



Somerville Early Education (SEE)

Phonological & Phonemic Awareness and Early Phonics Experiences

A Guide for Teachers



Welcome to SEE Every Child

Our Mission and Vision

Mission: The Somerville Early Education department ensures that young children in Somerville have equitable access to a curriculum approach where they are engaged in joyful, robust, challenging, child-centered experiences grounded in play, discovery, and their own interests, and guided by state and national learning standards.

Vision: Children are born ready to learn and have the right to equitable access to a curricular approach that reflects who they are and what they are interested in. It is the job of the adults in a child's life to prepare an environment and experiences that support a child's ability to grow to their full potential. In order for children to be confident and happy learners in school and life, the adult, environment, and child work together.

Roots of SEE Every Child

This curriculum builds on both current research and established theories[i] about how young children learn. SEE Every Child is...

Centered on the whole child. Research shows that for young children to grow and thrive, teachers need to think of them as whole beings, focusing on social and emotional development to help children build emotional awareness, skills for social interaction, and empathy for others.

Anti-bias focused. Anti-bias goals are integrated into each thematic project and all learning experiences are designed to be flexible and have multiple entry points, so that children with special needs, multilingual learners, and children developing at their own paces all have meaningful ways to engage with the curriculum.

Learning through play. Influenced by the Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches, children have extended time daily to engage in purposeful, guided play, leading their own learning through active engagement with materials in a prepared environment, with mentoring and support from thoughtful teachers.

Thematic and interdisciplinary. Children understand the world through active exploration, constructing knowledge as they investigate, asking questions, and interacting with people and materials. SEE Every Child is organized around thematic projects that offer opportunities for children to explore concepts and build skills across content areas while investigating topics that matter most to them.

Flexible and adjustable. SEE Every Child is designed with flexibility to be culturally responsive to the children in your class. While each class will take unique paths in the curriculum, cultivating unity and collaboration across our city's many vibrant ECE programs can make children's experiences stronger.

Responsive and co-constructed. Educators have been a part of developing this curriculum from the start, sharing their ideas and visions, generating suggestions for curriculum topics, and giving feedback on draft materials. Educators adapt the curriculum based on the funds of knowledge of children and families.

Classroom Environments and Intentional Teaching

The classroom environment can be referred to as a "third teacher;" (alongside parents and educators) where the environment guides children to make choices, to engage with materials, ideas, and each other, and to behave in certain ways (Gandini, 1998). Preparing environments for learning involves intentional teaching. An intention is a purposeful aim, plan, or provocation that guides teachers' productive action in the classroom. SEE Every Child is grounded in the Four Intentions (Kuh & Ponte, 2021), directly related to practices that all teachers can carry out daily as they work with children and develop purposeful curriculum. The Four Intentions complement each other and when used together, allow a rich curriculum to emerge:

Compelling Materials

Explicit Presentation

Responsive Scaffolding

Following Children's Interests

Key Practices and Routines

While each program will have a unique schedule to fit their context, certain key practices and routines are implemented across programs to allow children a variety of opportunities to learn and explore.

One key practice in SEE Every Child is engaging in thematic project-based learning, guided by Big Ideas. Each month, teachers choose from among several projects, outlined in the Big Idea Guides available on the website. Exploring topics through Big Ideas allow children to develop deeper understanding and to make meaningful connections between learning and their lives. Different times of day act as entry points for children to access curriculum through the project approach and Big Ideas.

Some of these entry points offered by SEE Every Child include:

Meetings Throughout the Day

Choice Time

Small Group Times

Whole Group Experiences

Outdoor Time

Mealtimes

SEE's routines and teaching practices are designed to be flexible. Educators incorporate them into their daily schedules as appropriate to their learners and the structure of their program.

