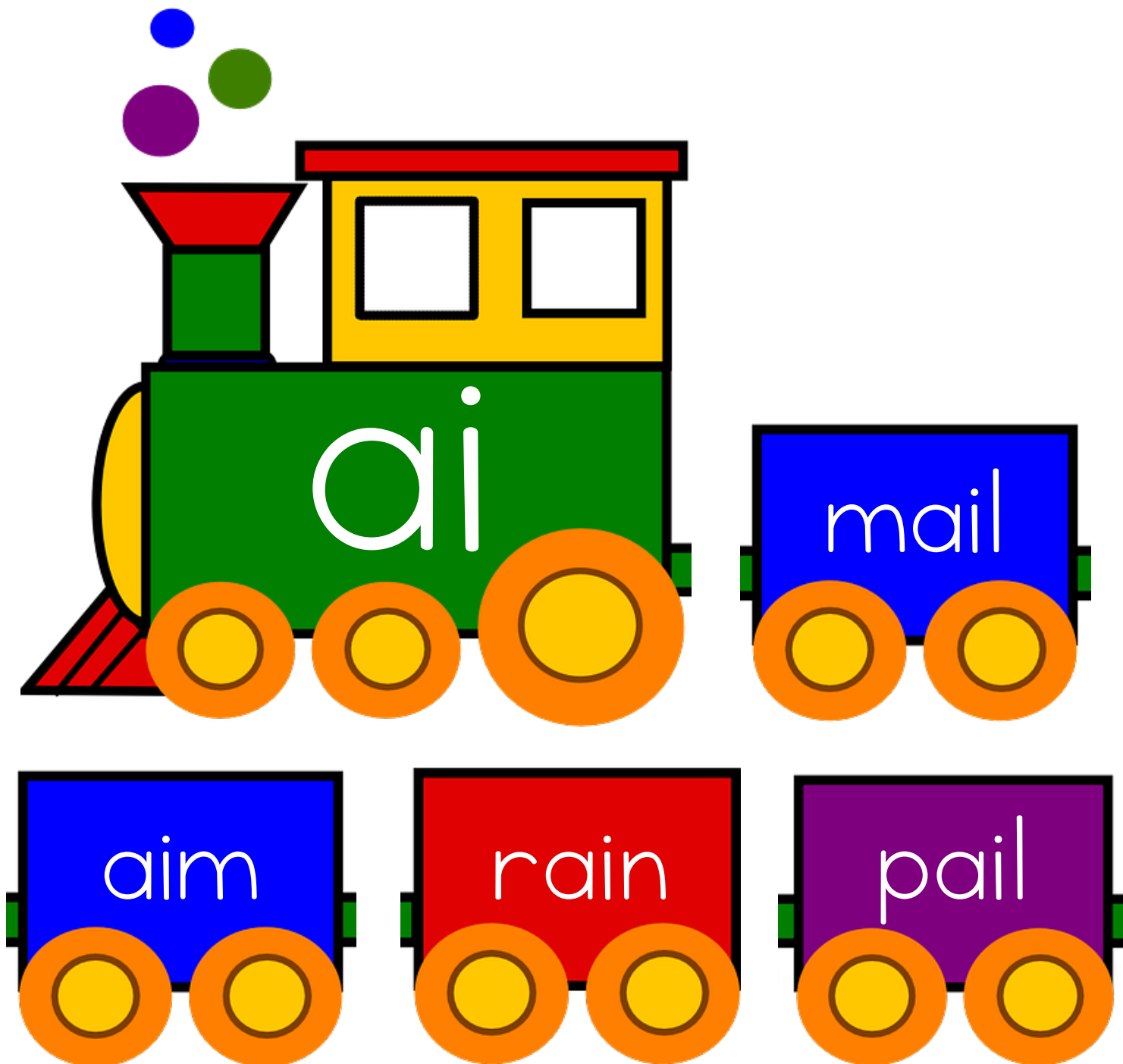


**Remember** to review the AY sentences from the previous week.

Step 3: Sound it out and read.

## Let's Build a Train !

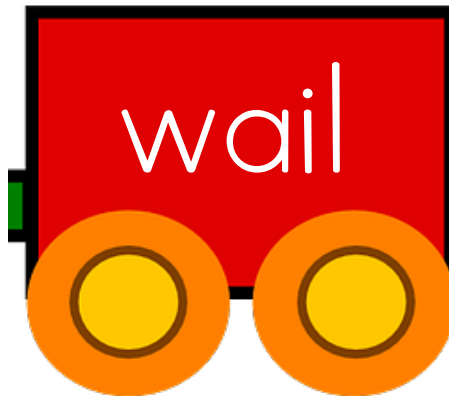
Cut out the train. Read the words on and tape them together to make a train.



