

Learning the ABC's: Fun Activities, Strategies and Mini lessons

Letter Recognition:

1. Tasty Letters

Introduce your students to a variety of taste experiences that relate to the letters of the alphabet. This activity would take several weeks to complete. The idea is to help your students make personal, meaningful associations between the letters of the alphabet and common food items that begin with those letters. Each day bring in one or two different food items that start with each letter. For example, use apples, avocados for "A"; bananas, bagels for "B"; cucumbers, cookies for "C," etc.

Extension Ideas for Phonics: Use this activity as a springboard to help students learn the different sounds each letter makes. Show how sometimes the same letter can make different sounds. For example, bring in both cookies and cereal for "C"—it can make both a hard and soft sound.

2. Upper/Lower Case Puzzles

Take construction paper or plain white paper plates and write an uppercase letter on the left side of the paper/plate and the corresponding lowercase letter on the right side. Next, take scissors and cut the paper/plate in two parts, either making zigzag or wavy lines to form puzzle pieces. Shuffle the pieces up and have your students try to match the pieces together. This could be done in pairs or small groups. Prepare enough puzzle sets for each group.

3. Letter Detective

Help your students find and identify letters all around the classroom. Have the students focus on one particular letter each day or week. Encourage them look for letters in words on classroom signs, in books, on toys, on their clothing, on food packaging, etc. Make an alphabet sticker/stamp chart with 26 columns (one for each letter of the alphabet) for each student. For each letter they detect they receive a sticker or stamp that goes in the column under the correct letter.

Advanced Students or Extension Ideas: Have the student read the word out loud if they are able. Also encourage students to identify whether the letter they detected was an upper or lowercase letter.

Phonics: You can also turn this into a simple phonics lesson by having the student repeat the sound he/she hears the letter make.

4. Repetition, Repetition, Repetition!

As simple as it sounds, sing the Alphabet Song at least twice a day with your students. Sing it to them and point out each letter on an alphabet chart as you go. You can even play it on a CD as a morning warm-up or in the background during play or free time. Do whatever you can make this a very familiar song to your students. They will have it memorized in no time! Have fun with it and create funny endings or use each student's name at the end, "Now I know my ABCs, next time won't *Evelyn* sing with me!"

Technology Component: You can always find different alphabet songs with a variety of melodies on the internet. YouTube.com is a great resource for this.

5. Mystery Letter Box

Place 26 different objects or pictures in a box, each object/picture beginning with a different letter. Have each student close his/her eyes and grab an object out of the box. Have the student name the object/picture he or she pulled, then encourage him or her to say the letter it starts with. Rotate different objects in the mystery box on a regular basis to keep up student interest!

6. Alphabet Book

This is an activity that may take several weeks. Have each student make his or her own alphabet book by helping them write a letter on each page. You can either guide their hand to make each letter, have them trace each letter, use dot-to-dot, or stencils, etc. Next, have the students draw a picture below the letter of an object that begins with that letter. Students can also use stickers or magazine pictures. Each book will be 26 pages long, in addition to a cover page. You can easily bind the pages with a hole-puncher and yarn (may be too thick for staples).

7. Disappearing Letters

Take a small chalkboard and use a wet sponge to write a letter of the alphabet on the chalkboard. Have your students say the name of the letter before it disappears. You can take students outside on a warm day to do this on the pavement for even quicker evaporation. Students can also name a word that each letter starts with.

Phonics: In addition to saying the name of the letter, encourage students to say the sound the letter makes.

Cooperative Learning and Letter Formation: If you want your students to practice writing the letters themselves, they can work in pairs by having one student write the disappearing letter, while the other identifies it.

8. Popular ABC Books

One of the best ways to help your pre-reading students learn the alphabet is to expose them to a variety of popular ABC books that teach the letters of the alphabet from a wide range of stories and contexts. It is a great idea to have a repertoire of books on hand in your classroom that kids love. Below are several popular suggestions:

Alphabet City, by Stephen T. Johnson

Animalia, by Graeme Base

Chicka Boom Boom, by Bill Martin Jr, John Archambault, and Lois Ehlert

Dr. Seuss's ABC

Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z, by Lois Ehlert

Eric Carle's ABC, by Eric Carle

I Spy: An Alphabet in Art, by Lucy Micklethwait

I Stink!, by Kate McMullan

Old Black Fly, by Jim Aylesworth and Stephen Gammell

Shiver Me Letters: A Pirate ABC, by June Sobel

The Z Was Zapped, by Chris Van Allsburg

Technology Component: Several popular ABC books have also been put to animation and song, many of which you can find for free on the internet to show your students. YouTube.com is one such resource.

Letter Formation:

9. Play Dough Letters

Have your students form letters with play-dough. You may need to start by modeling how to form the letters (i.e. rolling out and manipulating the play dough) until they get the hang of it. The teacher can call out a letter and the students can form it, or you can have students go through the alphabet forming each letter at their own pace. Make sure the students have visible access to an alphabet chart. Have students try both uppercase and lowercase letters.

Cooperative Learning: Try putting students in pairs to work on this activity, each building a part of the letter, or make teams and turn it into a fun game of seeing who can form letters the quickest.

Advanced Students and/or Extension Ideas: Have students build words with their play dough letters, working on spelling their names, objects in the room, current vocabulary words, etc. You can also use this activity for forming numbers to work on number recognition and counting.

Adaptations: If necessary, younger students can use alphabet cookie cutters instead of using their hands to manipulate the play dough. Also, try using shaving cream by spreading it out on each student's desk and show them how to use his or her fingers to write letters in the shaving cream. Do this activity on top of a plastic tablecloth. Students can also do this in sand, finger paint, using other food items, etc.

10. Touchy-Feely Letters

You can make your own set of touchy-feely letters by simply using index cards, glue and sand. To make smooth letters, simply take a glue bottle (*not* a glue stick) and write each letter on an index card, making the letter as large as possible. Once the glue has dried on each card, have the student take his/her finger to trace over the letter. To make rough letters, do the same as you would with the smooth letters, but pour sand over each letter before the glue dries. Shake off the excess sand. Make as many touchy-feely Alphabet sets as needed.

Kinesthetic Learners: This technique is great for your kinesthetic learners who require sensory input. Use these touchy-feely letters to help students learn letter formation by having them trace with a finger.

Adaptations: Try gluing down other objects in the shape of letters with varying textures, such as dry noodles, yarn, beads, cotton balls, etc.

11. Nature Letters

Have your students collect objects in nature, such as leaves, twigs, flowers, rocks, etc. They can either do this at home and bring the objects to school, or you can have them take a walk outside around the campus. Once they've collected their nature objects, have the students form letters out of their fun findings.

Cooperative Learning: Students can work in pairs to collect objects and/or combine their different objects to form letters.