Learning Opportunities in All Domains

Within the daily routines and practices outlined above, children are engaging in integrated learning across all domains. Projects, guided by Big Ideas, connect and integrate the learning. These domains consist of:

- **Social Emotional Learning.** SEE Every Child uses the *Second Step Early Learning* program (*Second Step*, n.d.) which encourages children to explore social emotional skills through storytelling, songs, games and group activities.
- **Balanced Literacy.** SEE Every Child's Literacy component was designed with researchers from the Lectio group (Lectio Group, n.d.) and includes evidence-based practices to help children become strong emergent readers, writers and communicators.
- **Mathematical Thinking.** Based on the *Building Blocks Pre-K* curriculum (Clements & Sarama, 2013), SEE embraces math as a language through which children can better communicate and understand their experiences.
- **Science and Engineering.** SEE Every Child aligns with *Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS Lead States, 2013) and allows children to investigate the world around them through hands-on, play-based exploration.
- **Artistic Expression.** SEE Every Child encourages making connections to Big Ideas through artistic expression in order to allow children to explore artistic media and to communicate their ideas creatively.
- **Physical Development.** SEE Every Child's dedication to educating the whole child means mindful incorporation of physical development. Children spend regular time outdoors, as well as play games and participate in activities that allow for movement and that make connections to Big Ideas in new ways.

Woven throughout SEE's curriculum is an emphasis on Anti-Bias Education (Derman-Sparks, Edwards, & Goins, 2020), which is integrated into projects and Big Ideas in order to promote positive self-image, empathy for others and an understanding of fairness. Anti-bias education is centered on 4 main goals for children: **Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action.** Through incorporation of these concepts, children are encouraged to be confident, understanding and compassionate, as well as develop their ability to identify injustices and use their voice to work towards fairness for themselves and others.

We hope you enjoy working with SEE Every Child. Feedback is welcome on our website.

[i] For a full reference list and additional research that underpins the SEE Every Child approach, please see the full Preschool Curriculum Guidelines on the SEE website.

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We acknowledge the following resources:

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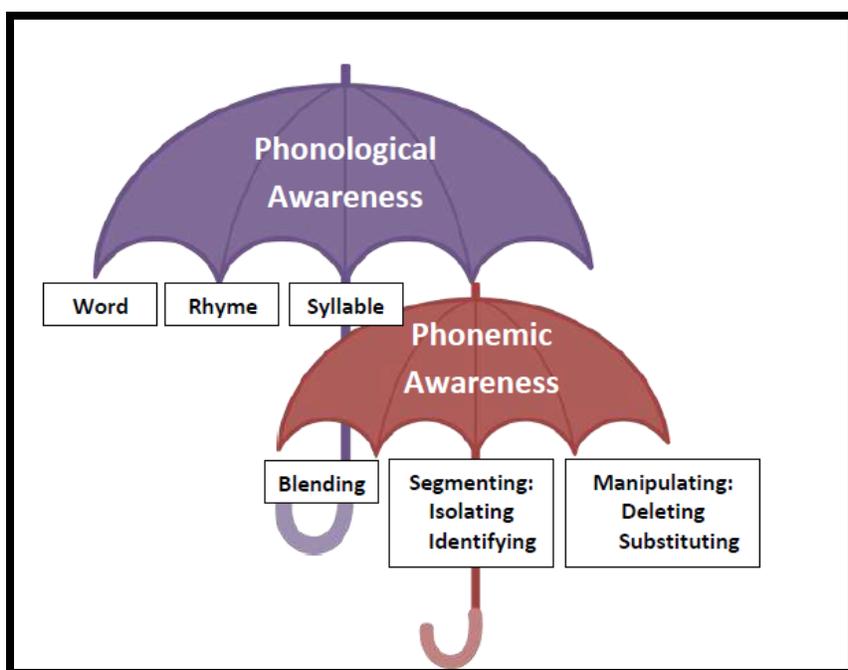


How to Use This Guide

This guide offers a framework and trajectory for teaching sounds, symbols, the association of the two, and an awareness of how sounds and words function in oral and written language.

Research tells us that literacy **instruction must be both explicit and integrated**. Children learn phonological and phonemic awareness in overlapping stages **and teachers should target multiple goals simultaneously** (Skibbe, Gerde, Wright, & Samples-Steele, 2016). This means that you will be teaching children a new letter sound or symbol during a whole group lesson, while at the writing center or in small groups children are associating sounds and symbols they already have been introduced to.