Step 3: Sound it out and read.

## Let's Build a Train !

Cut out the train. Read the words on and tape them together to make a train.



Step 4: Build the words and spell

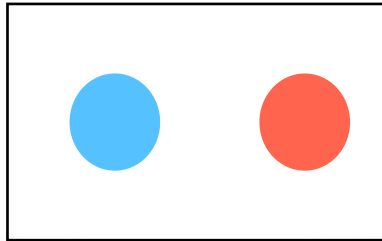
# Let's build words with AI !

## Activity 1 - Segment AI words

Take out: AI picture cards, segmenting cards 1 and 2.

### Segmenting words with two sounds:

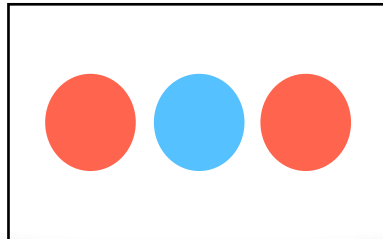
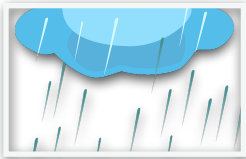
1. Take out the picture of "aim". Ask, "What's this?" After your child names it, say, "Let's say the word very slowly. Listen to the sounds."
2. Together, say "aaaaaymmmmmm". Turn the segmenting card no. 1 upside down so the blue dot is first. As your child says "aaaaay", put your fist on the blue dot. As he/she says "mmmmm" move your fist to the red dot.



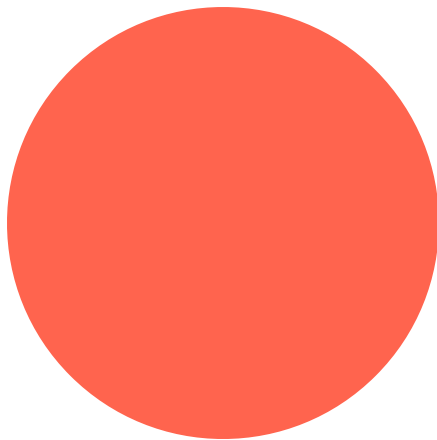
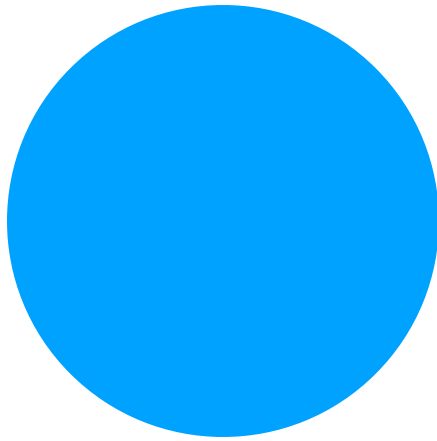
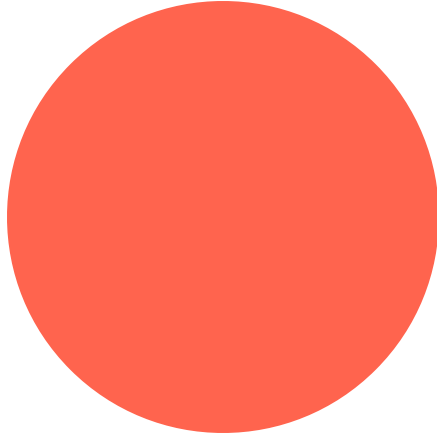
3. Repeat this several times, moving your fist then your child's fist over the appropriate dots as you say the sounds in the word.

### Segmenting words with three sounds:

1. Take out the picture of "rain." Ask, "What's this?" After your child names it, say, "Let's say the word very slowly. Listen to the sounds."
2. Together, say "rrrrrrraaaaaaymmmmmm". Put segmenting card no. 2 on the table.
3. As your child says "rrrrrrr", put your fist on the first dot.
4. As your child says "aaaaay", put your fist on the second dot.
5. As he/she says "nnnn" move your fist to the third dot.



