

PREFACE

This brand new text brings the phenomenon of *Words Their Way*[®] to the youngest readers. Why word study with preK and kindergarten students? Because the hands-on approach motivates them, keeps them engaged, and helps them build early literacy skills. The word study approach as outlined by renowned *Words Their Way*[®] authors is a developmentally driven instructional method. It remains a sound and popular method because of its concrete and research-supported approach for teaching children phonics, vocabulary, and spelling skills.

Through word study, students examine, manipulate, and categorize sounds, letters, and words. Using this approach, teachers create tasks that focus students' attention on critical features of words: their sounds, patterns, and meanings. This new text takes that time-tested, classroom-proven approach and focuses on the needs of emerging readers.

Using the same systematic approach to word study, guided by an informed interpretation of spelling errors and other literacy behaviors, *Words Their Way for PreK–K* offers a responsive, child-centered plan for vocabulary growth and spelling development appropriate for children just beginning school. Step by step, the chapters in this text explain and model exactly how to provide effective instruction in the fundamentals of early literacy.

As you'll see when you meet the wonderful prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in the pages of this text, the literacy diet can be implemented in a fun, engaging, and developmentally appropriate way. Good teachers integrate vocabulary and concept development, alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, phonics, concepts about print, and concept of word into all aspects of the school day. This book features diverse classrooms, including students who are learning English as a new language, and the preK and kindergarten teachers who are highlighted demonstrate many valuable techniques for developing language and literacy. The text guides you to integrate the essential elements of literacy instruction—Read To, Read With, Write With, Word Study, and Talk With (RRWWT)—with your students. Students who have a balanced diet in each of these areas develop the foundational skills needed to become successful readers and writers. This structure not only allows you to integrate the critical elements of literacy instruction, but also aligns with the proficiencies presented in the *Common Core State Standards*.

Predictable chapter structures contextualize literacy content inside a real preK or kindergarten classroom before covering the chapter's core concept in depth. Chapters then focus on how to plan instruction around that concept, including step-by-step lesson plans and dozens of activities to take directly into the classroom. Chapters also look closely at how to best assess your students' skills in a specific area—concepts about print, concept of word and word identification, phonological awareness, and more. There's also a complete chapter to help you organize your classroom for making the most of word study.

The appendix provides reproducible materials such as pictures, game templates, sample sorts, and assessments—materials you'll need to implement these strategies with your students and get your classroom up and running. Finally, chapters include notes to direct you to the PDToolkit online resource (<http://pdtoolkit.pearson.com>), where you'll find videos of word study in preK and kindergarten classrooms, as well as games and materials you'll find most valuable for young readers.

You'll have everything you need to ensure that your prekindergarten and kindergarten students are able to learn words *their* way and become successful readers.

PDToolkit for *Words Their Way*®



Accompanying *Words Their Way for PreK–K* is an online resource site that, together with the text, provides you the media tools you need to carry out word study instruction that will motivate and engage your students and help them succeed in literacy learning.

The PDToolkit for *Words Their Way*® is available free for 12 months after you use the password that comes with this book. After that, it is available by subscription for a yearly fee. Be sure to explore and download the resources available at the website. The following resources are currently available:

- Classroom video footage brings you into the classrooms of teachers using word study at different stages of development.
- Assessment tools provide downloadable inventories and feature guides as well as interactive classroom composites that help teachers monitor their students' development throughout the year.
- Prepared word sorts and games for each stage will help you get started with word study in your classroom.
- A Create Your Own feature allows you to modify and create sorts by selecting words or pictures to be used with the word sort templates.

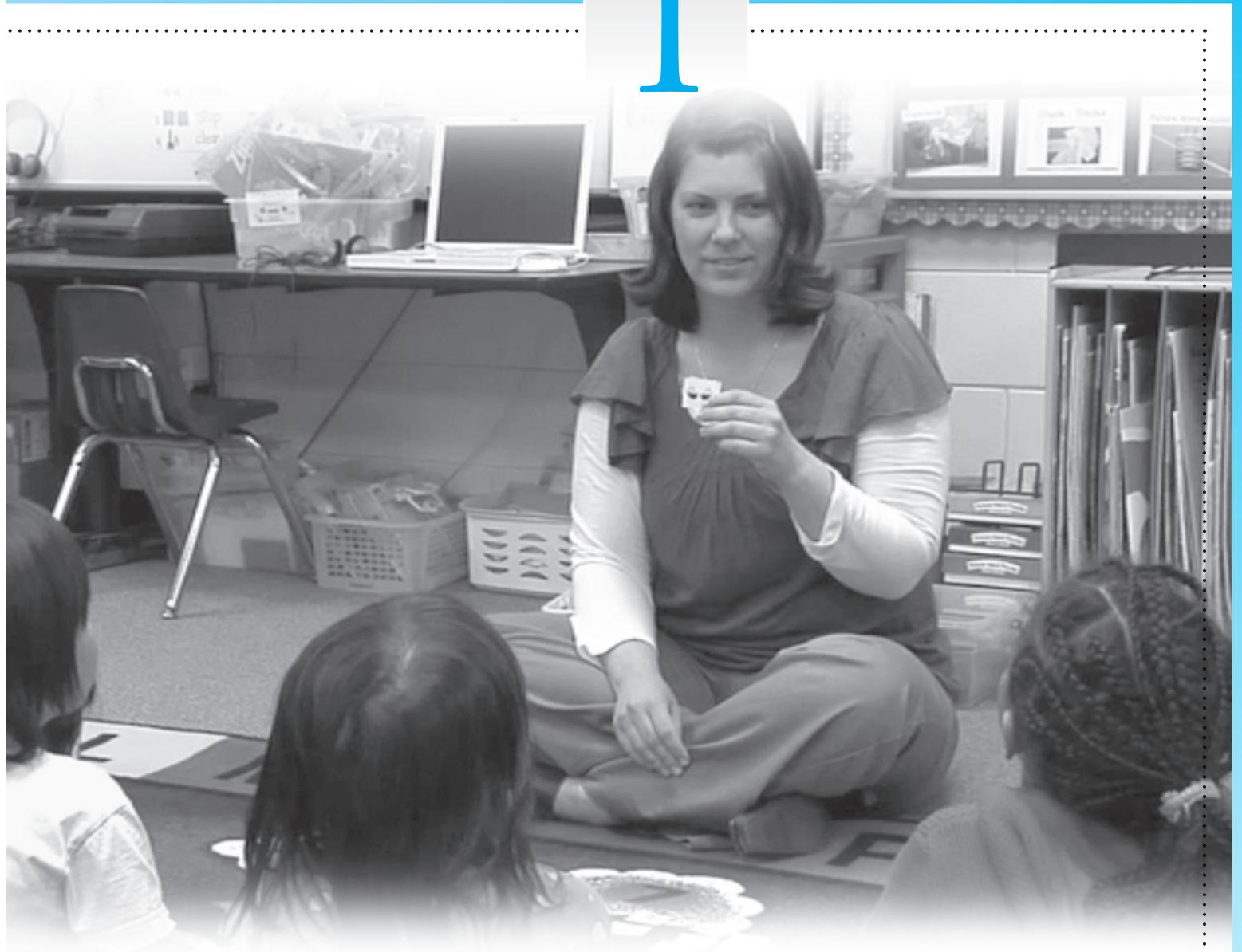
To learn more, please visit <http://pdtoolkit.pearson.com>.

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Oral Language, Vocabulary, and Concept Development

Kristen Polanski is working with a group of eight kindergarteners who are learning vocabulary related to the weather. Most of the students are learning English as a new language, so Kristen wants to make sure that they are comfortable with the new words before she engages them in a sorting task together. Students chant along as Kristen holds up a picture card, says the name of the object, and asks students whether they know what it is. When she holds up a picture of a thermometer, one student suggests “piano” because it resembles the keys of a piano. Another student says “amotheter.” Kristen says “good try” and asks the students to repeat the word after her, gently guiding them to stick out their tongues at the beginning and chant the word beat by beat with her as in “ther-mom-me-ter.” Then she asks, “What does a thermometer tell us?” One student notes, “It tell are you cold or are you hot.” Kristen responds by affirming the student: “It tells if it’s cold or hot.”



Watch Kristen Polanski conduct a vocabulary lesson with her English learning students at the PDToolkit. Click on Videos and select Emergent. Scroll to find “Vocabulary Development and Concept Sorting.”

In this brief vignette, Kristen’s lesson opens the door to many of the topics we will discuss in this chapter: Why are vocabulary, oral language, and concept development so critical to long-term literacy development? What approaches to instruction will assist teachers in ensuring that all of your students have access to the language they will need to grow and succeed academically? And, how might teachers like Kristen create a word-learning classroom that builds on the language resources that students bring with them from their families and communities?

Language Is Fundamental

Michael Halliday reminds us, “Language has the power to shape our consciousness and it does so for each human child, by providing the theory that he or she uses to interpret and manipulate their environment” (Halliday, 1993, p. 107). The preschool years are a time of intense growth in language development. From the moment they are born, children learn to communicate with the people in their lives. Beginning with crying and cooing, they practice the sounds, inflections, and communication patterns they experience with caregivers. In the first few years of life, very young children develop foundational understandings of the sound system of their home language (phonology), the way it is put together into meaningful messages (syntax), what it means (semantics), and how to appropriately communicate to others (pragmatics). Early language development continues to amaze those of us who watch it unfold in the children with whom we work or live.

Variation in Students’ Vocabularies

Preschool and kindergarten children bring many language resources with them to school when they arrive. Most of them can communicate their needs and ideas in their home languages, understand the meanings of thousands of words, and interact with others to share information and learn together. By the time they enter first grade, most children have learned an average of 14,000 words (Carey, 1978). This means that many four- and five-year-olds are acquiring 1,000 to 3,000 words a year, or as many as eight words a day! However, this is not true for all children.

Children come to school having had very different language experiences (Biemiller & Slonim, 2001). Although language learning is a process wired into all humans, individuals learn from the people with whom they interact and from the experiences they have had. In a classic study, researchers estimated that by three years of age, some children had heard three million more words than other children, and by the time they enter school, some children have heard 30 million more words than others (Hart & Risley, 1995). It is not just the number of words heard that is striking—it is the different contexts in which

these words are used and the different types of interactions with adults (Hart & Risley, 1995; Verhoeven, van Leeuwe, & Vermeer, 2011). The unfortunate reality is that these differences may be primarily related to children's socioeconomic environments. By the age of three, children from high-poverty backgrounds have heard fewer than one-third of the words that children from professional families have heard. In addition, many children today live multilingual lives and are learning one language at home and a different one at school. Although students may bring rich oral language resources with them to school, their strengths may not be supported within a classroom environment that only recognizes language development in English. It is incumbent on the educators in the classroom to help connect the students' knowledge in their home languages with the words and concepts they need to learn in English.

It is clear that students within early childhood classrooms will have a range of language resources to build on, and teachers will need to focus explicitly on developing their oral language and vocabulary skills. Only in this way will educators begin to close the tremendous oral vocabulary gap that exists between children who bring extensive vocabulary and oral language skills in English to the classroom and those who do not (Biemiller, 2005; Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006).

Different Kinds of Vocabularies

As new parents soon learn, young children understand much more of what they hear than they are able to produce. Words that a person understands when used by others are their **receptive vocabulary**. The words a person is comfortable using are **productive vocabulary**. The productive vocabularies of young children are considerably smaller than their receptive vocabularies. As a child learns to read, a **sight word vocabulary** of recognized printed words is acquired. In this chapter, our focus is on oral vocabulary and how to enhance the number of words in a child's receptive and productive vocabularies, with the ability to use the vocabulary being the ultimate goal.

