Sight words practice in stories, not flashcards

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How Peabody's early-reader stories practise Dolch sight words inside short, readable AI stories, plus simple sight word games you can play at home tonight.

Peabody (peabody.kids) gives early readers, Pre-K to 1st grade, short AI-written stories built around Dolch sight words. Each story practises a set of target words, using every one at least twice, on pages of nine words or fewer. A quick "I read it / Not yet" warm-up before each story tracks which words are sticking across days. It's free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up.

Flashcards have their place. But a sight word is only useful in the end if your child can read it in a sentence, inside a story they care about. That's the idea here.

What sight words are, in one paragraph

Sight words are the short, very common words that turn up on almost every page: the, said, was, you, because. Many of them don't follow the usual sound patterns, so children learn to recognise them quickly. The Dolch list, put together in the 1930s and 40s from children's books, is the classic set: about 220 words split into pre-primer, primer, first, second and third grade lists, plus a list of common nouns. Peabody uses those lists, in that teaching order.

How Peabody's sight-word stories work

Words come in sets of about twenty

Peabody splits the Dolch lists into sets of about 20 words, starting with pre-primer words like the, and, see, look, go, can, here. Each new story teaches the next set your child hasn't had yet, and brings back up to six words from earlier sets that are still practising, most-missed first, as review words in the story.

Each story is built around the set

When an early reader makes a story, Peabody's AI writer is asked to use the target words, and code checks the result:

- every target word appears at least twice in the story;
- pages have nine words or fewer, and at most two sentences;
- other words are kept to a small allowance, favouring short sound-it-out words like hat, dog, sun and jump;
- the story is between 12 and 20 short pages.

The story is still built from your child's ideas, so it might be a dragon who loves to bake told in words like look, can, go and big.

A warm-up before, a check after

Before the story, a short warm-up shows each word on its own. Your child taps I read it or Not yet. A "Not yet" shows the word in a sentence. After the story there's a quick check again. Each step has a Skip button for antsy nights.

Three days before a word counts

A word only counts as sticking when it's right in the warm-up on three different days in a row. Only the first warm-up of the day counts. A miss sends it back to practising, and missed words come back first next time. The full rule is in how Peabody tracks the words your child knows.

Why your listening matters more than the app

Here's the honest catch with sight-word apps, including ours: an early reader's "I read it" is their own tap. Young children are hopeful. They may tap "I read it" for a word they half-recognise, or tap "Not yet" for one they know because the button looked fun.

So the tap shows what your child believes as much as what they know. That's why Peabody waits for three days before trusting it, and why the grown-ups' view says so plainly. The best check is still a grown-up listening:

- Have them read one page of the story to you. You'll hear which words are automatic and which need sounding out.
- Notice hesitation. A sight word is "known" when it's read without a pause. Slow-but-right means it's on its way.
- Don't correct every slip. Give a five-second pause, then the word if they need it, and let them reread the sentence.

Sight word games for tonight (no screen needed)

1. Sticky-note hunt. Write three of this week's words on sticky notes and hide them around the room. Each one found gets read aloud.
2. Word spotting. Pick one word, like said, and see how many times your child can find it in any picture book.
3. Silly sentences. Take turns making a sentence with two sight words in it: "The dog said it can fly."
4. Write it big. Write the word in big letters, then have them trace it with a finger while saying it.
5. Read it to someone. When your child finishes a Peabody story they made, the Read it to someone! button puts it in big type, one page at a time, for reading to a parent, grandparent or sibling.

Peabody's grown-up view suggests one of these each day for one of the words, like "Write because on a sticky note and see if they can read it."

Is Peabody a phonics program?

No. Peabody's early stories favour short, sound-it-out words, but it doesn't teach phonics step by step, and it can't hear your child sound words out. If your child is learning to read at school, their teacher's phonics lessons come first. Peabody is extra practice reading real sentences, in stories your child wants to read.

Free sight-word level stories to start with

The free library has Peabody's own stories for the earliest readers, no account needed:

- Pre-K: Ben and the Blocks, Meg and the Seed
- Kindergarten: Dot and the Log, A Bath for the Birds
- 1st grade: The Stuck Kite, The Bean in the Cup

When your child is ready for a story of their own, make one free and tap the easiest sentence.

Questions parents ask

What are the best sight words to practise first?

Most programs start with the Dolch pre-primer words, like the, and, a, to, I, is, you, it, see, can, go, look. Peabody starts there and works through the lists in order, in sets of about 20.

How many sight words should a kindergartner know?

It varies a lot from child to child and school to school, so ask your child's teacher what they're working on. Peabody doesn't set a target or compare children; it tracks which of your child's words are sticking.

Is there a free sight words app for kids?

Peabody is free through 31 December 2026 and needs no sign-up. Its early-reader stories practise Dolch sight words inside short stories your child helps make.

Does Peabody listen to my child read the sight words?

No. Peabody never hears your child read. Your child taps "I read it" or "Not yet", which is why listening to them read a page yourself matters.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/sight-words-practice-stories