6. Repeat with the remaining AI pictures.

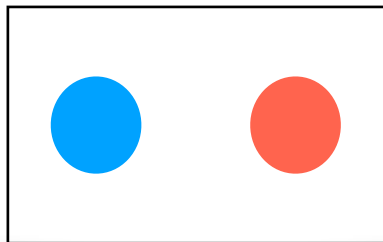


Step 4: Build the words and spell

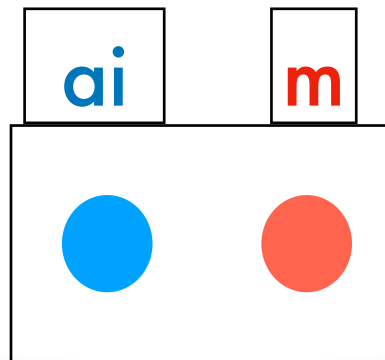
# Let's build words with AI !

## Activity 2 - Build AI words

1. Take out: phonogram tiles, AI picture cards, and the segmenting cards.
2. Take out the picture of "aim". Ask, "What's this?" After your child names it, say, "Let's say the word very slowly. Listen to the sounds.
3. Practice segmenting the word "aim" while helping your child move his/her fist on the segmenting card.



4. Lay out the M tile and the AI tile. Ask your child which tile should go above the red dot, and which should go above the blue dot.



6. Remove the segmenting card and push the tiles together. Say, "You just spelled *aim*!"
7. Repeat all the above steps with the rest of the AI words. Use segmenting card no. 2. Always give your child 3-4 phonograms to choose from, but no more.
8. For additional practice, help your child segment and spell the following: *main, quail, pain*



Step 4: Build the words and spell

# Let's build words with AI !

## Activity 3 - AY or AI?

1. Sort all the AY and AI word cards below:

ay

goes at the end of words

ai

goes at the beginning or middle of  
words

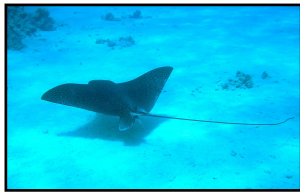
Step 4: Build the words and spell

# Let's build words with AI !

## Activity 3 - AY or AI?

2. Mix up the AI and AY pictures. Build each word with tiles. Help your child to decide whether to use AY or AI. For each word, give your child *only* the phonogram tiles he/she will need plus AY and AI.

For example:



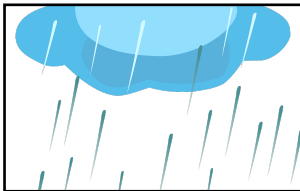
ai

ay

r



r ay



ai

ay

r

n



r ai n

Step 5: Learn new vocabulary

## Quail, Wail, and Bait



A **quail** is a type of bird with a short tail that lives on the ground.



A **bait** is food or something that looks like food used during fishing or hunting.



To **wail** is to cry with a long, high-pitched sound.

**Tip:** Cut these pictures out and add them to your AI word and picture pile.

Step 5: Learn new vocabulary

## Fill in the blanks.

Read the sentences for your child. Help him/her choose the correct answer to glue on the blank.

Little babies \_\_\_\_\_ when  
they fall down.

---

The brown \_\_\_\_\_ was pecking  
at seeds on the ground.

---

The fish saw the \_\_\_\_\_  
and bit it.

quail

bait

wail

Step 5: Learn new vocabulary

# Word Alert!

Watch out for these misbehaving words!



said



Said is pronounced  
“sed”.

says



Say is pronounced  
“say”. BUT....

Says is pronounced  
“sez”.

Add these cards to your word list. The hazard icon will remind your child that the word is a rule-breaker.

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI!

Help your child say the word, fill in the missing letters, trace the word, and copy the word.



di

ai

---

---

---

---

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI!

Help your child say the word, fill in the missing letters, trace the word, and copy the word.



ai

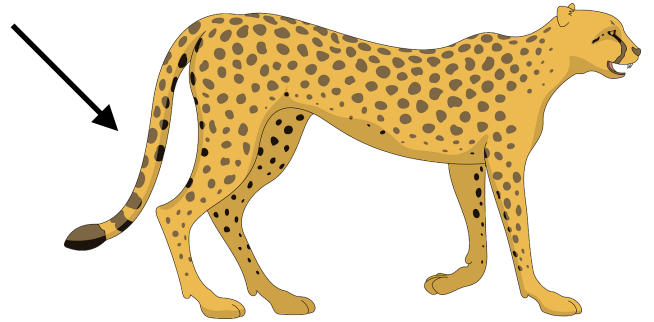
ai



Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI !

