Building Alphabet Knowledge

See, Hear, Name & Write Activities to Learn About the Letters & Their Sounds

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .................................................. 5
Saying the ABCs ............................................. 6
The ABCs Alphabet Animal Chart ..................... 7
Building Sensitivity to Speech Sounds ................. 8–9
Making Meaningful Connections with Letters .......... 10

PRACTICE & PLAY WITH UPPERCASE LETTERS .......... 11
Uppercase Letters (Small Cards) ......................... 12
Ideas for the Fun Animal Alphabet Booklet ............ 13
Fun Animal Alphabet Booklet Patterns ................ 14

See, Say & Write Uppercase Letters ..................... 19
A for Adam, the ant Activity Sheet ...................... 20
Looking for Letter “A” Story .............................. 21
B for Bobby, the bear Activity Sheet .................... 22
Looking for Letter “B” Story .............................. 23
C for Carly, the cow Activity Sheet ..................... 24
Looking for Letter “C” Story .............................. 25
D for Daisy, the dog Activity Sheet ...................... 26
Looking for Letter “D” Story .............................. 27
E for Ed, the elephant Activity Sheet .................... 28
Looking for Letter “E” Story .............................. 29
F for Fern, the fox Activity Sheet ....................... 30
Looking for Letter “F” Story .............................. 31
G for Gordy, the goat Activity Sheet ..................... 32
Looking for Letter “G” Story .............................. 33
H for Hilda, the horse Activity Sheet .................... 34
Looking for Letter “H” Story .............................. 35
I for Iggy, the iguana Activity Sheet ..................... 36
Looking for Letter “I” Story .............................. 37
J for Jake, the jay Activity Sheet ....................... 38
Looking for Letter “J” Story .............................. 39
K for Kayla, the kangaroo Activity Sheet ............... 40
Looking for Letter “K” Story .............................. 41
L for Larry, the lion Activity Sheet ....................... 42
Looking for Letter “L” Story .............................. 43
M for Marv, the moose Activity Sheet ................. 44
Looking for Letter “M” Story .............................. 45
N for Nash, the narwhal Activity Sheet .................. 46
Looking for Letter “N” Story .............................. 47
O for Olive, the ostrich Activity Sheet ................. 48
Looking for Letter “O” Story .............................. 49
P for Polly, the parrot Activity Sheet ..................... 50
Looking for Letter “P” Story .............................. 51
Q for Quilla, the quail Activity Sheet ..................... 52
Looking for Letter “Q” Story .............................. 53
R for Ray, the rabbit Activity Sheet ...................... 54
Looking for Letter “R” Story .............................. 55
S for Sam, the seal Activity Sheet ....................... 56
Looking for Letter “S” Story .............................. 57
T for Tonya, the turtle Activity Sheet .................... 58
Looking for Letter “T” Story .............................. 59
U for Ulani, the unicorn Activity Sheet ................. 60
Looking for Letter “U” Story .............................. 61
V for Vinna, the vulture Activity Sheet ................. 62
Looking for Letter “V” Story .............................. 63
W for Wally, the walrus Activity Sheet ................. 64
Looking for Letter “W” Story .............................. 65
X for Xavier, the X-ray fish Activity Sheet ............. 66
Looking for Letter “X” Story .............................. 67
Y for Yoni, the yak Activity Sheet ....................... 68
Looking for Letter “Y” Story .............................. 69
Z for Zoie, the zebra Activity Sheet ...................... 70
Looking for Letter “Z” Story .............................. 71

Think & Match Uppercase Letters Game Directions & Patterns .................. 72–77

“Tremendous” Printing Fun .................................. 78
Printing Letters A & B ........................................ 78
Printing Letters C, D, E ........................................ 79
Printing Letters F, G, H ....................................... 80
Printing Letters I, J, K ........................................ 81
Printing Letters L, M, N ....................................... 82
Printing Letters O, P, Q ....................................... 83
Printing Letters R, S, T ....................................... 84
Printing Letters U, V, W .................................... 85
Printing Letters X, Y, Z ....................................... 86
Handwriting Practice Sheet Template ..................... 87

Letter Discrimination Activities
Draw and Read: Letters S & Z ......................... 88
Color and Read: Letters I & L ......................... 88
Draw and Read: Letters P & R ......................... 89
Color and Read: Letters I & J ......................... 89
Draw and Read: Letters C & G ......................... 90
Color and Read: Letters B & D ......................... 90
Draw and Read: Letters E & F ......................... 91
Color and Read: Letters H & K ......................... 91
Draw and Read: Letters M & W ......................... 92
Draw and Read: Letters V & Y ......................... 92
Color and Read: Letters U & V ......................... 93
Color and Read: Letters O & Q ......................... 93
Draw and Read: Letters M & N ......................... 94
Color and Read: Letters V & W ......................... 94