What is the difference between Phonological & Phonemic Awareness and Phonics?



Jan Buckwalter, Somerville Public Schools

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness is the understanding that **spoken language can be broken down into smaller sound units**. For example, sounds make words and words make sentences **that we speak and hear**. Each word is made up of individual sounds called phonemes. Phonological awareness sets the stage for students to eventually correlate sounds and symbols, a skill needed for reading and writing. A child's ability to read and write is shaped by their understanding of the sounds that make up words.

When we begin to **map sounds onto symbols** (letters) that we print and manipulate through printed, visual representations, we move into the area of **Phonics and letter-sound correspondence**.



A good way to remember the distinction is that **Phonological and Phonemic awareness happens “in the dark”** - in the absence of printed letters. Children’s early exposure to sounds all happens without needing written letters or words to teach phonological skills. Babies play with sounds when they babble - no letter symbols needed - as they engage in the process of noticing, thinking about, and experimenting with sounds in spoken words.

In PreK we tap into **children’s natural interest in sounds and patterns** and intentionally introduce the skill of focusing on and discerning distinct language sounds using simple games such as the I-Spy game: **“I spy with my little eye something that hops and starts with “f,f,f,f”**. These activities help children become even more aware of the sounds of language as they play with rhyme, alliteration (See Sally swim slowly.), syllables and sound sorting (which of these objects begins with ‘m,m,m’?).

The progression, while not entirely linear is:

- **Active listening**
- **gradually introduce children to the symbols or letters**
- **support the association of sounds and symbols**
- **making marks that represent the words**
- **connecting with relevant vocabulary**
- **beginning to write using invented spelling**

Whole Group: Listen for Initial Sounds: Listening Games, Songs, Chants, Name Games

How do we build phonological awareness? **ACTIVE LISTENING!**

Active listening games are designed to teach children to listen carefully and analytically to both sounds in their environment and the sounds used in spoken language. Learning to attend to and distinguish sounds, is the first step towards later connecting sounds to letters and words.

(See Building Phonological Awareness handout from SPS, and other resources for more detail)

- **Can you remember? (Actions):** Say a list of actions. Have children do actions and add more as you go, as children repeat the list. (Start with 2 and increase to 4-5.) “Clap your hands, touch your nose”
- **Can you remember? (Objects):** Say a list of objects (can use pictures or have real objects as cues). Have students repeat the list. (Start with 2 and increase to 4-5.) “shoe, puzzle, crayon”
- **Say the Sound:** Say two sounds, ask children to tell you if they are the same or different, Talk about how, why, and where the tongue, teeth, lips are when they make the sound.
- **Partner question of the day:** Today we are going to talk about what we ate for breakfast. Turn and talk to your partner about what you had for breakfast. Then ask each child what the other person said. Sophia, what did Mark have for breakfast? “Mark had Cheerios.”
- **Guess the Voice?:** One person is the listener and closes their eyes. The teacher chooses a phrase or sentence, perhaps with alliteration (six silly snails), and chooses someone to say the phrase. The listener guesses who is speaking.
- **Coins in a Cup (or how many claps, taps, etc.):** drop coins into a cup one at a time while children close eyes, ask how many?



- **Mystery Bags:** In a small group take out all the items from the bag and name them. Put items back in bag. Have children reach in a feel for an item, pull it out, and name it. Or children can say, "I feel the _____." BEFORE they pull it out.



Small Group: Listen for Initial Phonemes - I SPY

The I Spy Game is the foundation of more formalized targeted experience and is played in a small group or individually. It can be presented to the whole group initially. Eventually children can play with a partner independently.

I- Spy



1. Carry the mat and I-Spy box to a table or mat on the floor.
2. Take each object or picture out of the box, basket, or bag and name each one WITH the children. "What is this?" and place on a mat or tray. Can also have the children each take one and put it on the mat or tray.
3. Line up the pictures or objects on the mat or tray and name them again. "So we have a _____, a _____, etc."
4. Begin the game. Call on each child to take a turn. "Benita, I spy with my little eye something on the mat that is green, and hops, and starts with ffff. Can you find it and put it in the basket? What is it?"
5. Repeat for the remaining objects giving each child a turn.
6. Can extend with "Fetching Games" placing objects across the room and whispering the clue to a child and ask them to get it. More difficult: Sound clue only.

