featuring:
VCV and VCe spelling rules
ew as in grew, few
eu as in feud, neutral
eigh as in eight
ei as in vein, ceiling
ue as in rescue, true
ie as in chief

Play Ball!

By Frances Bloom and Deborah Coates
Illustrated by Mary Geiger
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EDUCATORS PUBLISHING SERVICE
Cambridge and Toronto
Book 37 introduces
VCV and VCe spelling rules
ew as in grew, few
eu as in feud, neutral
eigh as in eight
ei as in vein, ceiling
tue as in rescue, true
tie as in chief

Learn ▼
  enough
  money
  touch
  sign
  women
  tissue
  brother
  word

Read ▼
Mrs. Potash checked to see if they had enough money.
My brother saw the words on the sign.
Eudora put a piece of tissue in the box.
The women wanted to touch a few pieces of pewter.
Mrs. Newton knew the true value of the coins.

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The Alphabet Series was compiled by Frances Bloom, author of Recipe for Reading.
To learn more about The Alphabet Series, visit: epsbooks.com.
I clutched the bat and kept looking at the pitcher. “Hey batter, batter, batter . . . swing batter, batter, batter . . . swing batter, batter, batter . . . swing Freddie,” they yelled. I swung.

The ball flew past the infielders. “Touch them all!” hollered my team. “Catch it,” shrieked the kids in the outfield. But the ball flew over the fence, into the yard of Mr. Grump and his wife Mrs. Grump.
“Game’s over,” groaned Ellie, as she threw down her mitt and looked sadly over the fence. “That must be the twentieth ball we hit over the fence this week.”

I didn’t argue with her. Ellie is our best hitter, but it was really only the sixth ball we had lost. It was also the sixth time we had had to face Mr. Grump telling us to stop hitting balls into his yard and to play somewhere else.

It’s not really true that our neighbors are Mr. and Mrs. Grump. We call them that because they always seem to be in a bad mood! Their real names are Mr. and Mrs. Newton. The problem is that we spend our extra time playing baseball in my yard, and they spend their extra time in their yard.
They’re always digging, planting, and potting. Their whole yard is just one big garden that no kids can go into, not even to get a ball.

Well, not exactly. In order to retrieve a ball, we have to ask Mr. or Mrs. Newton if they will go into the yard with us and find the ball. They hate being interrupted when they are in their garden, so they are never nice about helping us find our baseballs. While we look for the baseball, they always lecture us about finding another place to play.

I wish we didn’t have to play in my yard, but it’s the biggest backyard on Brewster Avenue. We’ve always played there. But we do have a plan. Well, it’s really Ellie’s plan.
It was a cool Saturday morning, with a clear blue sky. It was perfect for baseball. But we wouldn’t have time to play today.

Everyone on my street was out, setting up tables, painting signs, and putting candy in bags. Even my older sister was painting curlicues on little boxes.
Ellie’s plan was to make enough money to fix up an old field a few streets over from Brewster Avenue as a new place to play ball. All of our neighbors were helping. I think the whole neighborhood was sick of listening to us shriek, argue, and even feud over lost baseballs.

“Freddie,” yelled Mom, “I need a few more blocks to hold up the table. Be careful, the blocks weigh a lot.” I was careful as I stacked them.

“Freddie,” shouted Keith, as he flew by on his bike, “we need to help Mr. Dieter find his sleigh and reindeer statues. He said that he’s willing to sell them.”

“Be right there,” I said. But first I wanted to find Ellie. Keith had told me that Ellie’s mom had made a batch of
fudge this morning. Maybe there would be a piece for me. I grew hungry just thinking about it.

“You can thank me for this,” said Ellie, as she ran up beside me with a piece of fudge in her hand. “I’d never argue with that,” I said, grabbing the fudge and taking a bite.

Ellie had been telling us for a long time that she had found a better place for us to play ball. You see, Ellie and her older sister have a paper route. Every day, they pass an overgrown field a few blocks over. No one knew who owned the field. Ellie had been nagging her mother to call the City Council to ask if we could use it as a ball field.
At last her mom called. The City Councilor said that if we could get enough money to fix up the field, we could use it. Ellie had asked her mom if we could have a neighborhood sale to make money. Ellie always has good plans, and everyone was helping us out.

“Do you think we’ll make enough money with this sale?” I asked Ellie, as we licked the fudge off our fingers.

“I hope so. Everybody has a lot of things to sell. We’ll have to wait until the sale is over to find out,” called Ellie, as she ran off to help sell her stuff.

I walked down the street and couldn’t believe what I saw at the Newton’s house!
Mr. Grump was setting up a table in his driveway. I couldn’t believe he was going to help us. I could believe that I did not want to talk to him. I ran to my house so fast that I didn’t see Mrs. Grump walking by with two kids.