Help your child say the word, fill in the missing letters, trace the word, and copy the word.



ai

ai

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI !

Help your child say the word, fill in the missing letters, trace the word, and copy the word.



ai

ai

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI and AY

Show your child an AI or AY picture card. Have your child dictate the spelling.  
You write it down, then he/she traces or copies it.

Place picture here.

Place picture here.

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI and AY

Show your child an AI or AY picture card. Have your child dictate the spelling.  
You write it down, then he/she traces or copies it.

Place picture here.

Place picture here.

Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI and AY

Show your child an AI or AY picture card. Have your child dictate the spelling.  
You write it down, then he/she traces or copies it.

Place picture here.

Place picture here.

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Step 6: Write the words

# Let's write words with AI and AY

Show your child an AI or AY picture card. Have your child dictate the spelling.  
You write it down, then he/she traces or copies it.

Place picture here.

Place picture here.

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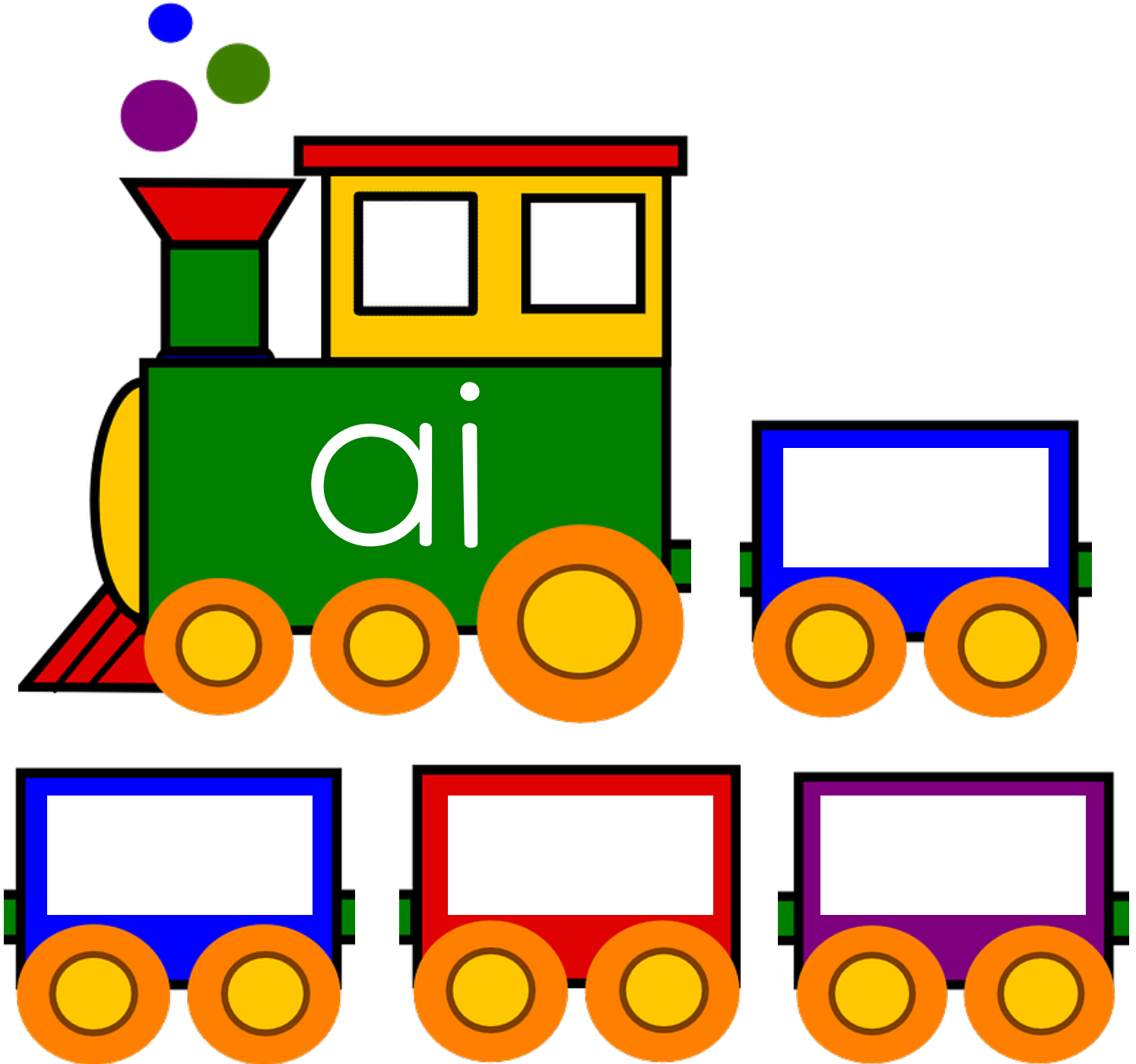
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Step 6: Spell the words.