Naming Uppercase Letters Take-Home Sheet .......... 95
Uppercase Letter Identification Checklist ............... 96
PRACTICE & PLAY WITH LOWERCASE LETTERS & PHOTOS ............................. 97

Learning Letters by Sound ........................................................................... 98
ABC Books to Read & Share .......................................................................... 99
Alphabet Photos & Letters Cards ................................................................. 100–113
Picking Pictures Game Directions ................................................................. 114
Letters on the Move! Game Directions ......................................................... 114
Picking Pictures Game Boards ...................................................................... 115–118
Lowercase Letters (Small Cards) ................................................................. 119
Letters on the Move! Photo Cards ............................................................... 120–121

Photos & Letters Cut, Glue & Match Activities
Letters m & s Sheet ....................................................................................... 122
Letters b & t Sheet ......................................................................................... 123
Letters a, c, m & t Sheet ................................................................................ 124
Letters d, m & r Sheet ................................................................................... 125
Letters f & p Sheet ......................................................................................... 126
Letters j & n Sheet ......................................................................................... 127
Letters f, j, o & y Sheet .................................................................................. 128
Letters l, y & z Sheet ...................................................................................... 129
Letters h & w Sheet ....................................................................................... 130
Letters g & v Sheet ....................................................................................... 131
Letters e, g, k & w Sheet ............................................................................... 132
Review Sheets ............................................................................................... 133–135

MORE PRACTICE & PLAY WITH LOWERCASE LETTERS .............................. 136

Fingerspelling Alphabet Chart .................................................................... 137
Letter a Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 138–139
Letter b Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 140–141
Letter c Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 142–143
Letter d Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 144–145
Letter e Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 146–147
Letter f Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 148–149
Letter g Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 150–151
Letter h Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 152–153
Letter i Activity Sheets ................................................................................... 154–155
Letter j Activity Sheets ................................................................................... 156–157
Letter k Activity Sheets ................................................................................... 158–159
Letter l Activity Sheets ................................................................................... 160–161
Letter m Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 162–163
Letter n Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 164–165
Letter o Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 166–167
Letter p Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 168–169
Letter q Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 170–171
Letter r Activity Sheets ................................................................................... 172–173
Letter s Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 174–175
Letter t Activity Sheets ................................................................................... 176–177
Letter u Activity Sheets .................................................................................... 178–179
Letter v Activity Sheets .................................................................................... 180–181
Letter w Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 182–183
Letter x Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 184–185
Letter y Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 186–187
Letter z Activity Sheets .................................................................................. 188–189

More “Tremendous” Printing Fun ................................................................. 190
Printing Letters a & b ..................................................................................... 190
Printing Letters c, d, e .................................................................................... 191
Printing Letters f, g, h ..................................................................................... 192
Printing Letters i, j, k ..................................................................................... 193
Printing Letters l, m, n ................................................................................... 194
Printing Letters o, p, q ................................................................................... 195
Printing Letters r, s, t ..................................................................................... 196
Printing Letters u, v, w ................................................................................... 197
Printing Letters x, y, & z ................................................................................ 198

Can-Do Sounds Games Directions ............................................................... 199
Beagle, the Paper-Bag Puppy Patterns ......................................................... 200
Can-Do Sounds Game Boards ......................................................................... 201–211

Naming Lowercase Letters
Take-Home Sheet ........................................................................................... 212
Lowercase Letter Identification Checklist ..................................................... 213

SEE, MATCH & WRITE UPPERCASE & LOWERCASE LETTERS ........ 214

Go-Together Letters Game .............................................................................. 215
Letter Line Up Game ....................................................................................... 215
Go-Together Letters Patterns .......................................................................... 216–217
Letter Line Up Patterns .................................................................................. 218–222

Letter Pals Activity Sheets
Letter Pals: Gg, Kk, Mm, Oo, Rr, Yy ................................................................. 223
Letter Pals: Bb, Cc, Ff, Hh, Tt, Zz ................................................................. 224
Letter Pals: Dd, Ee, Ll, Nn, Ss, Ww ................................................................. 225
Letter Pals: Aa, Ii, Jj, Pp, Uu, Vv ................................................................. 226