Tips for Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

- It can happen whole group, small group, individual.
- Throughout the day, transitions, and is ongoing all year.
- Help children hear and feel the sounds. Talk about what the teeth, tongue, lips are doing.
- Be aware of your own pronunciation.
- Clip sounds. Say, "g", NOT "guh". Don't add a vowel sound to the end.
- Use mirrors in small groups to help children gain awareness of sounds.

Listen for and Play with Rhyming Words: Games, Songs, Chants, Poems

(See Building Phonological Awareness handout from SPS for more detail and examples to use.)

- **Rhyming Pictures (or Objects):** Show children 3 cards, two of which rhyme. Say the name of each picture and ask children which two rhyme and which card gets turned over because it doesn't rhyme. (Can make sets and have as shelf work.)
- **Loud and Soft:** Use a poem or song chart with rhyming pattern. Choral read or sing but say the rhyming words in a louder voice. Then do the opposite and say the rhyming words in a soft voice.
- **Fill In the Rhyme:** (a la Down by The Bay). Say a rhyming phrase and have children fill in the missing rhyming word. (Similar to completion strategy.) A cat wearing a _____. Did you every see a moose, kissing a _____.
- **I Spy:** Play I Spy by saying what you spy rhymes with. "I spy with my little eye, something that we can open and close and rhymes with floor." Eventually leave out the clue. "I spy with my little eye something that rhymes with boat."

Words Have Parts: Syllables

(See Building Phonological Awareness handout from SPS for more detail and examples to use.)

- **Name Game:** "I am thinking of someone in our class." Say their name in syllables: "Ga-bri-el-a. Who am I thinking of?" (Can use during transitions or any time you call names.)
- **Mystery Bag or What's in the Box:** Put objects in the bag or box that differ in the number of syllables (or pictures). Children reach into the bag and name the object they choose. They repeat the name with a hand under their chin to feel the syllable as their mouth moves. (Use with Big Idea objects, pictures). Can also use I Spy boxes for this.
- **The King's/Queen's Command:** A child wears the crown. She stands in the center of the circle, gives a command and kids do three times with hand under chin to feel the syllable. For ex. "Everyone bow."
- **Troll Talk:** Once upon a time there was a kind troll who likes to give presents and made them guess before giving them and would say words in a funny way. Say by syllables. Can play at snack using Troll Talk. I will say the word and you guess what the present was. Use a low, silly voice to say the words in syllables. (Can also use Troll Talk when giving directions – Please get a pen-cil.

Environmental Print: Words are All Around Us

A longer version of this content also appears in the Vocabulary Guide.



Children are surrounded by environmental print. They begin to 'read' this print at an early age through repetitive exposure and use it to construct knowledge and make sense of their world. Environmental print supports the development of a memory for words. It also inspires children to be writers and helps them produce readable text. To support children's engagement with environmental print create a print rich environment. This does not mean charts, posters and labels on every surface of your classroom. Instead, carefully curate print that aligns with the current curriculum and is both teacher and child generated.





In your classroom:

- Encourage children to make their own word walls, classroom alphabet, and signs for areas of the classroom.
- Display children's work (drawing and writing) alongside photos of them engaged in the process.
- Create vocabulary rings and/or a poster of local businesses that children frequent.
- Include signs, maps and blueprints in the block area and attach local business icons to the blocks.
- Place cookbooks and menus in dramatic play
- Provide clipboards, index cards, paper, pencils and tape throughout the classroom so children can draw, write and make signs and labels.

Words Make Sentences (Morning Message)

Morning Meeting (see the Morning Meeting Guide) is an opportunity to build oral language and demonstrate public writing. Reading words slowly as you write them, sounding out a few words when appropriate and emphasizing sounds, finally reading the whole sentence or sentences as a whole, help children to see the words they hear come to life on paper. Write words using mostly lower case letters with upper case used appropriately.

Working with other large print formats, such as song charts, big books, and whole group writing experiences (i.e. story of the day) also provide opportunities to explore how words combine to make meaningful sentences.