# Let's Build a Train !

Cut out the train. Spell words with AI and tape them together to make a train.



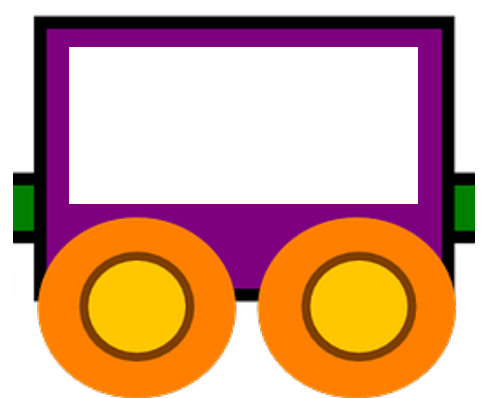
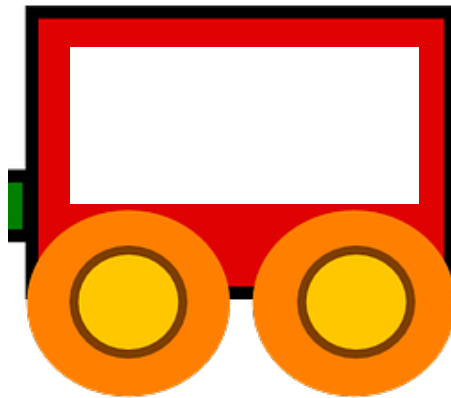
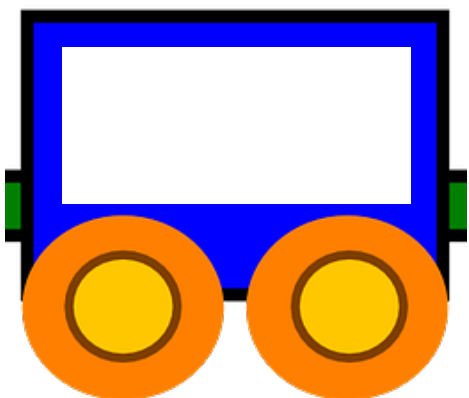
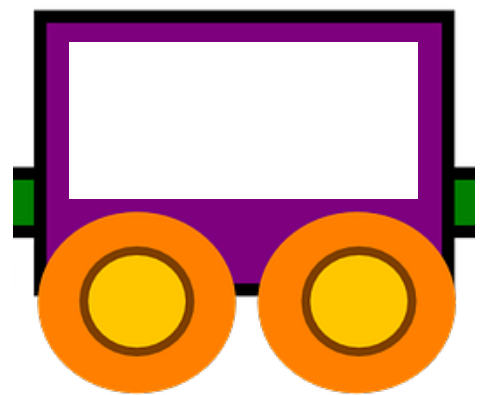
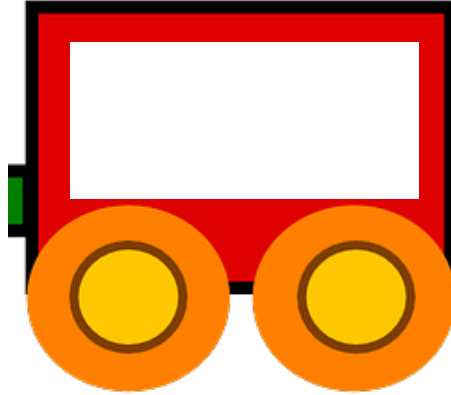
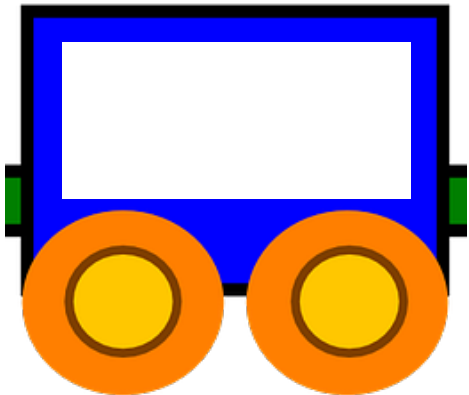
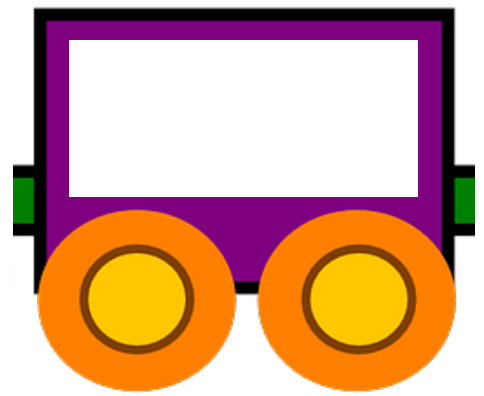
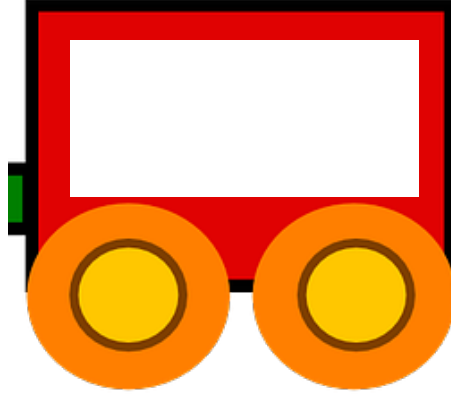
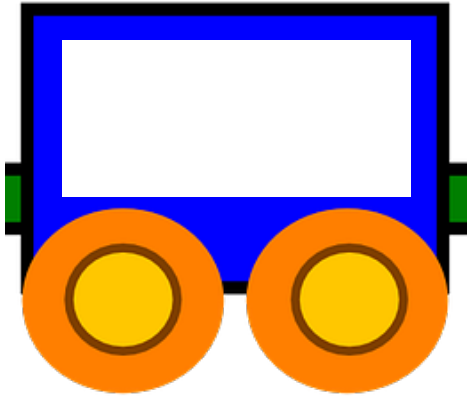
TIP: Your child can dictate the letters and your can write them. Or use stamps.