Vocabulary Learning Goes Hand in Hand with Concept Development

Young children are constantly learning about the world and how it is categorized (conceptual knowledge) and labeled (vocabulary knowledge). Sit near a preschooler and his or her caregiver at a park or in a restaurant and you are likely to hear conversations that involve pointing and identifying objects (e.g., "See the doggy? He's a nice doggy."), instructing about new topics (e.g., "That's a bee, it can sting us."), and information gathering by the child (e.g., "What's that?"). Words are the tools that help us understand new ideas. That is why learning a new topic often involves learning new vocabulary, and learning new vocabulary is often dependent on understanding something about the world. For example, when learning about African animals, the word *giraffe* will make a lot more sense if the student has seen a giraffe at the zoo, in a book, or in a movie. Conversely, a child who sees a giraffe for the first time will want to know, "What is *that*?" To teach the word *giraffe* to a child who has never seen a giraffe or used the word before involves teaching a concept as well a new word. Children who know the word for giraffe in their home language do not need to learn the concept; they need only to connect the word in English to the word they already know in another language.

..... Building a Language-Learning Classroom

A well-developed vocabulary is an essential part of school success (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003; Duncan et al., 2007) and is dependent on the richness and frequency of verbal interactions with peers and adults, along with exposure to new objects, experiences,

and ideas. Adults should engage children in conversation at every opportunity and intentionally use language that includes new vocabulary and more complex sentences, as well as visuals or other materials that make the new vocabulary clear. Classroom environments that are well managed and positively oriented invite peer interaction that results in greater language use—a primary goal in early language and literacy development (Mashburn, Justice, Downer, & Pianta, 2009). Students who are learning English as a new language need to be explicitly taught the words and structures of the new language, and they make connections to what they already know in their home language. This chapter will describe strategies to introduce, contextualize, and exercise oral language along with concept development.

Word Selection

Word selection is critical for ensuring that all students have access to the curriculum being studied in class, but there are so many possible words to be studied that it is often hard to know where to begin and how to select the right words. It is easy and tempting to look for hard words, but the hardest words may not be the words children are most likely to hear again, retain, and use on their own. They also may not be the words that will give children with smaller vocabularies in English the opportunity to catch up to their peers in learning class content. We suggest four criteria for selecting words: (1) utility or instructional potential, (2) concreteness, (3) repetition in text, and (4) thematic or topical relatedness.

UTILITY OR INSTRUCTIONAL POTENTIAL. When thinking about utility, consider words that can be used regularly in the classroom or words that will show up in other books or lessons being taught in class. For example, the book *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus* by Mo Willems includes many opportunities to hear and discuss the words *bus* or *driver*, both important words that are likely to come up very frequently in classroom interactions. After focusing on these words in reading aloud, make a point of using them in other contexts. You might ask students, “Did you come to school on a *bus* today, or in a car, or walking? Who was the *driver*?”

CONCRETENESS. It is not surprising that the majority of the words young children first acquire are nouns, because nouns often can be referenced concretely (e.g., *tractor*, *crayon*, *turtle*). An analysis of early semantic knowledge revealed that 40 percent of words learned in the early years are nouns, 25 percent are verbs and adjectives, and only 15 percent are pronouns or prepositions (Bates et al., 1994). It is useful for teachers to be aware of these percentages as they select words to teach. Objects are the easiest words to teach because you can show them to students or provide a picture. However, you can make verbs, adjectives, and adverbs concrete by modeling them with facial expressions, acting them out, and using them in context. Prepositions or position words should also be explicitly taught and used repeatedly. Jackie Dagenet uses a stuffed animal and directs her preK children to place it in various positions. For example, “Put Lucky in front of the house.” On the playground, she often lays out a jump rope and gives children directions such as “Stand behind the rope” or “Jump over the rope.”

REPETITION. Also consider what words are used more than once in a story or lesson: These will offer repeated exposure in a meaningful context. For example, the words *drive* and *driver* are used multiple times in *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*.

THEMATIC OR TOPICAL RELATEDNESS. As you review your teaching topics or classroom themes, think about the vocabulary that will be important in understanding key concepts; choose words that can be clustered in a semantic category (Whitehurst, 1979). For example, while studying about the body, books will feature body parts such as

head, hair, eyes, nose, mouth, ears, hands, feet, legs, stomach, back, arms, shoulders, and so on. Other important thematic vocabulary during this topic may relate to healthy behaviors such as *eating, sleeping, washing, and exercising.*

Repeated Exposure

Simply mentioning the meaning of words or doing lots of reading aloud is not enough to enhance the vocabulary learning of those students who need it the most (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002, 2013). When new words are introduced, children should be asked to repeat them, use them in phrases and sentences, and answer questions about them. For example, after reading the phrase “around and around he whirled” (from *Whistle for Willie* by Ezra Jack Keats), the teacher might pause briefly to draw attention to the word *whirled* and ask children to act out the verb. After reading the book, the word should be discussed again: “Say the word *whirl*. What do you think it means? Would you whirl on the grass? Would you whirl fast or whirl slow? Tell your partner how you would fill in this sentence: ‘I whirl when I _____.’” Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002, 2008) describe how to plan repeated exposure to words in different contexts to help students learn the meaning and use of new vocabulary.

Planning Instruction for Vocabulary

Vocabulary develops in a supportive environment with lots of exposure, modeling and explanation, guided practice, and independent use. (Table 1.1 lists some general principles of vocabulary instruction.) Each unit of study or instructional goal involves new vocabulary that will be needed in order to understand the concepts being taught. For example, while Kilee’s kindergarteners are involved in a study of maps, some of the key words they learn are *community, map, globe, neighborhood, birds-eye view, directly above, above, below, behind, near, and far*. It is important for Kilee to identify these key terms before she plans her lessons. She should provide many opportunities for students to hear and learn about the words in a number of contexts, practice using the words in structured interactions, and then encourage their use in independent settings. This follows the gradual release instructional continuum that you will see in chapters throughout this text: (1) expose and explain, (2) recognize and identify, and (3) produce or apply (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

TABLE 1.1 General Principles of Vocabulary Instruction

1. Select words that are useful in the world and important to understanding the classroom curriculum. Targeted vocabulary instruction should enhance what students already are beginning to understand.
2. Introduce new vocabulary in meaningful contexts, such as during a real-life experience or during a shared book activity. Be ready to define the word in terms children will understand. Use drawings, photos, or body motions to develop the children’s understanding of the word.
3. Plan for repeated use of selected words and provide many opportunities for children to try out new words in guided settings. For a word to move from receptive to productive vocabulary, children will need to be able to use it themselves.

1. *Expose and explain.* As noted in Table 1.1, new vocabulary is best introduced in meaningful contexts. This includes real-life events such as building or cooking projects, short trips around school or the neighborhood, or through the use of visual texts or Internet-based materials. As a key term is introduced, make sure students see a picture, an object, or a pantomime of it so they can make a meaningful connection. For students learning English as a new language, consider pre-viewing the least-familiar and most-essential vocabulary before presenting it to the whole class so they have an extra dose of its meaning (Helman, Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2009). Provide examples of the key term in various contexts until students understand its unifying characteristics. For example, when studying the term *map*, students need to see many types of maps such as a wall map, a road map, a map of directions to a friend's house, and a map of land formations and water.
2. *Recognize and identify.* There are many ways to provide opportunities for students to work with the key vocabulary terms you are studying, such as through picture sorts (e.g., sort "maps" versus "not maps"), games that relate to the terms (e.g., bingo with map-related pictures), or additional texts or poems that feature the vocabulary. Guide students to "Point to the map on this page." Or ask, "What do we call this illustration?"
3. *Produce or apply.* As students become more familiar with the new vocabulary, the teacher gradually give them responsibility for demonstrating their understanding and using the vocabulary independently. This might include creating their own dictated stories using the terms or drawing and labeling their own pictures. Depending on the concept being studied, children may display their knowledge through projects, conversation, or group work. The goal is for students to use the new words and ideas appropriately and regularly so they become a part of their interactions in the world. For example, students may be asked to draw a map of part of the classroom and explain it to a friend.

To help students develop the deep and wide vocabulary knowledge they will need to succeed in their academic studies, teachers can't just teach vocabulary for a few minutes a day. Rather, vocabulary and language learning must become an integral part of all aspects of the early childhood classroom. In this section, we discuss many ways to build a language-rich environment that will support all students' vocabularies and advance oral language and concept development. We describe how classroom routines can be a context for word learning, how to use read-alouds, how to get students talking and using language, and how to develop big ideas and language through concept sorts.

Developing Language through Classroom Routines and Conversations

To create a language-rich classroom, engage children in talk throughout the day in many different activities. Greet children by name and ask them a question to start the day. Visit children in centers and during free play; engage them in talk about what they are doing. Snack time and lunchtime provides an opportunity to sit down in a small group and engage students in an extended conversation. Model how to introduce topics: "Do any of you have a pet at home?" or "What do you like to do at bedtime?" In Nee Xiong's preK classroom, she posts reminder cue cards at the tables to encourage the adults to create conversations with the children. The cards have questions and prompts such as, "Could you explain your answer?" and "Who can add on to what was said?" By modeling higher-level conversational skills, she demonstrates how to be a good listener who responds and probes for more information. This also builds conversational skills for children to use as they talk with each other during play time and lunchtime.

Sophisticated Words

Throughout the day, teachers have opportunities to model the use of “sophisticated” words for familiar concepts. Young children are usually delighted to use such “big” words (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013) and this emphasis helps to develop children’s motivation to learn and enjoy words, their meanings, their sounds, and their pronunciations (Scott, Skobel, & Wells, 2008; Stahl & Stahl, 2012). For example, Lane and Allen (2010) describe how a kindergarten teacher begins the year by asking the “weather watcher” to report to the class using terms such as *sunny*, *cloudy*, or *warm*. Over time, the teacher gradually introduces new terms. After several weeks, for example, the appointed “meteorologist” was expected to *observe* the weather *conditions* and report her *forecast* using words such as *overcast*, *brisk*, or *frigid*.

Teachers should be on the lookout for, gradually teach, and consistently use more sophisticated synonyms for content studies; but they should also consider the common language of everyday routines. For example, students can *distribute*, *dispense*, or *allocate* materials. During discussions, encourage *participants* to *contribute* and *elaborate* their ideas and those of others. Before walking outside, the children may be asked to *assemble adjacent to* or *parallel to* the wall, and then to *proceed* in an *orderly* fashion. Compliment the children for being *courteous*, *amiable*, *agreeable*, *gracious*, and *considerate*. When children have learned the primary colors, introduce more nuanced color words such as *beige*, *maroon*, *lavender*, and *teal*.

As you work with young children, you should consciously take opportunities throughout the day to elevate your language, while always making sure that your messages are comprehensible to them. Provide appropriate explanations, repeated exposure, and opportunities for children to use that sophisticated vocabulary. Table 1.2 provides some possible terms for familiar concepts. Be selective about the ones you might want to include in your classroom.

Language in Centers

During center time, teachers should move about to observe and support children’s play. McGee and Richgels recommend that teachers “sit and stay” for a few minutes to model language and engage children in conversations about what they are doing (McGee & Richgels, 2012, p. 196). As they build with blocks, make comments such as, “I see you used the larger block on the bottom and then the smaller block on top.” As children work to put a puzzle together, provide them with language that helps them accomplish the task: “If you think the puzzle piece goes there, try turning it around.” At the sand table you might reinforce the word *sift* in its various forms: “Here is the *sifter*. I am going to *sift* this dry sand. Would you like to try *sifting*?” Or you might describe what you see the child doing and ask questions: “I see you have been constructing something here. Can you tell me about it?” Note that this simple modeling addresses Common Core State Standard (CCSS) Language: 4, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use.