Game - How many words?: I am going to say a sentence and you count how many words. Can have the sentence written on a sentence strip and then count the words or put a counter over each word and count the counters.

Letters are Symbols: Introducing Symbols

A Note About Children's Names

Handwriting Without Tears introduces the upper case letters first, as theoretically the lines and shapes are easier for children to form. However, **children's names should be presented and written with an uppercase letter for the first letter, followed by lower case.**



Mat Man activities are also upper case, but HWT recommends **engaging in sorting games where children categorize upper and lower case letters** as soon as possible. This way children can begin to practice the strokes for upper case, becoming successful writers, but learn that there are two kinds of each letter and they can write both.

Introducing Symbols Using Sandpaper Letters

Alphachant books introduce upper and lower case simultaneously and reinforces letter formation as each letter is introduced. You can begin with upper case letters for letter naming to align with HWT, moving quickly into sorting upper and lower case letter games. Sandpaper letters offer children a kinesthetic experience with the shape of the letter and a way to associate that shape with the name and sound of the letter. **Presenting the letters in clusters helps children to see that letters do not exist in isolation, but rather in relationship to other letters and the sounds they make.** Choose clusters of letters that include a range of shapes and sounds, a vowel when possible, and follow that order. Alphachants has a particular order that you can follow.

Focus Letter Groupings (Alphachant order):

msf hta cpl gre dkn voj bwi zyg xu

Sandpaper Letters: 3 Period Lesson

The Three Period Lesson is actually a way to teach anything you want children to remember – colors, numbers, shapes, names of objects, etc. The Three Periods are:

1. **This is...** (Tell the child what it is.)
2. **Show me....** (Ask child to find it giving them a verbal cue.)
3. **What is this?** (Ask the children to identify it by name.)

First Period: This is...

1. Choose 3 letters that are different in shape and sound.
2. Place letter cards upside down in a pile to the left of the mat.
3. Turn over a letter- Trace it with 2 fingers saying, “this is mmm.” OR “This is M, and the sound it makes is mmmmm”
4. Pass the letter to the child and have him/her trace the letter while you say the sound. Place that card face up on the mat.
5. Turn over the next letter and repeat as above. Repeat again with the next letter.
6. You may want to review the 3 letters and sounds again.



This is M and the sound it makes is ‘mmm’. Move M to top of table or mat and repeat with next letter. This is S and the sound it makes is ‘sss’. This is F and the sound it makes is ‘fff’.

The **Second Period** can get a bit tedious so mixing up the letters helps create novelty.

Second Period: Show me... (Ask child to show you the 3 letters you presented.)
 “Okay, close your eyes and I am going to put the letters in order and give you a clue, and you show me the letter.”
 Ask child to close eyes between each round. May not do all on one day. Most important is to ask child to show you the letters in the same original order in which you taught the sound and name, THEN mix them up. Sequence:

Placement	Request
In order	In order
Out of order	In order
In order	Out of order
Out of order	Out of order



Moving from “in order” to “out of order”: Photo 1) Show me mmmm, show me ssss, show me fff. Photo 2) Close your eyes! (Mix up letters). Now show me mmm, ssss, ffff. Close your eyes again (Mix letters again.) Photo 3) Listen carefully because I am going to ask for them in a different way. Show me fff, show me sss, show me mmm.

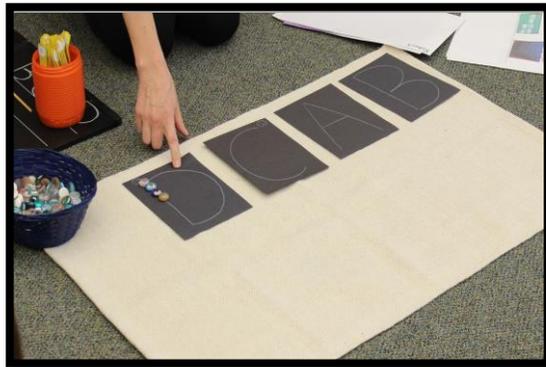
Second Period extensions (Show me...)