“Hello, Freddie!” she yelled out. “Do you need to go get another baseball out of our garden?”
“Hello, Mrs. Gr... ewton, I mean Newton,” I muttered, trying to look at her when I spoke. I really wanted to say, “Why are you always so mean about our baseballs?” But it didn’t seem like the right time. I didn’t want any bad feelings since it looked like she might be trying to help us.

“Freddie, I would like you to meet my niece Eudora and my nephew Billy,” said Mrs. Newton. “Their house is over on Euclid Street, and they go to the middle school with your brother.” My brother had talked about Billy, but he never told me about a girl. He believes I’d make fun of him... and he’s right.

“Eudora,” said Mrs. Newton, “stop chewing on the pencil and get a pad for
receipts for the sale. Billy, you can be the cashier. It’s almost time to begin.”

Mrs. Newton and Billy started to put boxes on the table. There were many sizes and weights. They were all tied with pieces of string. Billy put a sign on the table that said:

GRAB BOX!
FUN STUFF INSIDE!
$1.00 EACH

That seemed weird to me. “What are they, I mean uh, what’s in them? Give me a clue,” I begged.

“That’s for me to know and you to find out,” said Eudora, as she gave me a funny look. “So take a chance and get one.”

For a brief moment, I could just think about the bake sale and the single dollar
in my pocket. Then I saw the fierce look in Eudora’s eyes. I had to take her dare. “Can I pick them up to see how much they weigh?” I asked.

“You can touch them, shake them, and weigh them. You can do anything but pierce the box with that pencil you are holding,” she said.

“OK, I’ll take that blue one in the back.” Eudora handed me the box and gave me a receipt. I took it and put it in my backpack. I couldn’t believe it. I had just spent my one dollar on a box, and I didn’t even know what was in it.

Sometimes girls can make me do weird things. I had to leave before I did something else that was stupid. So with a sigh of relief, I ran down the street.
Cars were starting to pull onto the street. I had to review my job list one more time. I’d have to wait to see what was in my box.
I checked my backpack for extra signs, tape, and markers. I ran to the end of the street to make sure the main sign was up.

Brewster Avenue
Neighborhood Sale
10AM - 6PM
We’d been painting signs all week, and they looked good. I stuck one more up under the yield sign on the corner.

I looked down the street. The tables were filled. I could not believe how many toys there were. There were statues of horses, a toy shield, and even glow-in-the-dark stars to hang from the ceiling. All of the kids were willing to sell some of their old toys.

Mrs. Jewell had set up a food table. She had a big sign that said:

Hot dogs, chips, drinks: $1.00
Fudge, candy, dog treats: 50 cents

Mr. Jewell was grilling hot dogs. Hot dogs! I got hungry just looking at them. I quickly reached into my pocket for my
dollar, but it was gone. Rats! I forgot that I had spent my dollar on that box!

I went back to my house to help my dad. Cars, vans, and trucks were still turning onto our street. Kids were getting out and running to see what we had.

“How much is this skateboard?” asked a boy, as he sat on it and rode it down the driveway. “It’s five dollars,” said my buddy Tom.

“I have three dollars. Will that be enough?” asked the boy.

“I’d like these skates!” said his brother, as he laced them up.

Tom just stood there. He did not look happy, as he saw the boys trying out his old toys. “I’m not sure I really want to sell those,” he said to me in a soft voice.
“Oh, come on Tom,” I whispered, “you outgrew those things last year. We really want our baseball field.”

“You’re right,” he said. “It’s just hard to sell my stuff. But I want that field, too.”

Tom walked over to the two brothers and said, “Can I show you how to use that skateboard? Three dollars would be fine, and the skates are three dollars, too.”

I did not know how I would feel when kids wanted to pay for my old stuff. I would soon find out.

When I reached our house, Mom was behind a table. A few women were looking at her pewter vases. Mom collected things made of pewter, and she was willing to sell some of them.
“What is this vase made of?” asked one of the women, as she rubbed her hand on the soft gray metal.

“It is called pewter,” said Mom. “My son, Freddie is the pewter expert. He did a report on it this week.”

I hate to explain things, but Mom had turned away and was waiting on someone. I had to help her. “Pewter has been used for a long time,” I began. “It is made by mixing some metals together. Pewter is made mostly of tin. But tin is so soft that they have to add copper and other metals to make it harder and stronger.”

The women kept listening but looked like they would rather shop. So I had to be brief. “They pour it into molds, or
they shape it by spinning it. They can also make it into sheets,” I said.

