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Teaching the Alphabet

Empowering Preschool Teachers to Build Strong Alphabet Foundations

Carolyn Turner, Ed.D.
Ohio Literacy Lead

SESSION OBJECTIVES

- Define the role of alphabetics as a foundational component of later literacy achievement.
- Demonstrate explicit routines to provide intentional, developmentally responsive letter-sound instruction.
- Implement high-quality instructional materials that maximize student engagement and learning.
- Connect student assessment data and instruction to identify learning gaps and prescribe targeted interventions.

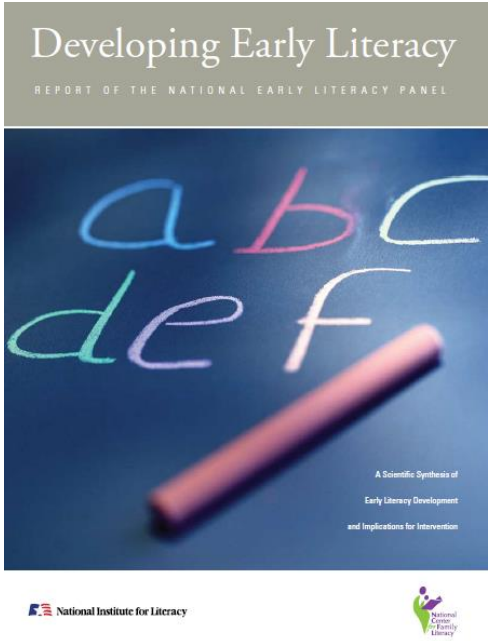
EARLY LITERACY RESEARCH

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY CONTINUUM

THE SCIENCE OF READING IN EMERGENT AND EARLY LITERACY

National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) identified:

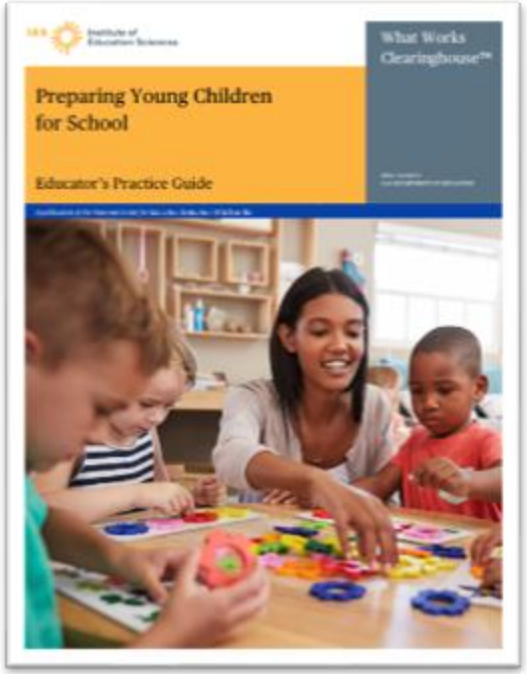
- ✓scientific studies about what children should be taught **before** school.
- ✓how this learning **predicts** how children will do later in school.
- ✓interventions, parenting activities, and instructional practices that **promote the development** of children's early literacy skills.



(National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2010)

PREPARING YOUNG CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL

- ✓Intentionally plan activities to build children's vocabulary and language
- ✓Build children's knowledge of letters and sounds
- ✓Use shared book reading to develop children's language, knowledge of print features, and knowledge of the world.