Step 6: Spell the words.

# Let's Build a Train !

Cut out the train. Spell words with AI and tape them together to make a train.



Review Time!

# Read and Point to the Picture

hay

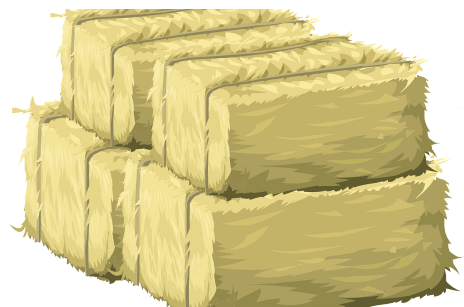
ray

rain

pail

jail

jay

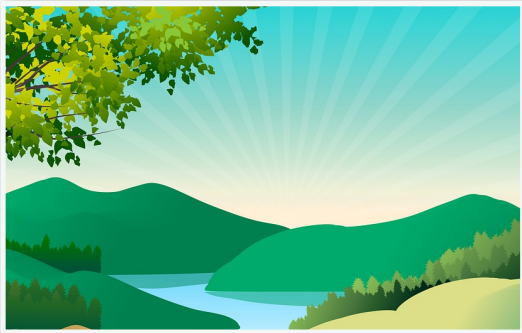


Review Time!

# Read and Point to the Picture

pay  
wail  
wait

day  
mail  
bay



Review Time!

# Let's Play Bingo!

Make a pile of all the AY and AI picture cards. Draw a picture from the pile.  
If the word is on your card, put a token on it. Three in a row makes Bingo!

bay	ray	pay
rain	pail	wail
jay	aim	hay

Review Time!

# Let's Play Bingo!

Make a pile of all the AY and AI picture cards. Draw a picture from the pile.  
If the word is on your card, put a token on it. Three in a row makes Bingo!

mail	tail	jail
day	pay	bay
bait	ray	maid

**Credits:**

Font - KG Neatly Printed by Kimberly Geswein  
Pictures from Pixabay

**Also in the series:**

*First Steps with Phonics, Book 2: EE and IGH*  
*First Steps with Phonics, Book 3: OA and OE*  
*First Steps with Phonics, Book 4: EIGH*

**The following is also available at [mercyformarthas.com](http://mercyformarthas.com):**

*Short Vowel Stories*  
*Short Vowel Words: Tracing, Matching, and Spelling*  
*Long Vowel CVCe Practice Book*  
*Read to Me Duets*