

Activities for Teaching Alphabet Knowledge

Letter Recognition Activities

In letter recognition activities, the children select or point to the letter that is named by the teacher. The task is to locate the letter that has been identified by the teacher. In letter naming activities, the children say the name of the letter that someone else presents.

Show Me the Letter (Large or Small Group)

- **Modeling:** Say, “Here are all the names of the children in our classroom. Let’s look at the first letter of each person’s name.” Say the name of each letter. “If you asked me to find M, which is the first letter of my name, I would point to this letter. Who else in our class has a name that begins with M?” Have that child point to her/his name.
- **Guided Practice:** Say, “When I say the first letter of your name come, up to the chart and point to that letter with the magic wand.” Have each child take a turn pointing to the first letter of her/his name. Give children specific feedback about what they did. For example, “You recognized the first letter of your name. That letter is called T
- **Independent Practice:** In small group, give each child the first letter of their name printed on a card. Call out the letters one at a time. When each child hears the name of their letter, they hold it up.

The Alphabet Eater (Large or Small Group)

- **Modeling:** Use a puppet who loves to eat letters (the Hungry Monster is a good option). Tell the children, “This guy told me that he loves to eat letters. I wonder what letters he likes to eat.” The Alphabet Eater calls out the name of a letter. Model how you select that letter from a group a few letters displayed on the table. For example, “He said T, so I am looking for the letter that has one big line that goes

down and a little line that goes across the top.” Pick up the letter T and say, “I found the letter T.” Continue this strategy until you have demonstrated recognizing all the letters that you are going to expect the children to recognize.

- Guided Practice: Give each child a set of letters that you used in your modeling activity. The puppet calls out the name of a letter. The children select that letter from their own group of letters. Give specific feedback.
- Independent Practice: In small group or one-on-one, present a set of letters. Have each child point to the letter that the puppet names.

If Your Name Begins with the Letter I Show (Transition)

- Materials: Cards with children’s first names printed on them.
- Modeling: Present a list of children’s names. Tell children that the first letter of our name is very important to each of us. Explain the activity. Say something like, “I am going to say this...

If your name begins with a ___ stand up.

If your name begins with a ___ stand up.

If your name begins with a ___ do your dance.

If your name begins with a ___ do your dance.

I will point to the first letter in someone’s name, just like this.” Hold up a name so everyone can see, point to the first letter, and say the letter. Model the activity using teacher’s name. Then, practice one time with one child demonstrating a turn.

- Guided Practice: Teacher sings...

If your name begins with a ___ stand up.

If your name begins with a ___ stand up.

If your name begins with a ___ do your dance.

If your name begins with a ___ do your dance.

Teacher points to that letter at the beginning of printed name. Children whose name begins with that letter stand up and everybody names the letter in unison.

- Independent Practice: Use this activity for transitions. Children go to the next activity when they hear the first letter of their name.

Where Is...? (Sung to the tune of Thumbkin)

Give each child in the group a letter printed on a card. The letter should be easily seen by all children. Explain the procedures for the activity.

For example, “When we sing about the letter that you are holding, it is your turn to stand up and hold up the letter so that all the children can see it.” Model and practice the procedure with children.

Teacher sings “Where is M? Where is M?” The child who is holding the letter M stands up and sings “Here I Am. Here I am” (showing the letter to all children). All the children sing, “This is letter M. This is letter M. Yes, it is. Yes, it is.”

Letter Naming Activities

The child is expected to provide the name of the letter that is presented. It is necessary for children to have many exposures to hearing the names of letters paired with seeing the letters. We have to teach before we ask.

The First Letter in Your Name (Large or Small Group)

- Modeling: Teacher says, “Everybody in this group has a different name.” Call out the names of the children in your group. Say, “It is good we have names because people know what to call us. They can identify us. Well, all these letters have names too. If we want to be able to spell and read, we need to know what to call all these letters. So, we will begin working together to learn the letter names. Let me show you one of my favorite letters. It is __. It is the first letter of my first name. In fact, this was the first letter that I learned to identify when I was your age. Here are some cards with your names written on them. Notice that the first letter in your name is the largest. Listen as I identify, or give the name of, the first letter in each person’s name.” Call out the first letter in each child’s name as you point to the letter.

- Guided Practice: Tell the children to repeat the letters with you as you point to the first letter in each child's name. Next, point to the first letter in each child's name and have children name the letter together. Provide supportive feedback. For example, "Yes, your name begins with ____."
- Independent Practice: In small group, or one-on-one, provide each child the opportunity to independently identify the first letter in his/her name.

Hot Letters (Large or Small Group)

- Materials: letter cards, CD player, instrumental music.
- Modeling: Show children letter cards, or 3-d letters that have been taught. Name each letter before you play the game. Explain the activity: "We are going to pass one of these letters around the circle while the music is playing. Each child will pass the letter to the next person (practice this procedure with the children). When the music stops, whoever is holding the letter holds it up for everyone to see and everybody says the name of the letter." After explaining the procedures and reviewing the names of the letters, start the music and begin passing the letter. Stop the music when you are holding the letter. Model holding up the letter so all can see and give everybody a turn to name the letter in unison.
- Guided Practice: Pass the letter and provide children the opportunity to practice naming the letter that is presented when the music stops.
- Independent Practice: After children have had many opportunities to practice this skill, provide each child a turn to independently name the letter.