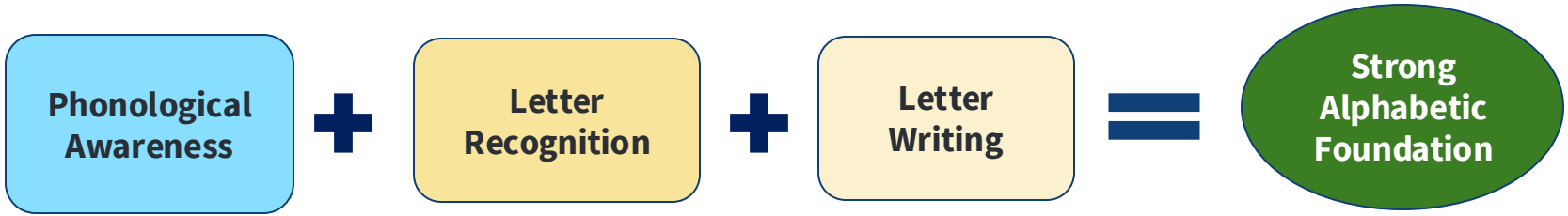


LETTERS AND SOUNDS

Children's early knowledge of letters and sounds will help them learn to read words and may contribute to the development of other literacy skills, such as spelling.

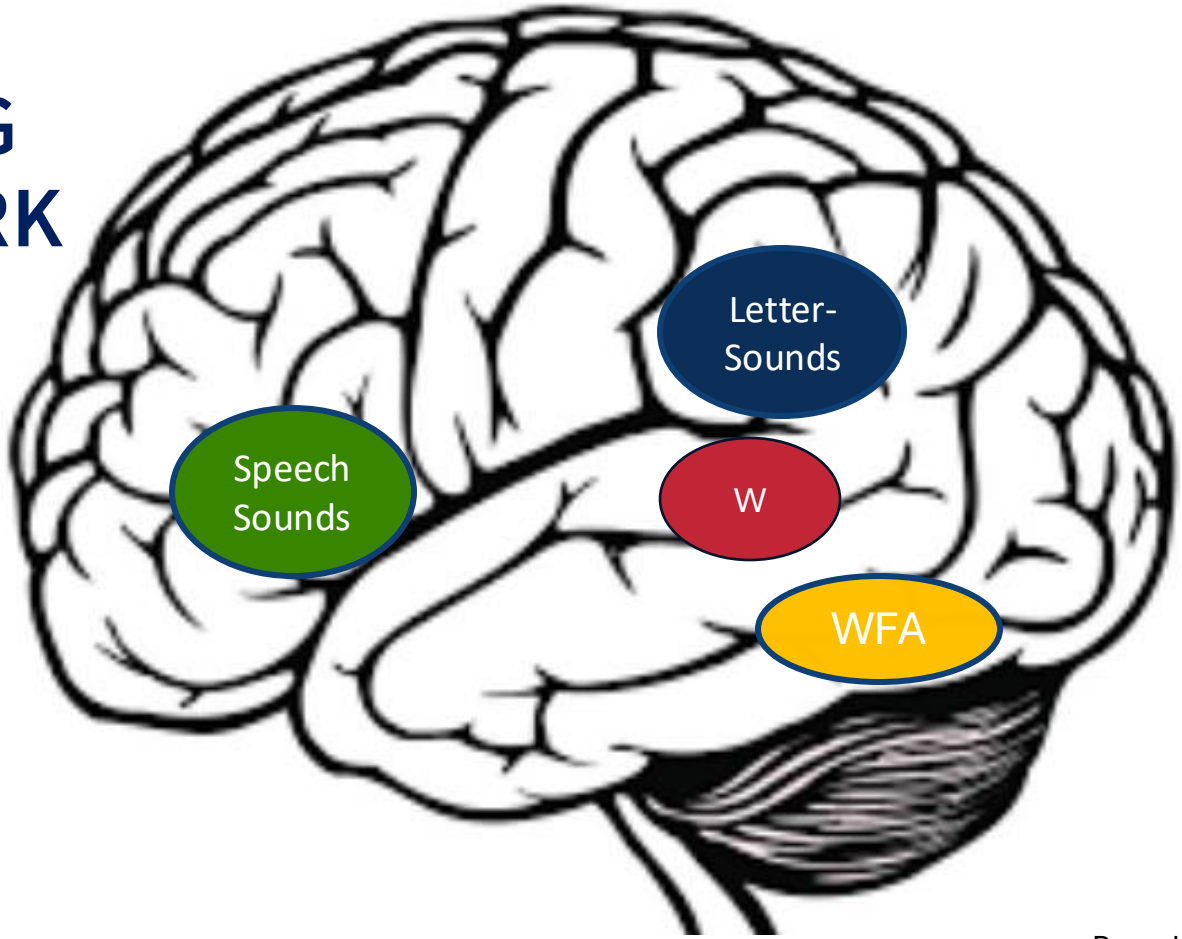
RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS: WHY ALPHABETICS?