McGee and Richgels (2012) also suggest keeping a list of words posted in centers as a reminder of vocabulary to use with children. Add to the lists as more words occur to you and save them from year to year. Encourage assistants or classroom volunteers to refer to the list of target vocabulary also. West and Cox (2004) list “spotlight words” for over three hundred play centers. Table 1.3 lists some examples related to particular centers that might be regularly incorporated into your informal conversations for repeated exposures over time.

Recasts, Expansions, and Questions

Two well-researched practices to use with young children to improve both syntax and vocabulary are recasts and expansions (McGinty & Justice, 2010). A *recast* acknowledges what the child says, but also provides corrective feedback without being negative. For example, in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, the student said, “It tell are you cold or are you hot.” Kristen recasts the sentence as, “It tells if it’s cold or hot.” An *expansion* involves repeating what the child says but adding just a bit more: “The thermometer tells us if it is hot or cold.” Children are not asked to repeat what you say but they may often do so spontaneously.

Questioning is a way to encourage language, but be sure to use open-ended questions such as “What do you want to build with the blocks today?” rather than yes-no questions such as “Do you want to play with blocks?” Use the familiar WH question



At the PDToolkit, watch Jackie introduce vocabulary as children assemble a puzzle. Click the Videos tab and then choose Emergent Stage. Look for “Sealife Puzzle and Vocabulary.”



TABLE 1.2 Sophisticated Synonyms to Use in PreK-K Classrooms

<p>move/walk</p> <p><i>assemble</i></p> <p><i>approach</i></p> <p>proceed</p> <p>navigate</p> <p>progress</p> <p>advance</p> <p>hustle</p>	<p>pass out</p> <p>distribute</p> <p>deliver</p> <p>allocate</p> <p>dispense</p>	<p>tell/show</p> <p>share</p> <p><i>contribute/contribution</i></p> <p>assistance</p> <p>benefit</p> <p><i>respond</i></p> <p><i>participate</i></p> <p>demonstrate</p> <p><i>indicate</i></p> <p><i>comment</i></p> <p>observe</p> <p>elaborate</p>	<p>think</p> <p>reflect</p> <p>imagine</p> <p>consider</p> <p>assume</p> <p>ponder</p> <p>infer</p> <p><i>identify</i></p> <p>respond</p> <p><i>conclude/conclusion</i></p>
<p>happy</p> <p>content</p> <p>relaxed</p> <p>calm</p> <p>pleased</p> <p>delighted</p> <p>thrilled</p> <p>ecstatic</p> <p>appreciative</p> <p>grateful</p>	<p>nice</p> <p>pleasant</p> <p>polite</p> <p>agreeable</p> <p>considerate</p> <p>compassionate</p> <p>thoughtful</p> <p>caring</p> <p>courteous</p> <p>understanding</p> <p>sociable</p> <p>sensitive</p>	<p>smart</p> <p>brilliant</p> <p>bright</p> <p>clever</p> <p>sharp</p> <p>intelligent</p> <p>knowledgeable</p> <p>on the ball</p> <p>skillful</p> <p>capable</p>	<p>tired</p> <p>weary</p> <p>exhausted</p> <p>drowsy</p> <p>fatigued</p> <p>sluggish</p>
<p>make</p> <p><i>design</i></p> <p><i>create</i></p> <p><i>construct</i></p> <p>build</p> <p>achieve</p> <p>coordinate</p> <p>cooperate</p> <p><i>illustrate</i></p>	<p>mad</p> <p>angry</p> <p>upset</p> <p>annoyed</p> <p>cross</p> <p>aggravated</p> <p>frustrated</p> <p>irritated</p> <p>furious</p> <p>enraged</p> <p>infuriated</p>	<p>collect</p> <p>gather</p> <p><i>obtain</i></p> <p><i>select</i></p> <p>remove</p> <p>replenish</p>	<p>active</p> <p>energetic</p> <p>vigorous</p> <p>bouncy</p> <p>lively</p> <p>calm</p> <p>relaxed</p>

Note: Italicized words can be found on the academic word list in Coxhead (2000).

TABLE 1.3 Vocabulary Development in Centers

Sand and water play	grains, gritty, damp, moist, clumps, sift, trickle, ripples, scoop, liquid, droplets, texture, measure, volume, mold, mounds, impression, containers, sieve, strainer
Blocks	construct, create, erect, assemble, organize, reorganize, elevate, destroy, dismantle, design, increase, shambles, elaborate, entrance, exit, reproduce
Restaurant	customers, servers, waiter/waitress, chef, delicious, recommend, suggestion, appetite, request, menu, expensive

starters—*Who, What, Where, When, and Why*—to engage children in a language exchange. “What is happening here? Why did you choose that? What do you notice? How can you solve that problem?” are all examples of open-ended questions. In Nee’s preK classroom, students learned about germs and were asked how to prevent spreading germs. Students responded to this open-ended prompt with many good ideas, including washing with soap, brushing teeth, taking showers, and not touching things. The photo shows one child’s effort to write a response. The teacher rewrote his statement below: “I learned if we don’t wash our hands we get sick germs.”

Show and Tell

Most children enjoy having time in the spotlight. Show and Tell provides an opportunity for children to get to know each other better, to use expressive language, and to respond to questions and comments from their peers. However, it needs to be carefully planned and conducted. Limit the time to three to five minutes total. That way, listeners will not be expected to sit for extended periods of time. Consider having only one or two students share per day. If you have a special student of the day, sharing could be that person’s privilege. Also, keep in mind that some students may be homeless or have limited possessions to share. Encourage children to bring in whatever might be special to them or to share a favorite book or something from the classroom to avoid the perception that Show and Tell is about showing off new possessions (Otto, 2010). You can also encourage children to bring something to school related to a theme you are studying—but have a few extra items to share with students who do not have something to bring from home. This can be a good way to gather the materials for a concept sort (described later). Imagine the different ways you might sort stuffed animals brought from home: by size, color, clothing (versus no clothes), types of eyes, how well loved they look, and so on.

Reading Aloud to Enhance Vocabulary

There are many good reasons to read quality literature to children, not the least of which is to develop a love of books. Plan to read from a variety of genres with themes and topics appropriate for young children. Informational texts about seasons, weather, transportation, and how seeds grow provide new vocabulary and develop background information, especially when



included in thematic units of study (Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Zucker & Landry, 2010). Through read-alouds, children are exposed to new words and more complex sentence structures, so it is not surprising that research has established that read-alouds are a source of vocabulary growth in young children (Biemiller & Boote, 2006; Whitehurst, Zevenbergen, Crone, Schultz, Velting, & Fischel, 1999).

SELECTING BOOKS. The best books for vocabulary development will offer more than simple repetitive language. Instead, consider books that offer rich language and enough complexity to enhance children's listening comprehension. Save simple books like *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin for shared reading, described in Chapter 4, an activity in which children are expected to memorize the text and approximate the act of reading by reading chorally with you. This distinction is important. A steady diet of simple text may not encourage the development of book-related vocabulary, exposure to literary language, or the development of comprehension strategies to the same extent as more complex literature.

Select books on topics that appeal to young children and that introduce vocabulary that is not likely to occur in everyday interactions. For example, books like *Corduroy* or *A Pocket for Corduroy* offer engaging stories to which young children can relate, but also include words like *escalator*, *amazing*, *palace*, and *enormous*—words that are good candidates for explicit instruction. Select read-alouds from a variety of genres: realistic fiction like *A Chair for My Mother* (Vera B. Williams), fantasy like *Harold's Purple Crayon* (Crockett Johnson), folk tales like *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Paul Galdone), information books like *Building a House* (Byron Barton), and poetry like *The Spider and the Fly* (Mary Howitt). Some books will be related to themes of study like animals or friendship, and others will be selected for pure pleasure.

REREADING. Young children love to hear their favorite books read and reread, and there is good reason to indulge them. Favorites become like old friends that are fun and comfortable to be with. More than that, repeated readings help to secure the syntax or sentence structures and vocabulary children have heard into their own memories. When Ellie was only three she spontaneously retold *Curious George* (H. A. and Margret Rey), pointing to the picture where George fell off the ship and saying, "George is struggling in the water." That was probably the only place she had heard the word *struggling*, but she had heard the book read many times and she naturally included the language in her retelling.

In busy classrooms you may feel that there is not enough time to reread books more than a few times, but you may ask classroom volunteers or older students to reread books that children request. (This can be a good opportunity for older students to practice reading books at a lower reading level that might not be acceptable in their own classroom.) You can record favorite books or use commercial recordings so that children can listen to them again in a listening center. Students in Kilee Christnagel's kindergarten class enjoy listening to books on tape and then responding to writing prompts about their favorite parts, as shown in the photo. This encourages them to revisit the language introduced in the book. You can also send home books for parents to read. Jackie has a collection of favorites in plastic bags that children can check out to take home. Each bag contains a book as well as ideas for parents such as extension activities and questions for discussion.



SHARING BOOKS THROUGH MEDIATIONS. When sharing books with the very young, it is often the case that little reading actually occurs. Instead parents, caregivers, and teachers "talk through" a book in an interactive way known as *mediation*. These mediations reflect the adult's personal knowledge of what the child knows.

They are adapted to the child's interests and attention span. Like read-alouds, mediated sharing offers many opportunities to introduce new vocabulary words. Direct children's attention to pictures by labeling ("There's an elephant") or questioning ("Can you point to the lion?"). Encourage the child to respond by (1) labeling things in the pictures ("What is that?"), (2) talking about what is happening ("What is the zebra doing?"), and (3) making connections with his or her own life ("Have you ever been to the zoo?"). For young children, **concept books** that teach numbers, colors, opposites, and so forth are ideal because they have clear illustrations and limited amounts of text (one or two sentences to a page). They can be shared in small groups and one-on-one. When you do read the text, you might simplify the language or substitute words you think children are more likely to know.

This mediated experience is also valuable for children who are learning English. In small groups, children will have many more opportunities to participate, and you can monitor their attention and make adjustments as needed. The preK students in the photo formed an impromptu group around one student who was engaging in conversation about her book with an educational assistant. Although each student had a book of her or his own, they were pulled into the interesting questions and conversations being shared.

Four-year-olds will come to preschool with varying amounts of experience with books and differing tolerances for sitting still to listen to a read-aloud. Less-mature listeners with little book experience still need mediation in a small group or individual setting as described previously, and you might use classroom assistants and volunteers to help with these students. Other students will be able to listen to a reading for an extended time. Your ultimate goal will be that all the children develop the attention span to benefit from the group read-alouds. Invite all children to participate in the large-group session, but also allow children to leave if their ability to concentrate is not sufficient for the experience. You may find that previewing the book in a small group with English learners or students who are just building listening stamina prior to reading a book aloud will help them maintain their attention.



ENRICHING THE READ-ALoud EXPERIENCE. There are several ways to make the read-aloud experience more productive in terms of vocabulary acquisition. Keep the principles listed in Table 1.1 in mind as you consider the following suggestions.

Adding Words to Simple Text

Even a simple text with limited words offers the potential for introducing new vocabulary as you discuss what is happening in the illustrations. For example, though *The Cat Sat on the Mat* by Brian Wildsmith is characterized by very simple predictable language, the cat experiences quite a range of emotions—from contented, to uneasy, to agitated, to furious—as more and more animals gather on the mat. Discussion of this book should include how the cat feels, with opportunities to introduce many synonyms for *happy*, *sad*, and *mad*—words that the children are likely to suggest. Discussing the illustrations will benefit English learners, in particular, who will be relying on those illustrations to understand much of the story. This is also an excellent opportunity to look up some of the synonyms in their home languages; *content* and *furious* turn out to be *contento* and *furioso* in Spanish!