Letter Formation Review Activities
Printing Letters Aa, Bb, Cc ............................................................................ 227
Printing Letters Dd, Ee, Ff ............................................................................ 228
Printing Letters Gg, Hh, Ii ............................................................................. 229
Printing Letters Jj, Kk, Ll ............................................................................. 230
Printing Letters Mm, Nn, Oo ........................................................................ 231
Printing Letters Pp, Qq, Rr ........................................................................... 232
Printing Letters Ss, Tt, Uu ........................................................................... 233
Printing Letters Vv, Ww, Xx ........................................................................ 234
Printing Letters Yy & Zz .............................................................................. 235

STANDARDS CORRELATIONS
Correlations to NAEYC/IRA Position Statement and the NCTE/IRA Standards 236
Correlations to Head Start Framework .......................................................... 237–238

Handwriting Practice Sheet Template .......................................................... 239
Notes ............................................................................................................. 240
What can young learners spy with their little eyes? Lots of pictures to name and letter shapes to identify when they complete hands-on practice pages, take home color-and-fold mini-books, and play group games!

With the activities in Building Alphabet Knowledge, children will have many opportunities to see, name, and write uppercase and lowercase letters individually. Large letter patterns make it easier for them to learn correct letter formation. For fostering print awareness, each uppercase letter has a special mini-book about an animal whose proper name starts with that featured letter. Included in the story are other objects whose names start with the corresponding lowercase. Because it is important for children to learn that words are made up of sounds and letters represent those sounds, phonemic awareness and beginning phonics skills have also been targeted through group games and worksheets. According to the research study Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel—A Scientific Synthesis of Early Literacy Development and Implications for Intervention (2008), there are six early literacy skills that children up to age five need to acquire: knowledge of the names and sounds associated with letter symbols, phonological awareness, the ability to name printed letters and pictures of objects rapidly, the ability to write letters in isolation, and the ability to recall information told to them. So much is offered in Building Alphabet Knowledge that you can tailor your activities to target certain early literacy skills to meet the needs of your young learners as they acquire letter knowledge from A to Z.

### How to Use the Book

Whether you are introducing the letters of the alphabet in sequential order or focusing on those that are particularly meaningful to your students—in both cases building alphabet knowledge of uppercase letters, lowercase letters, or a combination of both—the materials in this resource can be used in a variety of ways. Perhaps some of your students may benefit from working with photographs of real objects before learning to associate their names with illustrations. If your students have had very limited early literacy experiences, it is best to introduce letter-sound relationships with photographs and letter cards (pages 100–113). As an overview of the skills addressed in this book, refer to the list provided below or check out the correlations to the Head Start Framework (page 237).

- letter recognition
- letter-sound relationships
- visual discrimination of letter shapes
- phoneme matching
- print awareness
- correct letter formation
- naming letters in random order
Saying the ABCs

The “Alphabet Song” is probably the most common tool that parents use to help their children learn the names of the letters. Set to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” many four-year-olds sing the ABCs along with family members while they unknowingly acquire an important pre-reading skill. This step cannot be overlooked because several letters have names that relate closely to the speech sounds associated with them. Automatic recall of letter names makes it easier for the child to learn and label the letter shapes in future lessons.

Activity Suggestions

• Locate recordings of your favorite alphabet songs, traditional or alternative versions, and have children sing along with the music. Introduce each musical selection to the class before placing it in the literacy or music center. If there is a companion book, read it aloud without interruptions so that your students may enjoy the story. Reread the book at another time to discuss any new vocabulary words that are used. Keep the tone of the discussions playful.

• Occasionally, when you sing the alphabet song for the class, leave out two or three letters and let them discover the mistakes. If you would like this challenge to be game like, have the children who identify the missing letters form a group and sing the song again. Let the other students judge whether the lyrics were sung correctly. Conclude this activity by reading aloud to students the book Alphabet Mystery by Audrey Wood (Blue Sky Press, 2003) and find out what happens when little $x$ is missing.

• Read alphabet books to the class. Take time to show the illustrations or photographs and invite children to listen carefully to the language. Read through the book without pauses to keep children interested. When the book is reread, stop at times to discuss certain words, pictures, letter sounds, and so on. Here are a few titles that you may consider reading aloud to your students: The ABC Bunny by Wanda Gag (University of Minnesota Press, 2004); ABC I Like Me! by Nancy Carlson (Puffin, 1999); AlphaOops! The Day Z Went First by Alethea Kontis (Candlewick, 2006); and Q Is for Duck: An Alphabet Guessing Game by Mary Elting and Michael Folsom. See page 99 for additional alphabet titles.