- Strongest predictors of reading success
- Taught together improves decoding
- Teaching early writing strengthens results



GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

THE READING NETWORK



Based on Kearns et al.(2019)

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION IN ALPHABETICS

Alphabetics Instruction

- Clear, concise language
- Scripted routines
- Frequent responses & feedback
- Cumulative practice

WHY SYSTEMATIC AND EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION

- Land rarely traveled
- Lots of variety
- Not much repetition

- When we walk the same way repeatedly, we create a path.
- Lots of engaging practice within a predictable routine

ALPHABETICS

- Small Group Routines
- 15 minutes
- Homogeneous groups of students
- 3-5 times per week

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE OF LETTERS AND SOUNDS

Initially focus on listening for sounds in words.

Intentionally introduce a new letter and its sound.

Use materials and activities that allow children to practice identifying letters and their corresponding sounds.

Include print throughout the classroom to provide additional opportunities to discuss letters and their sounds.

INITIALLY FOCUS ON LISTENING FOR SOUNDS IN WORDS

- Fill a bag with small objects related to a theme or concept
- Pull one item and ask students what it is by telling its syllables or segmented sounds
  - “In my sack, I have a /ti/ /ger/”
  - “In my sack, I have a /m/ /a/ /p/
- Use syllables for younger children and sounds for older children.

INTENTIONALLY INTRODUCE A NEW LETTER AND ITS SOUND

Name	Letter name is “dee”
Sound	Letter sound is /d/
Target Word	D dog /d/
Shape	Playdough, foam shapes, textured letters
Writing	Magic c, up high, back down, bump the ground

USE MATERIALS AND ACTIVITIES THAT ALLOW CHILDREN TO PRACTICE IDENTIFYING LETTERS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING SOUNDS.