Interactive Read-Alouds

Reading to children will often be done in an interactive way that stimulates lots of conversation as children respond with comments and questions and point out things they notice in the illustrations (Barrentine, 1996). This means that the teacher does not simply read as a performer, but as a facilitator of conversation, stopping as needed to encourage children's participation while keeping the flow of the



book going. Although interactive read-alouds are the preferred way to share books, you may want to read through some books without interruptions the first time and then read them a second or third time in a more interactive way.



Extending Knowledge of Target Words

After selecting target vocabulary to develop before, during, and after a read-aloud, it is necessary to think about how to develop deeper and more extensive knowledge underlying these words (Templeton & Gehsmann, 2014). Beck and her colleagues (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002, 2008, 2013) suggest that we may do this by relating words to children's own experiences, associating new words with known words, and having children complete ideas that include the target vocabulary words. For example, in reading and rereading aloud to children a selection about artists and musicians, Regina Smith selected the target vocabulary words *important*, *combinations*, *ease*, and *rhythm*. She discussed them with the children in the context of the selection, defined them in kid-friendly language, and, over the course of a few days, engaged them as follows:

Relating Words to Children's Own Experiences

- "Which are *combinations* of foods—carrots and celery, or apples?"
- "Name three things that you can do with *ease*. Why are they so *easy* for you?"
- "What are some things that are *important* to you? Why are they important to you?"
- "Do you hear *rhythm* when you hear a cat meowing or when you listen to music?"

Associating New Words with Known Words and Phrases

- "Which word means something that matters a lot? (*important*)"
- "Which word means being able to do something that isn't hard? (*ease*)"
- "Which word describes what you have when you mix together different colors to make new colors? (*combinations*)"
- "Which word tells what you hear when we clap together to a song? (*rhythm*)"

Completing Ideas

- "You make a *combination* of things when you . . ."
- "You were able to finish your work with *ease* because . . ."
- "My little brother doesn't have *rhythm* when he dances because . . ."
- "The school assembly was *important* because . . ."



Anchored Vocabulary

Printing out words on cards that will be the focus of vocabulary instruction during a read-aloud is a way to anchor the meaning of the word to its sounds and spelling (Juel, Biancarosa, Coker, & Deffes, 2003). Supplement words with pictures to enhance meanings. (Use search engines to find images that you can electronically insert on the word card before printing.) These vocabulary cards will also serve as a reminder to review the words over time and in different contexts. Lesson 1.1 outlines the steps and provides an example that would be most appropriate in kindergarten. Two dictionaries for young children that are excellent resources for kid-friendly definitions are *The Longman Elementary Dictionary* (2010) and *The American Heritage First Dictionary* (2007). When Nee's preK class was studying about spring, the text she planned to read aloud provided an opportunity to introduce and practice many new words that were relevant to the season. She first introduced some of the vocabulary from the book using pictures. Then, during the reading of the text, the children were asked to notice when a key word was mentioned, and respond by enacting a quick body movement. They were also encouraged to talk about the illustrations using the key words. Nee periodically restated the kid-friendly definition or asked a relevant question as needed.



LESSON 1.1 Anchoring vocabulary

Reading *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague provides an excellent opportunity for young children to learn verbs describing different types of behavior (e.g., *pout*, *mope*, *sulk*) and to become familiar with the written forms of frequently occurring words in speech and in print (e.g., *say*, *throw*, *about*). (CCSS Language: 4, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)

Materials

A copy of *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* by Jane Yolen and Mark Teague and prepared cards such as *mope*, *swing*, and *demand*.

Step 1. Preview

Read *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* ahead of time and select a few words whose meanings may not be known to all of your children. Remember to focus on words that are important to the meaning of the story but are also likely to come up again in other stories. Write the words you select on cards in neat block letters and attach pictures when possible.

Step 2. Introduce the words

Before reading the story aloud, introduce the words along with a picture or object that illustrates each word. If the word is not a concrete object, act it out or create an icon that will help the group make a meaningful connection. Ask students whether they know the word or have an experience with it. Always try to use kid-friendly definitions with accessible language. For example, the word *mope* may be defined and acted out as “to be unhappy and move around very slowly.”

Step 3. Anchor the word in memory

Do this by pointing to the word as you say it slowly, highlighting its beginning sound; then have the students repeat it with you. Point out the beginning sound and letter, saying, “*mope* begins with *m*: /mmmmm/ /ôp/.”

Step 4. Read aloud

During the read-aloud, when you come to the word, hold up the card and briefly draw attention to it to remind students of its meaning and letter–sound properties. Ask someone to point to the word on the page of the book.

Step 5. Review immediately

After reading, go through the word cards once more and ask students to say the words, define the words, and perhaps use the words in a sentence that also recalls events in the story. For example, you might hold up *swing* and say, “What did the dinosaur swing from side to side?” Ask questions that use the words, such as “Would you ever *demand* something? Why?”

Step 6. Review over time

New word cards can be added to a growing set to be reviewed over time. Keep them handy and pull them out when you have a few minutes to spare and go through them. It is this continued exposure that will ensure that the words are retained over time. If children notice the anchored words in new contexts, make it a cause for great celebration. You can be deliberate in selecting new read-alouds with similar words such as *Where the Wild Things Are* (Maurice Sendak) and informational texts about dinosaurs: such texts provide excellent support for learning words related to parts of the body, size and amount, characteristics, and habitat. Children could also do concept sorts (described later in this chapter). During a unit on dinosaurs, for example, and learning some of their characteristics, the children may sort them by characteristics such as those that walk on two legs and those that walk on four legs.

EXTENDING THE READ-ALoud EXPERIENCE. After sharing books with children, activities such as discussions and retellings will enhance their enjoyment and understanding of the story and offer opportunities to use some of the new vocabulary they have heard.



Retellings with Books

After children have heard a story in the context of a read-aloud, you may ask them to retell it. This process will encourage the use of new vocabulary and language patterns. To facilitate retellings, you will want to reread favorites and keep those books available so that children are able to revisit and explore them on their own. Children need to be taught how to do retellings. Begin by modeling: “When you revisit this book and look at it on your own, try to retell the story. Watch how I do that by looking at the pictures.” Retell the story using the illustrations, several of the words and phrases in the story, and your own words. When you finish, go back through the book again, page by page, and call on different volunteers to talk about each page. You may need to prompt with some questions. Consider audiotaping the children’s retellings; children love to hear themselves, and you might find that they are more eager to do a retelling when they are recorded so that they may listen to themselves afterwards.

A well-researched intervention, *dialogic reading*, is designed to stimulate children’s oral language and enhance their ability to retell stories (Whitehurst, Arnold, et al., 1994). When parents and teachers of at-risk preschoolers have used dialogic reading, children grow in expressive and receptive language (Justice & Pullen, 2003; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). In dialogic reading, children are gradually given more responsibility for retelling the story until they are able to retell with little or no assistance. Parents may be trained in dialogic reading, and books that have been read and discussed in class can be sent home with the children. After reading a book aloud, follow up with small groups or individual children to help them become the teller of the story. Morgan and Meier (2008) suggest the following steps, known as the PEER sequence, to support children’s ability to retell:

- P** *Prompt* the child to say something about the book. Use open-ended questions. For example, while pointing to a picture in the book *Llama Llama Misses Mama* (Anna Dewdney) in which Llama Llama is pulling clothes out of the dresser, ask “What is Llama Llama doing?” The child says “Getting dressed.”
- E** *Evaluate* the child’s response: “That’s right!”
- E** *Expand* the response by rephrasing or adding information to it: “He’s going to put on the red sweater.”
- R** *Repeat* your prompt, and ask the child to expand on it: “Tell me what Llama Llama is doing?” The child then replies, “He is getting dressed and putting on the red sweater.”

You may use additional prompts to stimulate children’s talk, such as the following:

1. Ask *what, when, where, why, and how* questions.
2. Leave a blank at the end of a sentence for the child to fill in.
3. Ask the children to *retell* what happened so far or at the end.
4. Ask the children to *describe* what they see happening in the pictures.
5. Ask the children to *make connections* with their own experiences.



Building a “Tower of Talk”

This activity models *how* to engage in a sustained conversation for preschool and kindergarten children by adding a block as each participant talks (Templeton & Gehsmann, 2014). Lesson 1.2 offers an example for introducing this activity to children.

LESSON 1.2 Tower of talk

Children do not always understand the turn taking and contributions expected in a conversation. The concrete use of Unifix cubes, blocks or other colored counting objects can help children master these concepts. (CCSS Speaking & Listening: 1a, 1b, and 3, Comprehension and Collaboration)

Step 1. Explain and model

Show children how this activity works in a “fishbowl” setting by choosing two or three children to model in the middle while the other children watch. Choose a topic that is interesting and familiar to the children, such as a recent field trip, the gerbil babies that suddenly appeared this morning, or a favorite read-aloud book. Tell the children, “In this activity, we will be working on listening to each other and taking turns talking. When someone adds to our conversation, they will add a Unifix cube to our Tower of Talk.”

Pass out two or three Unifix cubes to each child who will be in the fishbowl with you. Each child should have his or her own color. Begin the conversation: “We discovered eight gerbil babies in the gerbil cage this morning!” While you are speaking, put your Unifix cube on the floor in front of the children.

Step 2. Invite participation

Ask the children to reply to what you just said with another statement or a question. When each child responds, he or she adds a cube to the Tower of Talk. You may need to remind the children how important it is to take turns and not speak over each other. Children may be reluctant to contribute to the conversation, so you will also model how to invite them into the conversation: “I’ve noticed that Darrell hasn’t added to our conversation lately, so I’m going to ask him a question: Darrell, what did you think when you first saw our gerbil babies this morning?” After Darrell shares, ask him to add one of his cubes to the tower. If Darrell doesn’t share, however, you may lean over and whisper a possible comment into his ear, encouraging him to add it to the conversation. Your goal is to keep the conversation going until all the children’s Unifix cubes are gone.

Step 3. Reflect on the process

After the fishbowl demonstration, talk with all of the children about what they noticed as they listened to your conversation. Emphasize the importance of mentioning what someone else has said or building onto what they’ve said.

Step 4. Extend

Provide all the children the opportunity to try out the Tower of Talk activity with a buddy or a small group. Children usually are excited and delighted to see their tower grow—it’s not long before they will be requesting more Unifix cubes so they can really grow their Towers of Talk! Once children have practiced this activity several times, remind them about using these “acknowledging and extending” skills in other contexts such as in a discussion of a read-aloud or during Show and Tell.

Turn and Talk

This activity is an excellent way to increase opportunities for children to exercise language, thought, and vocabulary use through oral interaction. Assign partners, and ask children to turn and talk to their partner during a discussion or read-aloud. In contrast to the traditional practice of calling on one child, through Turn and Talk every child has the opportunity to respond to a question, share





an experience, make a prediction, summarize, and so forth. Children who are reluctant to speak in front of a larger group (because they are less verbal, shy, or learning the language) are usually more comfortable when talking with a partner. The steps are as follows:

1. Model your expectations for Turn and Talk with another adult. Demonstrate how partners will take turns, and suggest ways to encourage a partner who is reluctant to talk: “Tell me what you think”; “It’s your turn now”; or “You go first this time.” You may also call on two children who do a particularly good job together to model for the rest of the group. Children should turn knee to knee and eye to eye, and talk softly so as not to distract others. In Nee’s preK classroom, each partnership in a Turn and Talk has two Popsicle sticks—one with a mouth pictured and one with an ear. Students who hold the ear first are the listeners, and the ones with a mouth on their stick are the talkers. After a short time, the children change sticks and take a different role. This scaffolding ensures that all students are practicing both speaking and listening.
2. Partners could be selected before the read-aloud or other shared experience begins, or you may allow children to pick their own partners on the way to the group and then sit down together. When selecting partners, take into consideration children’s language competence and confidence. A more verbal child may provide a model for a less verbal child, but he or she might also dominate the conversation, so watch to see how pairs work out and be ready to intervene with suggestions about ways to give the less verbal child an equal opportunity. The same partners might be established for a week or longer. This can save organizational time.
3. Bring Turn and Talk time to a close by offering a countdown warning. Slowly and steadily count down: “5, 4, 3, 2, 1.” As children notice, they should stop their conversations and put attention on the teacher. How much time you allow will vary but bring Turn and Talk time to a close before children lose their focus and get off the assigned topic; this will typically be only a couple of minutes.
4. As children talk with their partners, listen in to monitor their conversations. When everyone is back together, you may call on one or two children to share what they talked about. Because the less verbal or shy children have already been sharing their ideas with their partners during Turn and Talk, they may now be more confident in speaking before the larger group.



