How Do Young Children Learn the ABC’s?

Reading aloud, singing, doing fingerplays and engaging young children in conversation are all ways that parents and caregivers lay the foundation for young children to become successful readers and writers. Children learn best through play and hands-on, real-life experiences such as creating a sign shop, as opposed to using worksheets and flashcards.

These literacy skills can all be learned through play:
- knowing the meaning of words
- loving books
- being aware of letter shapes and sounds
- recognizing symbols and words
- telling stories

Adults facilitate children’s learning by showing how reading and writing is part of everyday life, surrounding children with print (books, signs, labels) and making available assorted writing materials (markers, brushes, pencils, paper).

So, read, sing and talk with children every day knowing that you are “growing a reader!”
Create a sign shop for dramatic play.

- Create a pretend shop for making signs.
- Use card stock, cardboard and other stiff papers of various sizes and colors for sign making. Provide markers, crayons, letter stamps, ink pads and stencils for making signs. Hand-held signs can be taped to craft sticks, chopsticks and straws. Provide string, hole punch, Fun Tac and tape for hanging signs. Arrange these signs around the shop.
- Think of a name for the sign store and make a special sign. Don’t forget about “open” and “closed” signs, a sign with store hours and price lists. The door can even be labeled with “push” or “pull” signs.

**Labels**

- Attach written labels to objects in the room such as clock, chairs, table, vacuum cleaner, broom, cabinet, bookshelf, paper drawer, crayon box. Everything in the room can be labeled creating a print-rich environment. This can be done with permanent marker on masking or painter’s tape, or by simply writing on cut-out paper taped next to the corresponding item.
- Children can help create labels for toy shelves so that everyone knows where to put toys away.
- Pictures can also accompany print labels to offer picture clues.
Lines, Curves, Circles and Dots!

Look at everyday items (see examples below) that have curves, lines, circles and dots. Identify and talk about the shapes found in these items.

**Curves**—hanger tops, cup handles, whisk wires, tied shoelaces, ribbons, rope, thread, cooked spaghetti, pretzels, hooks

**Dots**—marks on dice, peppercorns, buttons, thumbtacks, chocolate chips, sprinkles, stoplights, dots separating hours and minutes on digital clock

**Circles**—jar tops, lids, zeros, Cheerios, hoop earrings, wheels

**Lines**—Uncooked spaghetti, tape, book edges, pencils, rulers, cheese sticks, lines on road

Playing With Letters of the Alphabet

Provide different opportunities for children to be playful with letters of the alphabet. Ask children what they see when they look at letters. Do children see a letter that looks like a snake? Are there any letters in the shape of a triangle? Do children see any dots, lines, circles or curves?

- Set up a magnetic board and magnetized letters of the alphabet for play.
- Make a giant pot of “alphabet soup” in the bathtub, a small child’s pool or a large pan. Put foam letters in water. Provide slotted spoons, whisks, nets, bowls and cups for scooping, pouring and serving this pretend soup.
- Set up a writing table with alphabet letter stencils, pencils and paper.
- Use alphabet stampers with play dough.
- Let children type on a keyboard.
**Name Games**

Use a recipe box to keep index cards on which you have written children’s names. A picture of the child on the reverse side of his or her name card provides a good picture clue for identifying the name.

- Give children their name cards. Study names for lines, circles, curves and dots using the laminated cards in the kit.
- Use name cards to determine the order for taking turns.
- Make a second set of matching name cards. Spread the name cards out on the floor. Have children look for pairs.
- Put the name cards on mats to designate where each child should sit.
- Children can individually take cards out of the box to practice “reading” names.
- Compare names. Are some longer than others? Do some have the same letters?
- Make name cards to set at the table as place cards. Children can find their place at the table by identifying their own name.
- Make name tags for children to wear.

**Make an Environmental Print Book**

Invite children to collect examples of print. These can be glued or taped to a large piece of foam or poster board for reading as a group or individually.

Sources of environmental print include newspapers, magazines, food packages, coupons, maps, takeout menus, junk mail, greeting cards, soup labels, catalogs, comic strips, cereal boxes, signs, name tags, seed packages, travel brochures, business logos, calendar pages, sheet music, recipe cards, etc.
Literacy as a Part of Everyday Play

- Construction tape and road signs in the block area
- Hospital name bracelets and birth certificates for baby dolls
- Nametags on pet collars for stuffed animals
- Posted schedule for feeding pet
- Get well, happy birthday and other cards for special occasions
- Seed bags taped to craft sticks for outside garden and plant labels
- Eye charts, x-rays and doctor checklists
- Shopping list on refrigerator
- Maps for pretend play with cars
- Blueprints at woodworking table
- Ticket booth
- Play money and charge cards with cash register
- Cookbooks, recipe cards and menus
- Phone book near phone
- Stick-on notes
- Message board
- Names on artwork

Fruit Dip

Encourage children to “read” the following picture recipe to create their own healthy snack!

Ingredients:
- 1 cup plain or vanilla yogurt
- 1 pinch of cinnamon
- Sliced apples
- Bowl and spoon

1. Here’s what you need:
2. Add a pinch of cinnamon.
3. Stir.
4. Dip apples and eat!

For more great picture recipes, try the book *Pretend Soup* by Molly Katzen.
Bring books to life with these simple ideas that highlight early literacy skills.

**Signs in Our World** by John Searcy

**Presentation Notes:** Whether providing a warning, a reminder or information, signs are very important. This non-fiction book can be used to help inspire children to look for signs in their neighborhoods. Make finding signs into a game when you go out!

**Skills Featured:** Print Motivation, Print Awareness

**City ABC Book** by Zoran Milich

**Presentation Notes:** Alphabet letter shapes are everywhere! Share this book with children before taking a walk to encourage them to find letters in their own environment or go on a letter hunt around your home. The simple, clear font used in this book makes it an excellent guide.

**Skills Featured:** Letter Knowledge, Print Awareness

**At the Beach** by Huy Voun Lee

**Presentation Notes:** A young Asian boy practices writing in the sand at the beach. His mom helps him make connections to the real actions or objects that inspire each ideographic character. Show children these ideographic characters and ask them what they see. Spread sand on a tray or cookie sheet and have child use his or her index finger to make lines, curves or other shapes.

**Skills Featured:** Letter Knowledge

**Alphabet House** by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace

**Presentation Notes:** Welcome to the alphabet house where you can find things from A to Z! Each page features a different letter and a group of items that begin with that letter. Encourage children to search for and name objects, calling attention to the beginning sound. The book comes alive as children call out words. Take this opportunity to emphasize letter sounds and introduce new vocabulary.

**Skills featured:** Letter Knowledge, Print Awareness, Vocabulary
The Jacket I Wear in the Snow by Shirley Neitzel

**Presentation Notes:** Layer by layer, a child puts on all the clothing necessary when playing in the snow. This rebus story offers pictures instead of words to represent each article of clothing. As each picture is presented, have children identify the item. As each picture comes up, point and pause allowing the children to name the item. Identifying these shapes serves as a precursor to letter and word recognition. The repetition and rhyme will help children feel successful and comfortable as they “read” this book with you!

**Skills featured:** Letter Knowledge, Vocabulary, Print Motivation

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**More Great Books!**

**Alphabet Mystery** by Audrey and Bruce Wood

**City Signs** by Zoran Milich

**Alphabet Under Construction** by Denise Fleming

**Signs at the Park** by Mary Hill

**26 Letters and 99 Cents** by Tana Hoban

**The Dog from Arf! Arf! To ZZZZZ** by the Dog Artlist Collection