INCLUDE PRINT THROUGHOUT THE CLASSROOM

Labels

Daily schedule

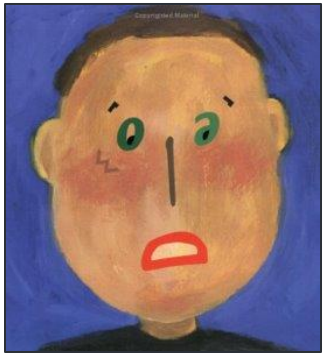
Children's Names

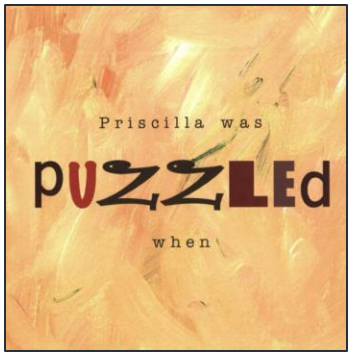
Print in Dramatic Play

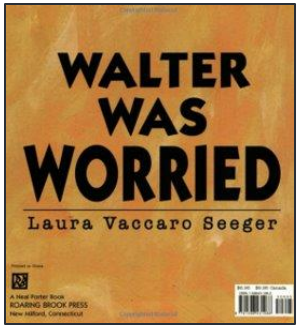
Books

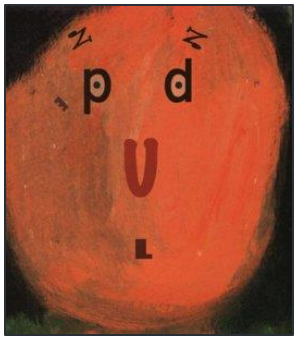
INCLUDE PRINT REFERENCING

- Book and print organization
- Words
- Letters
- Print carries meaning



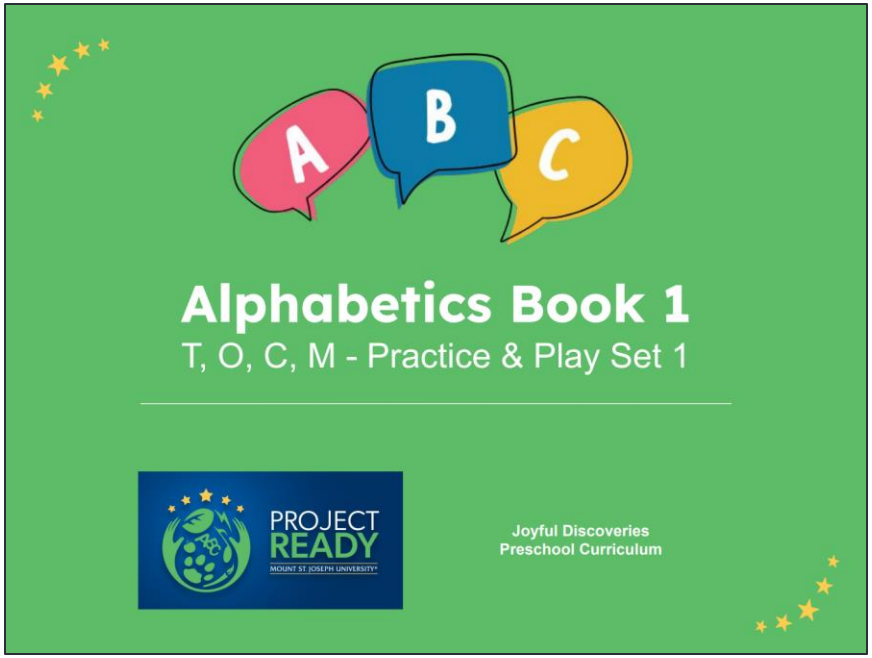






INTEGRATING HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

EXAMPLE OF EXPLICIT AND SYSTEMATIC INSTRUCTION IN ALPHABETICS



PRESCHOOL ALPHABETICS SKILLS

Less complex

More complex

Phonological Awareness Skills	Letter Skills
Compound Words – Blend & Segment	Tt, Oo, Cc, Mm
Blending Syllables (2-3)	Aa, Ss, Hh, Zz
Segmenting Syllables (2-3)	Ii, Dd, Nn, Ll
Blending Onset and Rime	Ee, Bb, Ww, Uu
Segmenting Onset & Rime	Xx, Ff, Vv, Rr
Isolating Initial Sounds	Jj, Kk, Pp, Qq
Blend & Segment 2-3 Phonemes	Gg, Yy

Every lesson should also work on isolating initial sounds (PA) and letter formation.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES IN AN ALPHABETICS LESSON