I was finished telling, and they were finished listening. So I started to sell my own stuff. It was not hard at all.
“Duck, duck, duck, duck,” chanted a little girl, as she tapped some kids sitting in a circle. Then she yelled “GOOSE!” as she bopped a red-haired boy.

“Run!” screamed the kids as the “goose” ran after her. “Play with us,” they called to me.
I must admit that I did like to play that game when I was little, but you would never catch me running in a circle now, unless it was to run to home plate. “Not now,” I said. “I have a lot to do.” It was time to see if we had made enough money for our baseball field.

It had been a long day. All of the neighbors were gathering up the few things that had not sold. Some were sweeping their sidewalks, and others were clearing off their tables.

I grabbed my backpack and went down the street to Ellie’s house. Her mom, Mrs. Potash, was in charge of counting all of the money. Her twin brothers were outside. “It’s your turn to take out the
dog,” John said fiercely to his brother. “Is not,” said Jake.

“Don’t argue,” said Mrs. Potash to the two boys. “I’m trying to check these receipts so I can add up our revenue.”

“You mean how much money we made?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Potash. “That’s what revenue is.”

“Just checking,” I said. It was fun to learn new words to use with my older brother and sister. Sometimes they don’t know what the words mean, and they have to ask me. I say, “You don’t know that word? I can’t believe it. You’ll have to look it up.” Boy, that makes me feel smart. Believe me, it’s hard to feel smart when you have an older brother and sister.
Mrs. Potash had a big stack of receipts in her hand, and I knew it would be a long wait. I reached into my pack for a piece of gum. My hand brushed the box. I still hadn’t opened it.

“Ellie,” I said in a soft voice. “Look what Mr. Grump’s niece sold me.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” I said. “All of the boxes were one dollar. She made me get one.”

“It’s a mystery box,” said Ellie. “Go on, open it. No wait! First tell me what you think you’ll find inside.”

I looked at the box and then at Ellie. “Well,” I said, “I think it’s an old baseball that we hit over the fence.”

“Come on,” she groaned. “Just open it.”
I quickly tore the string off of the box. “Tissue,” I said. “It’s just full of pink and blue tissue.” But then I felt something hard in the pile of paper. “It feels like a yo-yo,” I said, as I tore through the many layers of tissue. “It looks like a yo-yo. It is a yo-yo. Look at the patterns on it.”

“Wow,” said Ellie, as she stared at the yo-yo. “I don’t believe I have ever seen one quite like that. Anyway, since you got the yo-yo, can I have the pieces of tissue that are in the box? If I don’t take them, they’ll just be strewn all over your room.”

“OK,” I said, gathering up the tissue. “Wait, here’s more. I feel something else in this piece of tissue.” As I opened the blue tissue I saw a very small envelope. Dad
had envelopes like that on his desk. I carefully opened it.

“What’s in it?” asked Ellie. Into my hand fell three coins. I had never seen coins like these before.
Thanks to Mom, I know pewter when I see it. I had seen it made into teapots, trays, vases, or even statues, but I’d never seen it made into a coin.

“One of these coins is made of pewter,” I said to Ellie. “Maybe I should show them to my Dad. He collects coins.”
Just then Mrs. Potash yelled, “Would everyone listen to me.” She must have either counted the money really fast or gotten some help. Either way, she was finished, and most of the neighbors were gathered to hear a review of the day’s sale.

I looked for Dad, but the crowd was too big. “I see him over there,” said Ellie, pointing to some men. I dashed over to him.

“I need to show you something, Dad,” I said.

“Not now,” he said, “I’m trying to hear what Mrs. Potash is saying.”

“But Dad,” I begged, “look at these.”
Dad looked at me. “Not now,” he said firmly. I knew by his tone that I would have to wait.
“Listen, everyone,” said Mrs. Potash. “I’ve added up all of the receipts. We did well, but we don’t have enough money to fix up the park right now.”

We all looked at each other. For a brief moment, no one said anything. All I could think of was that we would be playing baseball in our yard forever.

“We’ll continue to try to raise money,” said Dad.

“We will! We will!” everyone shouted.

“I have some leftover hot dogs from the sale!” said Mrs. Jewell. “Please come over and finish them.”

Before she finished the word “finish,” everyone left except Dad and me. “I am sorry you will have to wait for the new field, Freddie,” said Dad. “What did you
want to show me?” I pulled the coins out of my pocket.

“Look at these coins, Dad,” I said. “I know that one of them is pewter. Have you ever seen anything like them before? Do you know where they are from?”

Dad held out his hand. “Slow down Freddie. Let me have a look at them.” Dad looked at the three coins for a long time. He turned them over and over. “Where did you get these, Freddie?”