Think Pair Share

Another way to enhance oral language interactions is Think Pair Share. Once students learn to do Turn and Talk, this will be an easy variation that provides think time to engage with a topic at hand and ends with the opportunity to share ideas in the larger group. The steps are as follows:

1. *Think.* During a read-aloud or discussion, instead of immediately raising their hands to answer a question, make a prediction, share an experience, or define a word, the children are asked to think of their own response for a few moments.
2. *Pair.* Students then turn and either talk to a partner or their small group. As with Turn and Talk, you might assign partners or groups in advance; they may stay together for a week or more. You should, however, observe the pairs or groups to make sure all children are participating.
3. *Share.* After everyone has had a chance to talk, you may call on individual or groups to report back to the larger group. As you listen in on the groups, you might identify ideas or examples that seem particularly worthwhile, and request that the children who came up with them share with the larger group.

Turn and Talk and Think Pair Share activities provide excellent extensions to read-alouds or other experiences. When children understand their format, they may apply them as they interact with their peers and apply their understanding of concepts and vocabulary in other planned activities such as cooperative learning formats or centers (Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006). These and other engaging activities that prompt children to report and retell encourage them to use new words and more complex sentence constructions (Ward, 2009).



Creative Dramatics

Like dramatic play centers (such as housekeeping or the post office) where children invent their own scenarios, creative dramatics are a way to encourage children's self-expression as well as vocabulary development. During creative dramatics, children act out memorable scenes from stories they have heard. This is first done under adult direction with the aim of retelling the story and involving lots of children as actors or audience. You will want to brainstorm with children about what characters will be needed and what each character will do. Then walk through your dramatization, posing questions and prompting language. Children are encouraged to add dialog or scenes to add to the story. Many children's picture books work (folktales are particularly good), but the following two compilations have brief stories ready to read to children with scenes to dramatize.

- Siks, G. B. (1958). *Creative dramatics: An art for children*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Ward, W. (1952). *Stories to dramatize*. Anchorage, KY: The Children's Theatre Press.

Children can also be encouraged to make up their own stories. Bhattacharyya (2010) describes a kindergarten classroom in which children dramatize familiar personal narratives and fairy tales as the basis for composing their own stories, both oral and written.

Stimulate retellings and dramatizations by supplying props such as puppets, flannel board cutouts, objects used in the story, or plastic figures. After you model the use of props or puppets with the whole class, place them in a center or make them available during activity time for children to use on their own. However, props are not always necessary in creative dramatics. To prepare for dramatizing a story, follow these steps:

1. After listening to a story, ask students to select a character and think about how that particular character acts—roaring like a lion after hearing *Leo the Lion*, or stirring the pot of pasta like Anthony in *Strega Nona* (Tomie dePaola).
2. Reread a short scene from a story; then have three or four students act out the scene through movement and recalling a few lines.
3. Ask children who were observing to share what they liked, as well as what might be improved the next time.
4. Ask another three or four students to try the same scene.

Acting Out Meanings

Young children love any type of movement activity. As they encounter new words through read-alouds and your use of sophisticated words (see page 13), take advantage of opportunities to act out the children's developing understandings (CCSS Language: Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: 4a, 5a, 5b, 5c, and 6, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use). For example, to support children's understanding of different types of words describing the act of walking after discussing the word *saunter* in Ezra Jack Keats's *A Snowy Day*, you may first demonstrate the terms *saunter*, *stroll*, *trot*, *meander*, *march*, *stride*, *tiptoe*, or *sashay* and then invite the children to do these actions (Templeton & Gehsmann, 2014). In so doing, you are supporting their developing awareness of the shades of meaning, or nuances, among words (Common Core State Standards, 2010). Verbs such as *walk*, *stroll*, and *march* are a good starting point because they are the easiest for children to distinguish between. Adjectives are just a bit more challenging, so begin with the frequently occurring ones such as *happy*, *sad*, *tiny*, *enormous*, and invite children to demonstrate them through facial expressions and bodily movement. This is particularly effective with children learning English.



Antonyms

Support children's explicit understanding of the relationships between words and the concepts they represent through an exploration of *antonyms*—words that are opposite in meaning. Begin by sharing concept books about opposites such as Eric Carle's *Opposites* or *Exactly the Opposite* by Tana Hoban, which feature colorful illustrations. Then engage children in acting out antonyms as they follow along with your directions and modeling. Call out commands such as these:



- Take a **big** step. Take a **little** step.
- Walk **fast**. Walk **slow**.
- Point **up**. Point **down**.
- Clap your hands **loudly**. Clap your hands **quietly**.
- Point to a **light** place in the room. Point to a **dark** place.
- Put your hand **over** your head. Put your hand **under** your chin.
- Make a **happy** face. Make a **sad** face.
- **Open** your mouth. **Close** your mouth.
- Raise your **right** hand. Raise your **left** hand.
- Come **here**. Go **there**.
- Show me how you feel when you are **hot**. When you are **cold**.
- Pretend to lift a **heavy** box. Pretend to lift a **light** box.
- Stand **on** the rug. Stand **off** the rug.
- Go **in** the door. Go **out** the door.

Once children are good at following your directions, challenge them by saying, “Show me the opposite of happy. Show me the opposite of fast.” Watch for different ways that they act out the opposites.

Experiences and Conversation

Reading aloud to children provides virtual experiences that can stimulate oral language and vocabulary learning, but real experiences with cooking, science experiments, special visitors, classroom pets, field trips, and so on are especially engaging and provide opportunities for verbal interactions. These experiences will be particularly important for English learners, but the presence of the “real world” is engaging for all young children. It is easy to think that experiences and conversations just happen, and, to a certain extent, they do; but planned experiences with careful attention to vocabulary and concepts are more likely to be fruitful. Even better, combining read-alouds with experiences supports the necessary repetition of targeted vocabulary and promotes linkages that facilitate learning. Because it is important for children to encounter new words and concepts in different ways, planning experiences that promote vocabulary learning and help maintain that vocabulary over time is critical.

Let’s say you have conducted a series of read-alouds about animals that make good pets, and you have decided to get a hamster for the classroom. The concepts and vocabulary that you could develop and use over time might include *hamster, male, female, habitat, nutrition, diet, exercise, bedding, gnaw, and nocturnal*. These words represent conceptual understandings you can develop about hamsters and are words children can then use in their daily conversations about hamsters. Use the same criteria outlined earlier to select words: utility, concreteness, opportunities for repetition, and relatedness to theme. An experience like caring for a classroom pet can lead to lots of reading and writing activities as well. You might create labels with the students’ help for the cage, water bottle, and exercise ball. Students might dictate their observations and insights about hamsters in the language experience approach (described in Chapter 6) or participate in an interactive writing activity (described in Chapter 4). In addition, you might ask students to illustrate and write about hamsters in their own journals.

Concept Sorts: Developing Big Ideas and Language

The human mind works by using a compare-and-contrast categorization system to develop concepts and establish relationships between concepts. Through comparing and contrasting objects and their features or attributes, children are able to create groups or categories (Clark, 2003). This process is the foundation of critical thinking (Gillet & Kita, 1979). At all levels of development, learners categorize objects, pictures, words, or phrases in what we call **concept sorts**. The ability to categorize demonstrates maturing thinking,

but this thinking needs to be developed through children’s conversations about why and how they are categorizing objects and pictures.

Children’s vocabulary grows and becomes more precise as they develop more complex concepts. You play an important role by labeling objects, actions, events, and feelings in meaningful contexts (Otto, 2010). For example, a young child might call any ride-on plaything a “bike” and point to a tricycle when asking for a turn. Your response might be, “Do you want to ride the tricycle? Tricycles have three wheels.” By supplying labels as well as the distinguishing characteristics, the child’s conceptual web or **semantic field** for “playthings with wheels” can grow to include big wheels, tractors, wheelbarrows, wagons, and scooters.

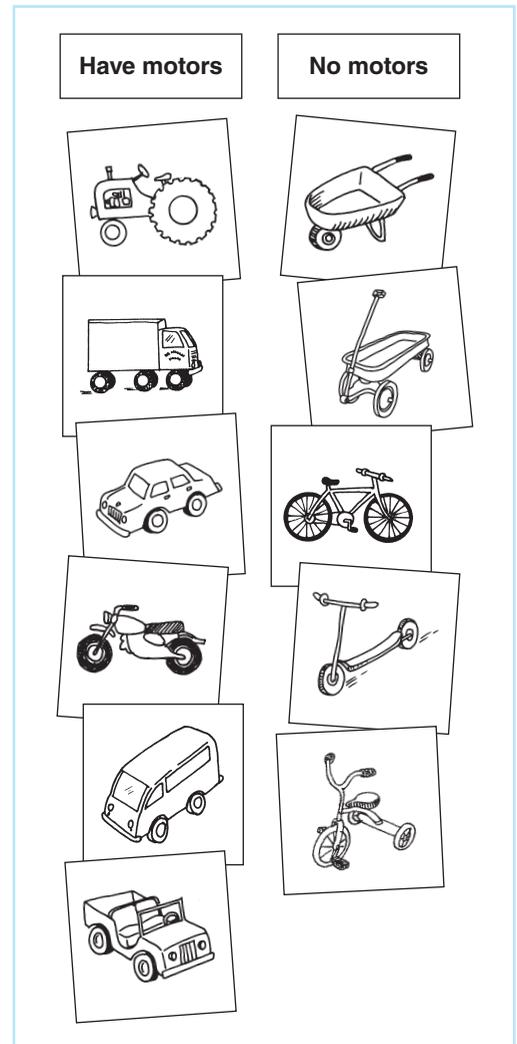
Concept sorts can develop deeper understanding about underlying concepts and the words that label these concepts, as well as how these concepts/words relate to other concepts and words within a semantic field. For example, a picture sort of vehicles might be used to extend a child’s concepts by assigning things with motors into one category and things that needed to be pedaled, pulled, or pushed into another. See Figure 1.1 for how such a sort might look along with labels agreed on by the children. The same pictures could also be sorted by the number of wheels (one: wheelbarrow; two: bicycle, scooter, and motorcycle; three: tractor and tricycle) or by those that have handles and those that have steering wheels. By attending to features such as wheels, motors, handlebars, and pedals and talking about these during the sorting process, children acquire more precise concepts as well as labels. Basic concept sorting tasks are a surprisingly simple way to engage English verbal interactions (Bear & Helman, 2004).