Phonological Awareness

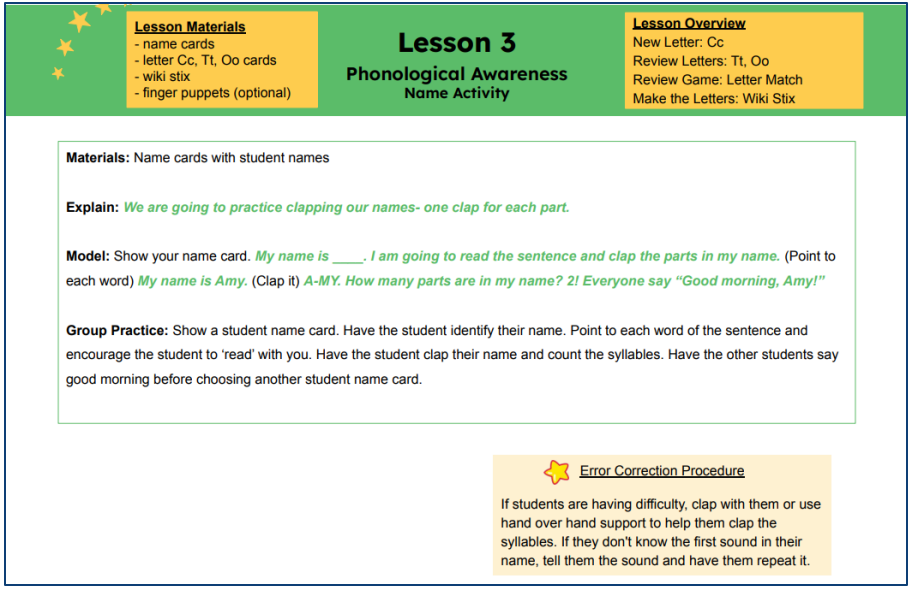
NEW Letter Introduction

Review of Known Letters

Make Letters

Lesson Wrap-Up

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS: NAME ACTIVITY



Lesson Materials
- name cards
- letter Cc, Tt, Oo cards
- wiki stix
- finger puppets (optional)

Lesson 3
Phonological Awareness
Name Activity

Lesson Overview
New Letter: Cc
Review Letters: Tt, Oo
Review Game: Letter Match
Make the Letters: Wiki Stix

Materials: Name cards with student names

Explain: *We are going to practice clapping our names- one clap for each part.*

Model: Show your name card. *My name is ____. I am going to read the sentence and clap the parts in my name.* (Point to each word) *My name is Amy.* (Clap it) *A-MY. How many parts are in my name? 2! Everyone say "Good morning, Amy!"*

Group Practice: Show a student name card. Have the student identify their name. Point to each word of the sentence and encourage the student to 'read' with you. Have the student clap their name and count the syllables. Have the other students say good morning before choosing another student name card.

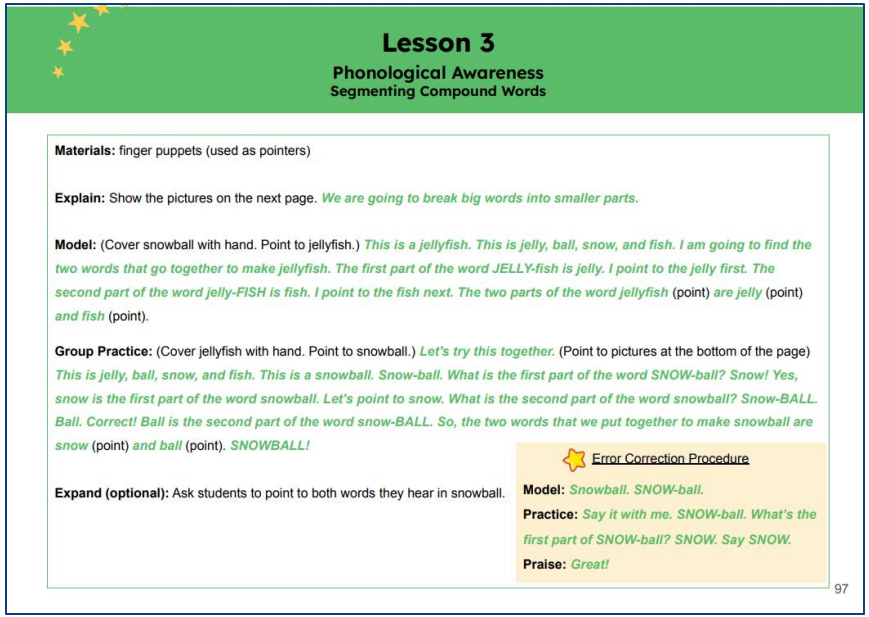
Error Correction Procedure

If students are having difficulty, clap with them or use hand over hand support to help them clap the syllables. If they don't know the first sound in their name, tell them the sound and have them repeat it.