• When your students can recite most of the alphabet easily, give each one an ABC chart and have the children point to each letter form while simultaneously chanting the letter names. (See ABC charts on pages 7 and 137.)

• Play the game “Z, you can’t catch me!” Have the children form a circle and sit down with crossed legs. Explain to the class how this game is similar to “Duck, Duck, Goose” or “Duck, Duck, Grey Duck.” Select one child to be “It.” The chosen child walks around the circle, lightly tapping the top of each player’s head while simultaneously saying a letter of the alphabet (without repeating any letters). At anytime, “It” can call out the letter Z and then must run quickly around the circle to prevent being tagged by that player. If successful, the former “It” player now sits down in that player’s spot. The letter Z player becomes “It” and the game continues in the same manner.
# The ABCs

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**Please come to our ______________________ program to see your child perform.**

**Date Time**

**Schedule of Events**

**Special Notes**

**Place _________________________________________**

---

**Please come to our ______________________ program to see your child perform.**

**DateTime**

**Schedule of Events**

**Special Notes**

**Place_________________________________________**

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Building Sensitivity to Speech Sounds

Skill-building word-play activities are just as important as learning the names of the alphabet letters. Young learners must understand that spoken words are made up of smaller units of sounds, or phonemes. Word-play activities for strengthening receptive language skills are easy to plan and can be related to picture/photo cards, read-aloud books, nursery rhymes, favorite song lyrics, and so on. Plan sessions that target developmental needs of small groups of three or four preschoolers or slightly larger groups of kindergartners. By working with small groups, lessons can be tailored effectively for your young learners with the benefit that they stay engaged during the activities. Keep a watchful eye on the time because the sessions do not need to be long—about six to eight minutes. Beforehand, write the children’s names individually on large index cards and sort them into groups according to the oral language skill levels of the children. Finally, at the end of each instructional session, be sure to record a few anecdotal notes on the cards regarding each child’s progress.

What is the difference between phonological awareness activities and phonemic awareness activities? Before planning your word-play sessions, quickly assess your students to find out if they can tell you how many words are in a spoken sentence, blend two words to make a compound word, identify rhyming words in a nursery rhyme, and count the syllables in words. All of these activities focus on large units of speech sounds to strengthen phonological awareness. When you ask children to listen to a group of words and identify which ones start with the same sound; blend three sounds to make a word, such as /m/-/a/-/m/ into mom; or break apart a word into its individual sounds, these tasks target phonemic awareness by manipulating phonemes. Under the large umbrella of phonological awareness, you will find phonemic awareness as one of the subsets of skills. Keep in mind that it is not necessary to teach all of the above skills during a lesson. Choose a mix of phonological (and phonemic) awareness skills to keep the session playful, positive, and slightly challenging for the children. Here are a few ideas along with more activity suggestions on page 98.

- **Identifying rhyming words:** Select passages from a favorite book. Words that rhyme with see are also used in the Color-and-Fold Mini-Books. Have children identify the rhyming words and think of others (both actual and nonsense words).

- **Recognizing alliteration:** Look for examples of alliteration with the children, such as the names of the animals featured in the Color-and-Fold Mini-Books, e.g., Adam, the ant.

- **Counting words:** Choose any sentences in the Color-and-Fold Mini-Books for the uppercase letters. Say a sentence and have children pat their legs to count the words.

- **Counting syllables:** Count the syllables in the names of animals, children, and so on. Have children feel with their hands how their chins drop when saying each syllable.

- **Make the sound:** Select a few pictures (page 9). Say the name of an animal and ask a child to tell you its beginning sound. (For rabbit, the child can say /r/.) The pictures stand for letters whose names closely resemble their corresponding phonemes.

- **Matching initial sounds:** Select two or three pictures (page 9) and show them to the children. For example, point to the bear and say, “Which words begin with the same sound as bear—ball, zoo, bug?” (ball and bug) The picture helps children remember what is being compared.

- **Blending phonemes:** Choose words that have three phonemes (consonant-vowel-consonant pattern or CVC). You might say, “Listen closely because I want to tell you my secret word. It is /m/-/a/-/n/. Say the sounds with me: /m/-/a/-/n/. Say those sounds quickly. What is my secret word?” (man) When did we use this word? (Answers will vary.)

- **Stretching apart sounds:** Choose CVC words. You might say, “How would I say the word ran to stretch apart the sounds?” (/r/-/a/-/n/)