CONCEPT SORTS WITH CONCRETE OBJECTS. For young children, we begin sorting activities with concrete objects, then move to sorting activities with pictures. Concrete sorting activities (see Lesson 1.3 for an example) may involve, for example, pasta, buttons, or miniature dinosaur figurines. These objects are sorted by size, shape, color, or other attributes that children may notice. Using such concrete objects is an excellent way to introduce children to the idea or process of sorting. Importantly, they become aware of particular attributes and develop the ability to categorize objects according to those attributes through their growing awareness of comparison and contrast. At first, it is difficult for most young children to stay focused on a single attribute—they may start off sorting by shape and then, in the middle of the activity, switch to color. As children have the opportunities to sort real, concrete objects that have different features, encourage and support them in *talking about* why they are sorting the objects the way they are. By beginning with concrete sorts, you are setting the stage for moving to picture sorts and eventually phonics sorts, described in Chapter 5.

The children may sort many different types of concrete objects—including themselves—and there are many ways of exploring the different types of categories and their attributes or features. Here are some additional possibilities:

- Children: male/female, age, favorite color, wearing pants/shorts/dresses
- Bottle caps: material (plastic or metal), size, color, print/no print, texture
- Buttons: two holes/four holes/no holes, shapes, colors, size
- Shoes: girls’/boys’, right/left, tie/Velcro/slip-on
- Mittens and gloves: knit/woven, right/left
- Lunch containers: boxes/bags, plastic/metal/nylon
- Legos: color, shape, number of pegs, length
- Food: sweet, sour, bitter, salty, fruits, vegetables, grains

FIGURE 1.1 Concept Sort for Vehicles



LESSON 1.3 Pasta sort

Sorting different types of pasta according to the basic attributes of size, shape, or color is an excellent way to introduce the idea of concrete concept sorts. (CCSS Language: 5a, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)

Materials

This sort will require three to six types of pasta that vary in size and in shape. You may either buy two or three different colors of pasta or you may dye your own: Shake the pasta in a jar with a tablespoon of alcohol and a few drops of food coloring, then lay it out on newspaper to dry. Make sure that each color has a variety of shapes and sizes. Children can sort the pasta on paper divided into columns as shown in Figure 1.2, or simply into piles.

Step 1. Invite students to sort and assess

Give each child a handful of pasta and a sorting paper. Ask children to come up with their own way of grouping the pasta. This will provide you the opportunity to evaluate which children understand attribute sorting and which will need more guidance. When they finish their first sort, ask the children to share their groups. Discuss *how* they decided to place different pieces of pasta in different groups or categories. Emphasize the different ways—the different features or attributes—by which they can sort.

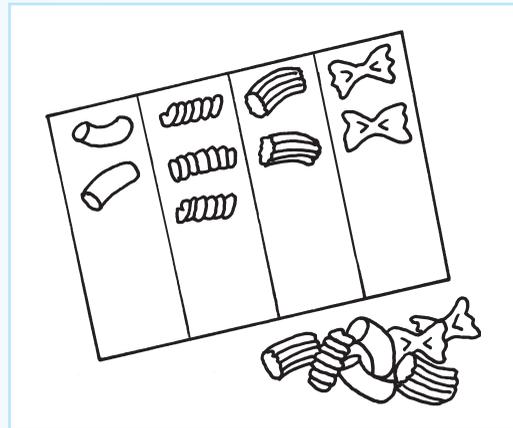
Step 2. Model

If most or all of the children do not appear to understand how to come up with their own groupings, then you will model one possibility: “Hmmm . . . Let’s see: Are all of our pasta pieces the same color? What different colors do we have? I wonder . . . What do you think? Could we sort our pasta by the different colors? We could? Let’s try that!” You could then model how to begin the sort, saying “I’m going to look first for all of my red pieces of pasta. . .” and so on.

Step 3. Ask the children to re-sort

Decide on a category different from the first one to sort again. To conclude the lesson, as well as have a concrete example and reminder of their sort, have the children glue the pasta onto their paper by categories; then label the sort. At first, you may label them, but, depending on the children’s knowledge about print and the alphabet (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4), you may encourage them to write their own label.

FIGURE 1.2 Paste the Pasta



native-English-speaking partners can supply unknown words, and, in the process of talking about the sort, new vocabulary is learned and exercised.

Pictures may be glued down into categories and children can be encouraged to label the pictures and categories, spelling as best they can as shown in Figure 1.3. In addition they should have the opportunity to write about their sorts and what they are noticing and learning. After exploring animals and comparing and contrasting farm animals with zoo animals, one kindergarten teacher helped the children create their own animal books. In addition to drawing pictures of their favorite animals, the children were asked by their teacher to write about an animal or animals. Their efforts ranged from scribbles and random letters to “readable” text—for example, I LIK THE LINS N TGRS.

The pictures used in concept sorts may be words that are new to students, and they need to be directly taught. It will be important to talk about the meaning of the word and to use the words repeatedly each time they are used in sorting. For example, when sorting birds and animals, it may be helpful to stop and talk about the meanings of the words *claw* and *hoof*. English learners may also be acquiring the names of more common objects, such as *pig* and *duck*. As they sort, the children should be encouraged to name the pictures; this provides additional practice, and the words become more familiar as the children hear one another pronouncing the new words. The children should then be asked to describe their categories.

BOOKS AND CONCEPT SORTS. Concept sorts are also an easy way to extend read-alouds and provide additional exposure to new vocabulary (Carpenter, 2010). After listening to *Are You a Butterfly?*, children are provided picture cards to sort into three groups: butterflies, caterpillars, and eggs. Through this type of categorization activity, children move beyond their basic awareness of butterflies to an understanding of the life cycle of egg to caterpillar to butterfly to egg. This book also presents an excellent opportunity to develop oral language with creative dramatics as children re-enact events in the life cycle of a butterfly. Lesson 1.4 offers an example using the picture storybook *Froggy Gets Dressed* (Jonathan London), and Lesson 1.5 is based on a book about colors.

Read more about encouraging children’s writing in Chapters 3 and 5.

LESSON 1.4 Concept sort for clothing

***Froggy Gets Dressed*, by Jonathon London, tells the story of a young frog who wants to go outside and play in the snow but needs to put on his winter clothing first. He has plenty to remember, and children will giggle along as he forgets essential pieces of clothing. (CCSS Foundational Skills: 1b, Print Concepts; 2d, Phonological Awareness; 3a, Phonics and Word Recognition; CCSS Language: 5a and 5c, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)**

Materials

Collect real objects or pictures of items suggested by *Froggy Gets Dressed*—for example, socks, boots, hats, scarves, mittens, and pants. Also have on hand objects or pictures of items that children would not wear out in the cold, such as a bathing suit or sandals.

Step 1. Invite students to sort

After reading *Froggy Gets Dressed*, the children can be introduced to a concept sort. Gather together around a large table or pocket chart, and ask them to choose the items they would need to put on before going out in the snow. Place those items in one pile. Place items that are not appropriate for cold weather in a separate pile.

(continued)

LESSON 1.4 Concept sort for clothing (*continued*)

Step 2. Sort, check, reflect, and re-sort

After the items have been sorted, ask the children to describe how the items in each category are alike. Then ask them to think about a word or words that “we can use to describe or label each of our groups.” They might describe the categories as “for the cold” and “for a warm day,” for example. Print their selected words on cards, making sure they can see you as you write. Say each word slowly and talk about the sounds you hear in the words and the letters you need to spell them. You might also give each child in the group a card to label one of the individual items in a group, sounding out the name as best as they are able.

Step 3. Individual sorting

Keep the items and key word cards available so that children will be free to redo the sort on their own or with a partner at another time, perhaps during free time or center time. Encourage them to talk as they sort.

Step 4. Paste and label

Divide a section of a bulletin board or a large sheet of paper into two sections, each labeled with a key word. If children work independently, a sheet of paper may be folded into two sections. Children may be asked to draw items, or they might be given a collection of magazines or catalogs to search for pictures to cut out and paste into the correct category. You will need to model how to look through magazines and catalogs at first: Turn each page slowly, spending time looking at each page, encouraging the children to name what they see, then deciding whether the pictures fit their categories. Encourage them to write and label the pictures.

Step 5. Extend

Froggy Gets Dressed is a great introduction to healthy dressing habits. The same pictures the children have drawn or cut out can serve as the beginning pictures for categories such as “What can cover my legs, chest, or head?” You can also sort clothing by color, design, or fabric.

LESSON 1.5 Concept color sort

Concept books are designed around a single topic like colors, opposites, shapes, or numbers and provide an excellent introductions to concept sorts. To introduce a color sort, start with a book like *Mary Wore Her Red Dress and Henry Wore His Green Sneakers* (Merle Peek), *Is It Red? Is It Yellow? Is It Blue?* (Tana Hoban), or *White Rabbit’s Color Book* (Alan Baker). (CCSS Language: 2d, Conventions of Standard English; 5c, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)

Step 1. Share the book

Because concept books are primarily illustrations and have little text, engage children in discussing what they see. Then provide the appropriate labels: “This is a book about colors. Here is a picture of a toy school bus. What color is the school bus? Yes, the school bus is yellow. Now it’s your turn. What do you see here?”

Step 2. Sort objects or pictures

If you’ve not already done so, get in the habit of collecting objects or pictures of objects that you may use for your sorting activities. When preparing for your children’s sorting based on color, you should be able to find real objects around the classroom such as toys, markers, and books. Explain to the children that they are going to help you sort the objects by color. Model how you will do this, using complete sentences: “Here is a red ball. I will put the ball with the other things that are red.” After the sort is

completed, support children in making generalizations such as, “How are all these things alike? Yes, all the things in this category are *red*.”

Step 3. Label

With help from the children, make labels for each category: “Boys and girls, I am going to label this category by writing ‘red’ on this card. What letter do you think I need to write down first? Listen, *rrrr*-ed. . . .”

Step 4. Independent work

Place sorts where children can easily access them on their own, preferably with a partner, and encourage them to talk as they sort. In addition, students can look for more pictures in magazines or catalogs that fit the categories. They may also draw pictures, cut them out, and then paste them into their categories. Importantly, they should be encouraged to write the name of each category.

THEMATIC UNITS AS A STARTING POINT FOR CONCEPT SORTS. Concept sorts in the context of thematic units of study provide a rich opportunity for introducing, reviewing, and extending the learning.

Animal Concept Sort

This sort is an excellent way to introduce a thematic unit. You will need plastic animals or animal pictures.

Ask children to think of ways that the animals can be grouped together. They may notice different possibilities, such as fur or feather coat, dangerous or not dangerous, and color. Children will often realize that some animals may be grouped in more than one way. If your unit is based on exploring animal *habitats*, then you will guide the children in sorting animals according to the places they live. If you are studying the food chain, you may guide the children in sorting the animals according to meat eaters, plant eaters, and those that eat both. In addition to the great vocabulary that will come up related to animal and food names, children will also develop an important concept that later in their academic experience will help them access the more sophisticated labels of *carnivores*, *herbivores*, and *omnivores*.



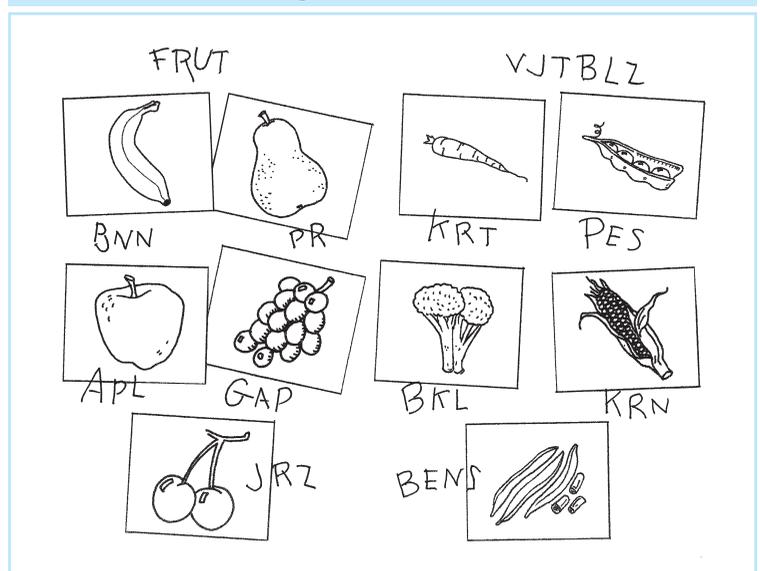
Fruit and Vegetable Concept Sort

Bring a collection of real or plastic fruits and vegetables to share or use pictures of fruits and vegetables. This sort may be introduced through books featuring food.