Identifying one's own name

Clapping syllables

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS: SKILL ACTIVITY



Lesson 3

Phonological Awareness

Segmenting Compound Words

Materials: finger puppets (used as pointers)

Explain: Show the pictures on the next page. *We are going to break big words into smaller parts.*

Model: (Cover snowball with hand. Point to jellyfish.) *This is a jellyfish. This is jelly, ball, snow, and fish. I am going to find the two words that go together to make jellyfish. The first part of the word JELLY-fish is jelly. I point to the jelly first. The second part of the word jelly-FISH is fish. I point to the fish next. The two parts of the word jellyfish* (point) *are jelly* (point) *and fish* (point).

Group Practice: (Cover jellyfish with hand. Point to snowball.) *Let's try this together.* (Point to pictures at the bottom of the page) *This is jelly, ball, snow, and fish. This is a snowball. Snow-ball. What is the first part of the word SNOW-ball? Snow! Yes, snow is the first part of the word snowball. Let's point to snow. What is the second part of the word snowball? Snow-BALL. Ball. Correct! Ball is the second part of the word snow-BALL. So, the two words that we put together to make snowball are snow* (point) *and ball* (point). *SNOWBALL!*

Expand (optional): Ask students to point to both words they hear in snowball.

Error Correction Procedure

Model: *Snowball. SNOW-ball.*

Practice: *Say it with me. SNOW-ball. What's the first part of SNOW-ball? SNOW. Say SNOW.*

Praise: *Great!*

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- Phonological awareness skill
- No print
- Pictures to support language development

PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS TEACHER PRACTICE

- Review the Name and Phonological Awareness activities in your lesson packet.
- Find a partner at your table and decide who will be the teacher and who will be the student.
- The “teacher” should deliver the lesson to the “student.”
- Take turns as teacher and student.

NEW LETTER: INTRODUCTION

Lesson 3

New Letter Introduction

Explain: *We write the /c/ sound like this* (trace the letter with your finger). *The name of this letter is C.* (point to the cat) *Cat, /c/,* (point to the letter) *C.*

Model: Focus practice on having students say the letter name. *The name of this letter is C. What is the name of this letter? C!*

Group Practice: *Let's say it three times. C, C, C! Great!*

Read the Poem: *As I read this poem, raise your hand high in the air anytime you hear me say C.*

C curls its back like a cat on a rug.
It's as sweet as it sounds—like cocoa in a mug.
C enjoys candy, cookies and cakes
But it also eats carrots to avoid stomach aches.
C sounds like ice when it breaks in the Spring
A delicate ccc—then the water's flowing!

*Repeat the letter name several times with the students.

101

- Move from speech to print.
- Start with a target picture that clearly represents the letter's sound.
- Move from the familiar (picture/word) to the unfamiliar (sound).

NEW LETTER: EXPLORATION

Lesson 3

Letter Exploration

Model: Point to the pictures. *This is a cat, car, and comb. I hear the /c/ sound at the beginning of each word.*

Group Practice: *Let's say the names of each picture together as I point.* (point to each) *Cat, car, comb. Great job. They all start with the /c/ sound. We write the /c/ sound with the letter C.*

Explain: Point to the letter. *The name of this letter is C. This is the capital C and this is lowercase c. They look the same!*

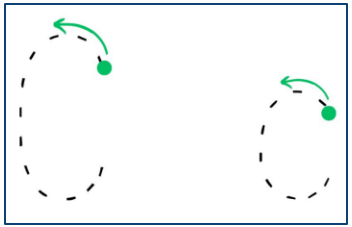
Group Practice: *Let's practice saying the letter C together 3 times. C, C, C! Great!*

Additional pictures to support language development.

Say the name of the pictures and focus on the first sound.

Explore the letter name associated with the sound.

NEW LETTER: FORMATION



Lesson 3

Letter Formation

Materials: letter Cc cards for each student

Model: *Now we are going to learn how to make the letter C. Watch me first.* (Trace with your finger while you say the directions out loud) *I use my finger and I start at the green dot. Pull back and go around. Pull back and go around* (model again). *This is letter C.*

Group Practice: (Pass out letter cards to each student. Provide lots of positive feedback and modeling as needed.)
Now it's your turn to make the letter C. Put your finger on the top of the C. Pull back and go around. Great job! Let's try again. Let's write the letter C. Put your finger at the top. Pull back and go around. Great work! We made the letter C. What letter did we make? C! Great job!