- Ask child to put the letters under, beside, on top, etc. of other things
- Ask child to pass the letters to each other, “Juan please give mmmm to Susan.”
- Put a few letters on a mat across the room. Ask, “Bring me mmmmm.”

In the **Third Period** we ask the child to identify the letter by sound and/or name. Play the “Knock, Knock” Game to make it more interesting.

<p>Third Period: <u>What is this?</u> Play the Knock, Knock Game</p> <p>Steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Place the 3 sandpaper letters face down on the side of the mat.• Show child how to ‘knock knock’ on the top of the pile.• The child partner or adult says “who’s there”?• Child flips over the top card and names it.• Adult may need to prompt, ‘what is it, what sound does it make’?• Mix up letters again and repeat.	<p>On the same day or another day: additional extensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crayon Rubbings• Sand Tray• Tracing on Children’s Backs• Child as Teacher
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Sandpaper Letter and Letter Symbol Extensions for the Writing Center





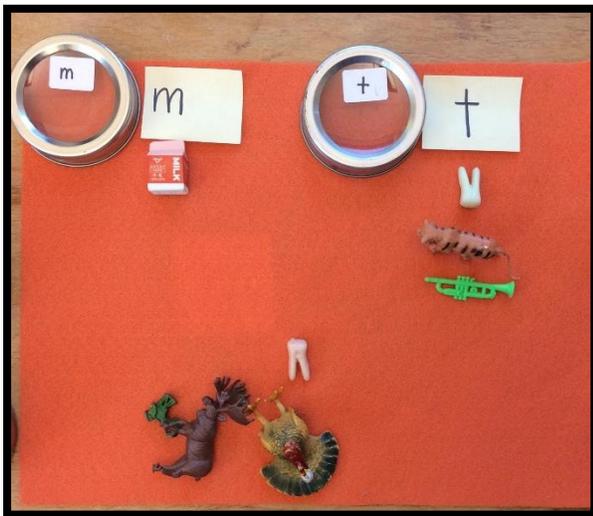
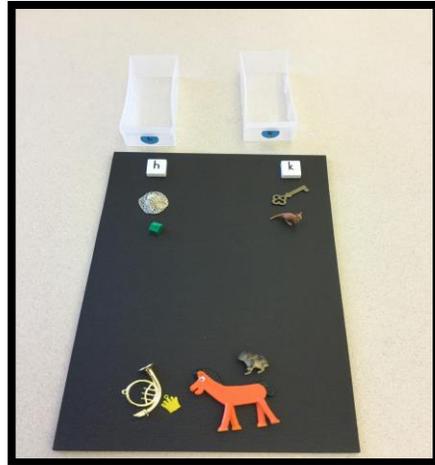
Version of Wet, Dry, Try with a brush and sponge.

Connecting Phonemes and Symbols - Letter Sound Correspondence

Initial Sound (Phoneme) Boxes/Drawers with Cards or Objects

(Sets consist of 2 letters and 4-6 picture cards (or objects) that begin with those sounds. Child or teacher chooses two drawers and children name objects, then sort by initial sound.)