“They were in one of the dollar boxes that Mr. Newton was selling. There was also a yo-yo in the box.”

Dad gave me a long look. “Freddie,” he said, “we need to go and talk to the Newtons. I don’t think they wanted to sell these coins.”
Dad and I looked all over, but we could not find the Newtons. Dad said, “I don’t even see their niece or nephew. Let’s go to their house.”

I told Dad that the last thing I wanted to do was go to the Newton’s house because they always gave me grief when I wanted to retrieve a ball. Dad looked down at me.
“Freddie, it will be fine. We just want to ask what these coins were doing in your box.”

Dad rang the bell and Mr. Newton came to the door. “Hello, Mr. Newton,” I said. “I found these coins in one of the dollar boxes. I think you should see them.”

“You better show them to Mrs. Newton,” said Mr. Newton. “She’s the one who collects coins. Come inside.”

Mr. Newton led us into a sunny room. Mrs. Newton was sitting at a desk with little blue envelopes strewn all over.

“Mrs. Newton,” I said, “I found these coins in one of the dollar boxes. Did you mean to put them there?”

Mrs. Newton looked up. “Let me see those, please,” she said, as she held out her hand. I put the coins in it. She let out
a huge sigh of relief. “My lost coins!” she yelled. “You found them! I can’t believe you found them! Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you so much. I have been looking everywhere for these coins. Thank you.”

Dad and I just stood still as Mrs. Newton clapped her hands and cheered. We waited a bit, and then Dad asked, “Are any of these coins rare?”

“Well, just one is rare,” said Mrs. Newton. “It’s this one. It’s a Gold Copper Half Eagle. That one is a euro that we got on our trip to Europe. That other one is a pewter Ching coin from China. I had wanted to sell the Gold Copper Half Eagle last year, but I couldn’t find it. The
value of this coin is a lot more this year than it was last year.”

She looked at me with a big smile on her face and said, “I know what I’d like to do with it now. You really need another place to play ball. I think my flowers and I would be very happy if you played baseball in that field. I’ll sell this coin and let you have what you need to turn that field into a ballpark. I’ll go and talk to Mrs. Potash right now.”

Mrs. Newton flew out of the house. All of a sudden it hit me! We might really have enough to fix up that field! I flew after her shouting, “Thanks, Mrs. Newton! Thank you so much!”
It had been ten weeks since the sale. The whole back of the field was cleared, flat, and open. There were benches and swings for the little kids. Mrs. Newton had been digging and planting flowers at the edge of the baseball field. Today the old field would become our dream come true—a real baseball park.
“Would everyone settle down?” yelled Mrs. Potash. “We would like to have a brief meeting before we open our brand new park.”

Everyone had been hopping and jumping and yelling, but they all stopped to hear what she had to say. You could hear a baseball drop.

“I want to thank everyone for all of their hard work,” said Mrs. Potash. “This is a dream come true for all of us. Now Ellie would like to say a few words.”

Ellie climbed onto a bench so everyone could see her. Everyone gathered around the bench. “Neighbors,” she said, “the kids of Brewster Avenue would like to invite all of you to our first game. We
would like to ask someone who means a lot to us to pitch the first ball.”

All of us kids reached into our back pockets and pulled out new baseball caps. “Now!” yelled Ellie. In one fell swoop, every kid put a cap on. Every cap said Newton Park.

“Mrs. Newton,” said Ellie, as she handed her a cap, “would you please pitch the first ball at Newton Park?”

We all turned to Mrs. Newton. I never knew how someone could cry and smile at the same time. But we saw a tear run down her cheek, and a big smile was on her face.

“Play ball!” shouted Mr. Newton. With her cap in place, Mrs. Newton threw the ball over the plate.
“Hey batter, batter, batter . . . swing batter, batter, batter, swing batter, batter, batter, swing,” we yelled.

Ellie swung. “Touch them all!” we yelled. And she did.
Why did Freddie and his friends need to find a different place to play baseball?

What did Ellie suggest to raise money for a new baseball field?

What did Mrs. Newton do to help?

How could you and your friends raise money for something special in your neighborhood?
The Alphabet Series, Volume 3

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Book 37  Play Ball!  VCV and VCe spelling rules
  ew as in grew, few
  eu as in feud, neutral
  eigh as in eight
  ei as in vein, ceiling
  ue as in rescue, true
  ie as in chief

Book 38  The Book of Records  Three-syllable words
  Schwa /ə/
  tion as in action
  sion as in division, mansion

Book 39  The Cave Adventure  ow as in snow
  ea as in head
  oo as in good
  ou as in group
  ch as in school
  ch as in machine
  final s as in is
  Spelling with affixes
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