*collect letter cards

105

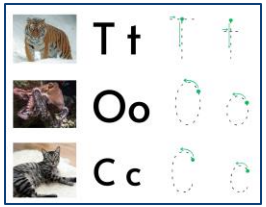
Children practice forming the letter, noticing similarities and differences between uppercase and lowercase forms.

Move to pencil and paper as soon as students have the fine motor skills (second year).

NEW LETTER TEACHER PRACTICE

- Review the New Letter activities in your lesson packet.
- With your partner, decide who will be the teacher and who will be the student.
- The “teacher” should deliver the lesson to the “student.”
- Take turns as teacher and student.

REVIEW LETTERS



Lesson 3

Review Letters

Explain:(point to the picture) *This a tiger. Tiger /t/. We write the /t/ sound with letter T.* (Trace the capital letter) *Pull down, pull across.* (Trace the lowercase) *Pull down, pull across.* (Point to the picture) *This is an octopus. Octopus /o/ O.* (Trace letter with finger) *Pull back and around.* (Point to the picture) *This is a cat. Cat /c/ C.* (Trace the letters). *Pull back and around.*

Review Game: Letter Match

Materials: letter cards

Explain: *I am going to give you a letter card. Flip the card over, say its name, and match it to the letter on the page.*

*Give each student multiple opportunities to practice. Provide immediate corrective feedback as needed.

Make the Letters

Materials: wikki stix for each student

Explain: *Now we are going to practice making the letters.* (Pass out a wiki stick to each student)

Model: Use the wiki stix to make the letter C. Say the name frequently as you write the letter.

Group Practice: *Let's make the letter C. Pull back and around. Great job! We made a C! What letter are we making? The letter C!* (Continue with Tt and O if time)

*collect all materials

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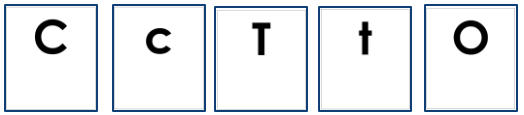
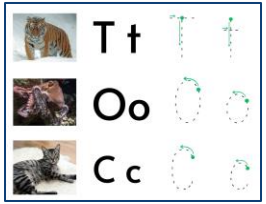
Review 2 previously learned letters.

Practice naming, producing the sound, and forming the letters.

REVIEW LETTERS GAME





Lesson 3

Review Letters

Explain:(point to the picture) *This a tiger. Tiger /t/. We write the /t/ sound with letter T.* (Trace the capital letter) *Pull down, pull across.* (Trace the lowercase) *Pull down, pull across.* (Point to the picture) *This is an octopus. Octopus /o/ O.* (Trace letter with finger) *Pull back and around.* (Point to the picture) *This is a cat. Cat /c/ C.* (Trace the letters). *Pull back and around.*

Review Game: Letter Match

Materials: letter cards

Explain: *I am going to give you a letter card. Flip the card over, say its name, and match it to the letter on the page.*

*Give each student multiple opportunities to practice. Provide immediate corrective feedback as needed.

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Explain: *Now we are going to practice making the letters.* (Pass out a wiki stick to each student)

Model: Use the wiki stix to make the letter C. Say the name frequently as you write the letter.

Group Practice: *Let's make the letter C. Pull back and around. Great job! We made a C! What letter are we making? The letter C!* (Continue with Tt and O if time)

*collect all materials

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Playful review game

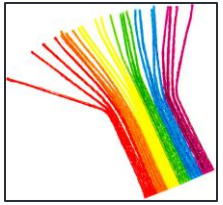
Quick and engaging

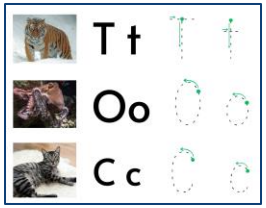
- letter hunt
- sorting pictures
- fast-response activity

REVIEW LETTERS AND GAME TEACHER PRACTICE

- Read the Review Letters and Review Game activities in your lesson packet.
- With your partner, decide who will be the teacher and who will be the student.
- The “teacher” should deliver the lesson to the “student.”
- Take turns as teacher and student.