1. Display the pictures and invite the children to think of those that might go together. Encourage them to think of several possibilities. Record the ideas on a chart. Some possibilities include big/little, fruit/vegetable, peel it/don't peel it, green/not green, and tastes sweet/doesn't taste sweet.
2. Sort the produce by the identified categories, and talk about why each item is sorted into a particular category: “An apple is a fruit, so I will put it with the orange and grapes.”
3. After discussing different categories, have the children decide the suggestion they each liked the best. Give kindergarten children construction paper to label their categories. They can then draw or cut out pictures for each category. Encourage them to label their pictures and categories, as shown in Figure 1.3.

FIGURE 1.3 Fruits and Vegetables Sort



Keeping Track of Vocabulary Growth

Instructional activities described in this chapter such as retellings and concept sorts can also be used to measure progress in children’s vocabulary growth. Teachers can note increases in word use by tallying the number of ideas, facts, or concepts expressed in the retelling or in the explanation of the sort. Retell assessments have been shown to be authentic, valid, and reliable means of assessing understanding (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Maxwell, 1988). Noting the number of objects, pictures, or items correctly sorted into conceptual categories can also yield a reliable means of assessing depth of receptive vocabulary (Ward, 2009). Other developmentally appropriate ways of assessing receptive vocabulary growth in emergent learners include pointing to pictures that answer direct questions (e.g., “Which picture is the veterinarian?”) or answering sets of yes/no questions (e.g., “Is an acorn a seed?” “Do plants grow from seeds?” “Do all seeds look the same?”). Kearns and Biemiller (2010/2011) have validated a simple vocabulary measure that asks children to get two yes/no questions correct for a particular word to assess their knowledge of it. For example, to assess the word *season*, you might ask, “Is fall a season when leaves turn brown?” (yes) and “Is it an example of a season when I go to bed?” (no).

Connecting with Families and Communities

There are many ways that parents can support vocabulary learning (Templeton, 2009). Figure 1.4 provides an example of the kind of letter you might want to send home. In addition, remember to translate letters so they can be understood by families of children learning English as a new language.

Frequently Asked Questions about Bilingual Language Learning

Many teachers and parents have questions about how using students’ home languages affects their learning of English. They often fear that working with two or more languages will confuse children or cause them to be delayed in their language learning. In this section we briefly address some of the questions that have come up in our work with early childhood educators and families regarding oral language learning in more than one language.

1. *Are children likely to experience confusion or language delays because of exposure to two or more languages?* De Houwer (1995) clearly outlines the research base: There is no evidence that students who operate in multilingual worlds are any more likely to experience language delay or become confused in their language acquisition. Instead, the use of the home language can provide great support for the acquisition of a new language. In addition, becoming bilingual can be a socially and intellectually empowering experience.
2. *What if a student uses more than one language within the same sentence or conversation?* Code switching (or moving between languages or registers within languages) can happen in many ways—at the level of the conversation, the sentence or phrase, or even within a word. For example, a student who is explaining an event that occurred may introduce a word that is unique in one language because there is no direct translation or it holds special cultural meaning (e.g., “My *tío* came to visit.”). As students learn language they can also play with its forms, such as when one student added *-cito* (showing affection) to the end of his friend’s name in class (*Briancito*). These creative

FIGURE 1.4 Letter to Parents

Dear Parent,

You play an important role in helping your child develop vocabulary and learn new things about the world through oral language. This knowledge is the foundation for the more advanced reading and writing your child will do throughout the grades.

Talk with your child. Explain what you are thinking or doing (“I’m hungry. It’s time to fix some lunch.”). Ask questions that require more than a yes or no response (“What shall we make?” rather than “Do you want a peanut butter sandwich?”). Use new words (“Let’s make something *delicious*.”). Share observations (“I saw a squirrel stealing bird food this morning.”). Invite your child to respond (“Why do you think he is taking the seeds? Maybe he will store them up for winter.”) You do not need to teach children how to talk, but you need to model your own talk and encourage them to talk.

Teach your child nursery rhymes, jump rope jingles, and songs that you remember from your own childhood. Explain what any unusual words mean. Change the words in the songs or make up your own songs or rhymes with your child’s name.

Read to your child from a variety of books. Take the time to point out things in pictures and explain the meaning of words they might not understand. Encourage your child to ask questions and say things about the story. Reread favorite books and take turns letting your child “read” to you. Pretending to read is an important first step in learning to read.

Tell your child stories and encourage your family to tell stories. Storytelling is a way that cultures have passed on values and traditions for millions of years and it is a way to build relationships with others. Families often have their own collection of stories to share, like the time Granddad lost his glasses in the snow or the time Aunt Crissy brought home a lost puppy. Children love to hear about the things you did as a child or the things they did when they were younger. In addition you can tell traditional stories like folktales and fairy tales instead of reading aloud.

uses of language should not be seen as errors, but rather as children’s meaningful application of multiple language systems.

3. *As a teacher, should I ask parents to speak in English at home with their children?* Basically, the answer to this question is no. Children need their parents to speak to them in the language they know best, and as educators we want to encourage the multilingual potentials of our students. When students learn words and concepts in their home languages, educators can build on that conceptual knowledge in English at school. Children who learn rhymes and stories in their home languages will be better able to appreciate others in English. Children who suddenly experience a withdrawal of a home language are likely to experience emotional and psychological difficulties (De Houwer, 1995). Encouraging parents to use only the language of schooling also decreases the self-esteem and bilingual capacities of the child.
4. *What if I don’t speak the home languages of my students?* In today’s linguistically diverse classrooms, even bilingual teachers are unlikely to speak the languages of all their students. There are still many things you can do to help your students use their home languages to learn English, and you can show your interest by learning about their home languages.
 - Ask students to teach you words from their home languages.
 - When you teach a new word, ask students to share what it is called in their home language.

- Allow students to translate ideas into their home languages for each other.
- Encourage students to tell or write stories in their home language.
- Bring in print or audio materials in students' home languages.
- Invite family members or community representatives who speak other languages to come to the classroom.
- Send notes to families in students' home languages so that classroom ideas can be discussed in a familiar language.
- Get excited about the many languages you hear in your classroom, and notice their commonalities and unique aspects.

Multilingual Resources

There are many web-based resources available to support you in learning about and including multilingual materials from a variety of heritage languages in your preK or kindergarten classroom. A quick search of “rhymes in _____” (language background), or “cultural information about _____” (ethnic or cultural group) will lead to plenty of examples that will open doors to new perspectives and understandings. Sometimes even this small amount of information will help you in framing questions and conversations with students and their families. In addition, school districts that experience a substantial influx of students from particular linguistic backgrounds often post dictionaries, cultural information, and translations of parent education materials on their websites. Look online for the UCLA Language Materials Project for background information and teaching resources for more than 150 languages. In the current digital age, knowledge about the worlds our students come from is literally at our fingertips.

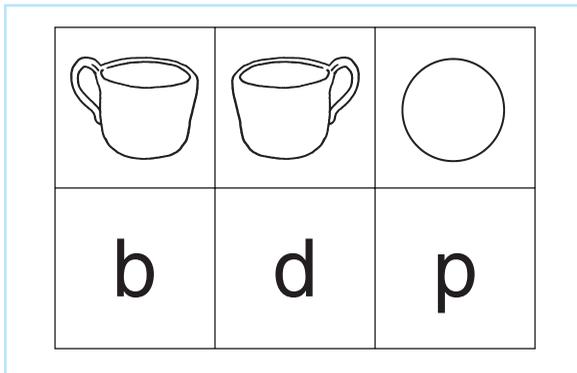


Alphabet: Letter Recognition and Production

The traditional simple song known as “Bingo” is easily taught to four- and five-year-olds and can be used to help them learn the alphabet. The song goes like this: “There was a farmer had a dog and Bingo was his name-oh. B-I-N-G-O, B-I-N-G-O, B-I-N-G-O, And Bingo was his name-oh.” The verse repeats, but instead of naming the first letter, the children clap for the *B*: [clap]-I-N-G-O. On the third round the first two letters are replaced with claps and the last verse replaces claps for all five of the letters. (There are many versions of this on YouTube if you don’t know the song.)

After teaching children the song “Bingo” over several days, Jackie lays out large alphabet cards for each of the five letters, explaining to her preK class that the letters spell the dog’s name. The children work together to put the letters in order to spell Bingo, and then children line up to take turns stepping from card to card as the letters are called in the song. As the song progresses to the next round, a letter is turned over to indicate a clap until all the letters are face down. (Children could also be given the letter cards to hold up as it is named, turning each card around when it is to be replaced with a clap.) Jackie has created an additional version of the song featuring her dog Lucky. The song then goes like this: “There was a teacher had a dog and Lucky was his name-o. L-U-C-K-Y . . .” Children whose names are spelled with five letters could also be featured: “There was a teacher had a boy and Jacob was his name-o.” Additional versions give children practice with additional letters. After modeling this with a large group, Jackie makes the letter cards available during free play time and children do the activity independently. A similar activity can be done with the song “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” using letter cards for the traditional E, I, E, I, O or a variation such as A, E, I, O, U.

FIGURE 2.1 Direction Matters in Print



Alphabet knowledge is the strongest early predictor of later reading success (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). This should not be too surprising when you consider that visual familiarity with the letters and the ability to distinguish between them is necessary to make sense of printed words. However, there is a lot to learn about the alphabet itself. Letters have names, sounds, shapes, a set order, upper- and lowercase forms, and they must be written in particular ways.

The letters of the alphabet are arbitrary abstract symbols that can take children several years to learn completely. Of the 26 capital and 26 lowercase letters, there are only 12 whose upper and lowercase shapes are identical or almost so (*Ss*, *Xx*, *Pp*, etc.), leaving 40 distinctive shapes to learn (Ehri & Roberts, 2006). Letters that share common visual features, such as *m* and *n* or *i* and *j*, may be confused for some time. And, unlike other

aspects of life, directional orientation is vital. In the three-dimensional world, a cup is a cup whether you approach it from the left or from the right or the top, as shown in Figure 2.1. Not so with letters: A *b* is a *b* and a *d* is a *d*. Direction makes a difference in print.

Letter Names and Letter Recognition

The first step in learning the alphabet for most children is learning the letter names in sequence as they sing the traditional ABC song. A list of these letter names can be found in Table 2.1. Note that many letter names share similar sounds and are often confused. The letter name *B* or /bee/, for example, shares the ending **vowel** sound with /dee/, /tee/,

TABLE 2.1 Names of the Letters of the Alphabet

A ay	H aich	O oh	V vee
B bee	I ie	P pee	W double yoo
C see	J jay	Q kyoo	X ecks
D dee	K kay	R are	Y wie
E ee	L el	S es	Z zee
F ef	M em	T tee	
G gee	N en	U yoo	

/pee/, and so forth. The letters *G* and *J* start with the same sound (/jee/ and /jay/), as do *Q* and *K* (/kyoo/ and /kay/). (Slash marks indicate the sound of the letter or letters inside.)