Lights Out Letters (Large or Small Group)

- Materials: flashlight, letter cards, or big plastic letters.
- Modeling: Explain activity by telling children that you are going to use your magic light to light up the letters on your classroom alphabet chart. Turn out the lights and demonstrate the activity by moving the flashlight about and saying...

Magic light, magic light where will you go?
Children, tell me the letters you know.

Before playing the game with children, model the process for naming a letter when the flash light shines on it. For example, "I know that this letter is S because S looks like one curvy line."

- Guided Practice: Children practice naming the letters that are shown in the magic light. Provide specific feedback as children name the letters.
- Independent Practice: In a small group setting, each child takes a turn to shine the flashlight on the individual letters. When the letter is in the magic light, the child names the letter.

I Spy a Letter (Large or Small Group)

- Materials: letters on a chart (no more than 6).
- Modeling: Tell children that each letter has its own special look. Each letter is different from the others. Present the letters that are on the chart on separate cards. Introduce each letter. For example, "I would like you to meet T. Notice T has a special look. It has a straight line down and a little straight line across the top." Continue this strategy with the other letters that you have chosen on the chart. Tell the children that you are going to show them how to play a game called I Spy a Letter. Describe the letter on the chart, "I spy a letter that has a big straight line that goes down and three little lines that go across." Using a think aloud, model how you figured out what letter was described. For example, "I see this letter. It has a big straight line down and four little lines that go across." Point to features as you describe the letter. "It is called E. Everybody say E."
- Guided Practice: Describe a letter and have the children say the name of the letter that you describe. Provide feedback by repeating the description as you point to the features of the letter and say the name of the letter.
- Independent Practice: In a small group setting, each child can take turns naming the letter that is described.

Note: For children who need more support, have them point to the letter instead of naming it.

Other Popular Letter Recognizing and Naming Activities that Provide Exposure and Practice:

- Letter Bingo
- Sing ABC song and point to each letter as you sing each letter
- Sing ABC song backwards and point to each letter as you sing it
- Use magnetic fishing poles and catch magnetic letters (children name each letter they catch)
- Hide the plastic letters in the sand table. Children search for letter treasures and practice naming each letter (teacher is present to provide support and feedback).
- Play musical chairs in small group where everybody has a chair. Label each chair with a letter and children take turns naming each letter in their chair when the music stops.
- Play The Pass Letter. Each day a letter is presented as the secret pass letter. The teacher names and describes the letter. All teachers in the room wear the pass letter on a necklace. The letter is also posted outside the classroom. During transitions, each child takes a turn to name the pass letter (when dismissed from large group to next activity or when entering the classroom). The goal is to provide repeated exposure. It is not letter of the day.

Distinguishing Between Letters Activities

Similar Letters (Large or Small Group)

- Materials: magnetic letters, two paper plates for each child, magnetic board
- Modeling: Teacher says, "I notice that sometimes it is tricky to tell some letters apart because they look so much alike. They are similar." Place letters V and U on a magnetic board. "Look at these two letters, V and U. We know that this is called V (point to V) and this is called U (point to U). Look how similar they are. They look so much alike (point out similarities), but there is one way they are different (point out difference). The V has a point at the bottom and the U has a curve at the bottom. I am going to be a letter detective and use my special magnifying glass to carefully look at these Vs and Us on the table and then I am going to separate them. Watch me." Model separating letters using a think aloud.

- Guided Practice: Give each person a special magnifying glass. Let the children explore holding and using the magnifying glass as you talk about the purpose of it. Tell children that you are now going to be detective team and work together to separate the letters that are so similar. Children and teacher sort the letters in separate containers. Teacher provides names of letters as children place them in containers.
- Independent Practice: Give each child a set of letters that includes only Vs and Us. Tell them that they are going to be letter detectives and use their magnifying glasses to investigate the letters. Instruct the children to use the magnifying glass to notice how the V and the U are different. Have them separate them into two groups. Provide specific feedback. For example, “Wow, you detectives were really good at being able to distinguish the V from the U. Tell me how they are different.”

Matching Upper- and Lower-Case Activities

Upper- and Lower-Case Bingo (Large and Small Group)

- Modeling: Teacher says, “Look, I have a chart for playing a letter game. All the letters on the chart are upper-case letters. We always use upper-case letters for the first letter in our name.” Point to each upper-case letter and have children name each letter. Say, “For each upper-case letter there is a lower-case letter.” When we read we see lots and lots of lower-case letters. They are usually smaller than upper-case letters.” Show children the lower-case letters as you name each one. Model how you match the lower-case to the upper-case. “Look at this letter. It is the lower-case k. I notice how it looks very much like the upper-case K. This one is easy for me to match. But, look at the lower-case r. It looks very different from the upper-case R. So, let’s take a good look at it so we will remember what it looks like.” Continue modeling using this strategy.
- Guided Practice: Use a puppet who is trying to learn how to match lower-case letters with upper-case letters. Give puppet a lower-case letter and have it ask the children for help in matching it to the correct upper-case letter.
- Independent Practice (small group only): Use a puppet who is trying to learn how to match lower-case letters with upper-case letters. Give puppet a lower-case letter and have it ask the children for help in matching it to the correct upper-case letter.