MAKE LETTERS





Lesson 3

Review Letters

Explain:(point to the picture) *This a tiger. Tiger /t/. We write the /t/ sound with letter T.* (Trace the capital letter) *Pull down, pull across.* (Trace the lowercase) *Pull down, pull across.* (Point to the picture) *This is an octopus. Octopus /o/ O.* (Trace letter with finger) *Pull back and around.* (Point to the picture) *This is a cat. Cat /c/ C.* (Trace the letters). *Pull back and around.*

Review Game: Letter Match

Materials: letter cards

Explain: *I am going to give you a letter card. Flip the card over, say its name, and match it to the letter on the page.*

*Give each student multiple opportunities to practice. Provide immediate corrective feedback as needed.

Make the Letters

Materials: wikki stix for each student

Explain: *Now we are going to practice making the letters.* (Pass out a wiki stick to each student)

Model: Use the wiki stix to make the letter C. Say the name frequently as you write the letter.

Group Practice: *Let's make the letter C. Pull back and around. Great job! We made a C! What letter are we making? The letter C!* (Continue with Tt and O if time)

*collect all materials

107

Children make the letters in a hands-on way.

Use a variety of materials to keep practice playful and tactile.

- Wikki Stix
- Chalk
- Markers

MAKE LETTERS TEACHER PRACTICE

- Review the Make Letters activities in your lesson packet.
- With your partner, decide who will be the teacher and who will be the student.
- The “teacher” should deliver the lesson to the “student.”
- Take turns as teacher and student.

LESSON WRAP UP

Lesson 3

Wrap Up

Explain: *Today we learned the letter C. (point to the picture) Cat, /c/,* (point to the letter) *C. Say it with me, cat, /c/, c. What letter is this? C! Great job!*

*Repeat the letter name several times with the students.

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Students say the new letter name, recall the sound, and celebrate success.

Fast and positive

TEACHER PRACTICE

- Return to the beginning of Lesson 3 and review from start to finish.
- Jot down any questions you have about the lesson.
- If you have time and access to a device, look at a review lesson (page 111). These lessons are for students who need additional support.

ASSESSING ALPHABETICS

MASTERY MONITORING

Skills

- Letter Names
  - required
- Letter Sounds
  - supportive, not required
- Phonological Awareness Skills
  - supportive, not required

Tools

- Student Mastery Sheet
- Group Lesson Progress Form

Letter Name goal by the end of PreK?
18 Uppercase names, 15 lowercase names

LETTER NAMES MASTERY

- A student can say the name of the letter when prompted without modeling first. ("What letter is this?")
- A student can point to the letter when prompted without modeling first. ("Point to the letter A.")
- Capital and lowercase letters that do not look similar are considered separate letters (i.e., T, t, G, g). Mastery is reached when the capital form can be identified 3 times and the lowercase form 3 times.
- *Independent letter formation is not expected in preschool*

MONITORING IN ACTION

- Monitoring = Teaching
- Use data to group students
- Know when to reteach with a review lesson
- Identify who needs intervention

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Of the skills taught in an alphabetics lesson, which is required for mastery?

A. Letter sounds
B. Letter names
C. Isolating and identifying the initial sound in words

Letter sounds must be mastered before students enter kindergarten.

- TRUE
- FALSE

KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Alphabetics should be taught in SMALL groups of students with similar AK and PA skills.

- True
- False

Alphabetics instruction should take approximately 15 minutes.

- True
- False

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Alphabetics instruction is explicit, systematic, AND joyful
- PA + Alphabet Knowledge → strongest predictors
- Mastery of letter names (18 UC/15 LC)
- Build in reviews and interventions to ensure success

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING

Please let me know if you have any questions!

Carolyn.turner@hcesc.org

Padlet of Resources