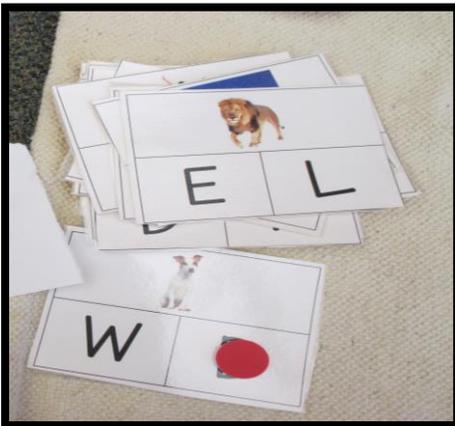
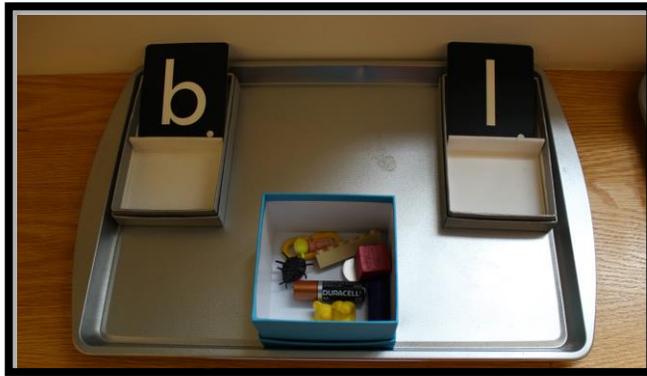
1. Choose a set of initial sound cards and bring them to a rug on the floor or mat on the table.
2. Line up the letters at the top of the mat, saying each sound as you go.
3. Show the children each object or picture card, naming each picture with the children. You can ask them if they know what it is, but the first sounds need to match your letters so you may need to say, "That is one name for it but for this game we can call it a hen, that is another name for chicken."
4. Turn the picture cards upside-down to reduce visual noise. Demonstrate turning over a picture card and placing it under the letter that matches the initial sound of the picture, saying the name of the picture and the sound. "book, bbbbbb". For objects, place objects in a small group at bottom of mat, choose an object and say its name emphasizing the first sound, and place it under the corresponding letter
5. If the child makes a mistake, place the object or picture next to the wrong letter (for example 'h') and then next to the correct letter ('b') saying, "Is it a hook or a book?"



The Sound Drawers are filled with objects that begin with the sound. Labels can be in both upper and lower case. Inside are letter tiles or cards to place on the mats for sorting. Children can choose 2 drawers, carry them to a table, and sort objects on a mat. Then they can play with the objects to tell a story or engage in dramatic play.

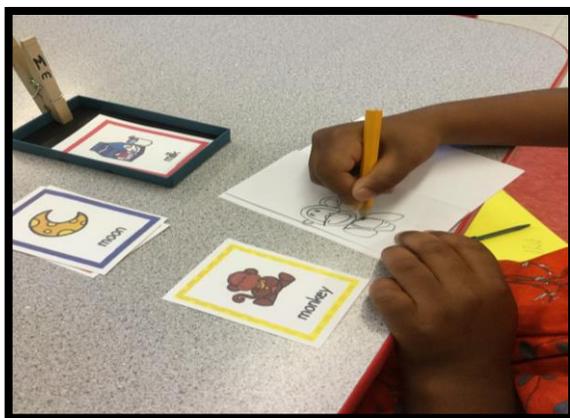


You can also make sets of two letters and corresponding objects in small boxes, rotating them throughout the year as the focus sound groups shift.



Use a clothespin to pin the corresponding sound.

Match the moveable alphabet letter and object on card.



Sound sorting and sound book making



Focus letter movement card

“Writing” into Reading - Building Words, Invented Spelling

(See *Journaling Guide* for more detail about dictation and invented spelling.)

As children learn letter names and sounds, see them in print, experience seeing their words and stories in print on their drawings and in journals, children will naturally want to begin writing themselves. See the Writing Center Guide and the Journaling Guide for progressions of children’s writing. Handwriting practice via making lines, shapes, and eventually the actual letters helps children to successfully replicate the letter symbols for the sounds they hear.



Copying is a valuable experience but eventually children must learn to sound out words as they write in order to be successful, fluid writers.

or



Invented Spelling

picture that?”

Phonemic Spelling

- The teacher will point to a part of the and ask something such as, “what is
- When the child responds, the teacher can encourage the child to begin to think about the sounds in the word.
- The teacher can exaggerate and stretch the word out slowly so that the child can hear all the sounds.
- Then, the teacher encourages the child to write down each letter that corresponds with the sound they hear.
- Encouraging inventive spelling allows children to take risks.

More Early Writing Experiences



Focus letter books: Children use the Alphachant cards to make their own books using paper and book covers from the writing center. They draw the picture, then write the initial sound or the whole word.



Magnetic letters and objects, and Moveable Alphabets give children experiences with sounding out words without the burden of actual writing with pencil and paper.



This child used his favorite plastic animals and sounded out the letters, finding them in the Moveable Alphabet box and laying them out on the mat.