To reduce the memory load and possible confusions, some literacy programs avoid teaching students the names of the letters (Reading Mastery or Distar, for example). There is no strong evidence to support this practice though, and learning to associate just a sound with a symbol may be much more difficult than a name (McBride-Chang, 1999). Sounds make poor labels (Ehri & Roberts, 2006). For one thing, consonant sounds are often hard to make in isolation. Just try to say the sound for *B* without adding a vowel sound as one does in /buh/. In addition, some letters, such as *C*, have more than one sound. Would we call it /k/ or /s/? Both are already sounds for other letters! Many children learn the letter names at home before school, so it seems artificial to avoid using the names in school. And there is no well-known ABC song with just sounds!

We believe that names are useful labels when talking to children about letters, and research has established that children who know the names of letters learn the letter–sound associations more readily than those without letter–name knowledge (Kim, Petscher, Foorman, & Zhou, 2010). This is probably because most letter names offer clues to at least one sound (Share, 2004; Treiman & Kessler, 2003). Consider the list of letter names in Table 2.1. Children learn sounds of letters more readily when those names begin with consonant sounds such as *K* (/kay/) or *T* (/tee/) than those beginning with vowels such as *F* (/ef/) or *L* (/el/) (Evans, Bell, Shaw, Moreti, & Page, 2006; Treiman, Weatherston, & Berch, 1994; Kim et al., 2010). A few letter names do not offer clues to the sounds they represent. The letter name for *W* is “double u”; for *Y* it is “wie”; and for *H* is “aich”. However, the name for *H* does end with the /ch/ sound, and young spellers may spell *chin* as HN. To summarize, letter names fall into four categories:

1. Some letter names begin with an initial consonant letter sound: *B, C, D, G, J, K, P, Q, T, V, Z*
2. Some letter names begin with a vowel sound (often short *-e*) and end with a consonant letter sound: *F, L, S, X, M, N, R*
3. Vowel letter names are the same as the sounds for long vowels: *A, E, I, O, U*
4. Some letter names offer no clue to the consonant sound: *H, W, Y*

The names of letters serve as a reference for children when they first begin to invent spellings, even before formal schooling, and initial sounds are most likely to be represented first (Henderson, 1981; Read, 1971). Young writers rely on letter names to spell phonetically

FIGURE 2.2 Ellie's Writing Attempt: "When are you coming?"



The image shows a child's early writing attempt for the sentence "When are you coming?". The letters are written in a simple, blocky, and somewhat irregular style. The letters are Y, N, R, U, K, and M, arranged in a single row from left to right. The letter Y is on the far left, followed by N, R, U, K, and M on the far right. The letters are black on a white background.

See Chapter 5 for more information about how children develop as spellers.

or alphabetically. See Figure 2.2 for an example of a child's early writing attempt ("When are you coming?"). As Ellie wrote a note to her sister Meg, she spelled *are* as R and *you* as U. According to letter name logic, there is no need to add vowels because they were already part of the letter names. When you say the name of the letter Y ("wie"), you can feel your lips moving to make the shape of /wuh/, the sound we associate with *W*. Consequently, Ellie quite logically spelled *when* as YN. Long vowels that "say their names" are usually the first vowels used in writing. For example, children might spell *cake* as KAK. We have noticed that Spanish speakers often use vowels in their spelling earlier than English speakers. This may be because Spanish is a syllabic language in which the vowels stand out more (Helman, 2004). Nevertheless, there is a reciprocal relationship between learning letter names and letter sounds in most alphabetic languages. That is, learning either one supports the acquisition of the other.

Learning about the Alphabet

Many children will have learned letters at home from parents and siblings, who pointed out the shapes and provided them with the letter names while eating, dressing, playing, bathing, reading, shopping, and traveling. Magnetic letters on the refrigerator door, alphabet puzzles, alphabet blocks, alphabet books, and alphabet games are staples in many print-rich homes (Adams, 1990). One study found that middle-class four-year-olds knew an average of 54 percent of the letter names and five-year-olds knew 85 percent (Worden & Boettcher, 1990). This means that children who come to preschool and kindergarten without exposure to the alphabet from home or daycare are already well behind their classmates in terms of alphabetic familiarity. They need teachers to help them develop a variety of concrete connections with the letters in a direct but game-like manner, such as the "Bingo" song activity described previously.

Children tend to learn the letters in their own names first (Bloodgood, 1999; Treiman & Broderick, 1998). This is probably because names are part of their identities. Children are excited to see their names on labels, nametags, or lunch bags. The order of learning the remaining letters can be influenced by several factors. Kindergarteners master capital letters most readily. Capitals are considered more visually distinct; are easier to form; and are featured in games, books, and curricula for preschoolers. Parents and caregivers emphasize children's names and refer to them in discussing letters—especially the first letter, which is capitalized (Levin & Aram, 2004, Evans et al., 2006). *V*, *W*, and *Y* are the hardest of capital letters to learn, perhaps because they all look alike or because, in the case of *W* and *Y*, their names do not reflect their letter sounds.

Research indicates that some letters are harder to learn than others, which may mean that they require more attention in the classroom. The lowercase letters that are easiest to learn are the ones most similar to their capital forms, such as *Cc*, *Xx*, and *Zz* (Huang & Invernizzi, 2012; Turnbull, Bowles, Skibbe, Justice, & Wiggins, 2010). The lowercase *g* is one of the hardest to learn, perhaps because there are two distinct lowercase forms (*g*, *g*) and neither of them bears a visual relationship to the capital *G*. Lowercase letters *b*, *d*, *p*, and *q* provide well-known difficulties because of their similarities; however, *p* is not as readily confused as the others, perhaps because it is visually similar to capital *P*. The lowercase *q* is the hardest of all letters to name (Evans et al., 2006), perhaps because children seldom encounter it and confuse it with *p*. No single characteristic explains why some letters are easier than others. *X*, for example, is rare in reading materials and children's names but is one of the first to be learned, probably because of its visual distinctness. *O* is also one of the easiest—this may be because circles show up early in children's first drawings and the round *O* is therefore a familiar shape.

Writing the Alphabet

The ability to write the letters is an important skill that is highly correlated with literacy learning in preschool children (Puranik, Lonigan, & Kim, 2011). Writing a letter from memory (not just copying) requires that the student retrieve its visual representation and then coordinate the fine motor movements needed to produce it (Berninger, 1999). There is good evidence that the motoric act of letter formation helps to secure the visual representation of the letter in the brain (Bara & Gentaz, 2011), and children who can write letters with ease can give more attention to spelling and composing as they learn to read and write (Graham, Berninger, Abbott, Abbot, & Whitaker, 1997).

Although there are different handwriting programs and different materials used to teach the physical act of writing (including varying pencil sizes and types of paper), research has not established the superiority of one over the other (Asher, 2006). However, there are good reasons to teach young children proper pencil grip as well as efficient, accurate letter formation so that they do not develop bad habits that are hard to break later (such as starting letters at the bottom or retracing lines). Consistency and some focused practice on one letter or similar letters are important as children are first learning letter formation (Asher, 2006). In addition, children benefit from the chance to experiment with different writing tools and writing surfaces (Mayer, 2007).

Some letters will be more difficult than others for children to produce. Letters with slanted lines, like *Y* and *K*, seem especially challenging. Kaitlyn's attempts to write the first letter in her name when she was four years old is shown in Figure 2.3. It was not until kindergarten that she was able to produce a more conventional *K*.

FIGURE 2.3 Kaitlyn's Early Efforts at Writing the Letter *K*



Font Variations

There are many styles or fonts that exist in the world of print, and these variations add to the difficulty of learning to identify letters. For example, the letters *A* and *G* have two distinctly different lowercase forms (a versus *ɑ* and *g* versus *g*), and children may think these are different letters if variations are not explicitly pointed out. Children eventually come to see the regularities of letter shapes by noting the salient, stable characteristics of letters in many contexts and as represented in different fonts, sizes, shapes, and textures. By extracting the “*M*-ness” across all the variations of different *M* font styles, an essential concept of *M* is formed (see Figure 2.4). Additional encounters with *M* add new attributes to the concept of the letter, and explicit talk about these variations helps students remember the visual features that are characteristic of particular letters.

FIGURE 2.4 Font Styles



No More Letter of the Week!

Letter of the week activities have been a longstanding staple in many early childhood classrooms, but we have several concerns about this approach. Studying one letter at a time overlooks the importance of comparing and contrasting letters—children need to learn what something is not, as well as what it is. Reutzel's research (2008) showed that it was better to teach a new letter each day than to spend an entire week on a single letter. Letter

of the week activities do not serve the needs of children who come to kindergarten already knowing all, or most, of their letters and who are ready for more challenging activities than pasting macaroni in the shape of the letter *M*. And for children who do not already know most letters, one letter a week for kindergarten is much too slow. There are 26 letters and approximately 36 weeks in the school year, so a letter a week sets a very slow pace. Expectations in many school systems are that kindergarten children will acquire a sight vocabulary and be reading simple, patterned texts by the end of the year. To meet these goals, complete alphabet knowledge is required long before the last 10 weeks of school.

Instead of approaching the alphabet as one letter per week, we suggest that four- and five-year-olds be immersed in the study of letters—all the letters. Alphabet immersion can be accomplished in many ways, but one activity we especially like (and describe later in this chapter) is to teach children the letters in classmate's names and then have the children use the names daily for taking attendance, making choices, taking turns, or identifying belongings. Children are highly motivated to learn their own names and the names of friends, and names serve as a powerful springboard to recognizing and writing the letters of the alphabet. Letters in names take on the personalities of the owners: *K* is Kaylee's letter and *T* is Tyler's letter. An alphabetic display of classmates' names and photos becomes an important learning resource in the classroom and should be posted where children have easy access to it.

Teaching the Letters of the Alphabet

Exposure to the alphabet is nicely accomplished as you share alphabet books, talk about letters in many contexts, and teach children to track the letters as they sing the alphabet sound. However, explicit instruction and extended practice are needed as well. The alphabet activities and games described in this chapter are designed to develop different aspects of alphabet knowledge, including letter naming, letter recognition (both capitals and lowercase), and letter production. Learning the sounds associated with letters begins here but is more thoroughly addressed in the chapter on phonics, Chapter 5.

In preK some teachers might prefer to start with capital letters, but the world of print is full of both capital and lowercase letters, so introduce children to both as soon as possible. When working with children, use the terms *capital* (or uppercase) and *lowercase*. The terms *big* and *little* are confusing because some capital and lowercase letters are the same height (*B/b*, *L/l*, *F/f*) and because the letters children will see around them vary in how large they are printed. Alphabet charts should include both capital and lowercase letters.

Getting Started with the Alphabet

Learning the alphabet song is the traditional first step in learning the letters. The rhythm and rhyme will help children master it with relative ease. However, children may not realize that the song refers to individual letters unless you point to letters as you sing.



Learn the Alphabet Song and Track the Letters

Teach the alphabet song to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and sing it every day until everyone knows the sequence by heart. You may have recorded versions, or you may find animated versions online that you can play for the children. The song teaches the names and the order of the letters, serving as a point of reference for years to come. (Some adults still find themselves humming the song when trying to find something in alphabetical order!) While singing the song, point to the letters on an alphabet strip large enough for all to see. Once children learn the sequence, let them follow along on the posted strip, or provide each person with an individual alphabet strip (found in Appendix B) so students can begin to match what they are saying to the letters. Separate the sequence of "LMNOP" and slow it down so children hear each letter. Pointing to the letters will help children understand that "LMNOP" is five letters and not one long word.



Talk about Letters in the Environment

Letters are everywhere in the environment, so take the time to draw the children's attention to letters in your classroom and around the school building. Look for the *X* in *exit* and talk about what *exit* means. Point out the difference between the first letters in *girls* and *boys* on the restroom doors. Try to find every letter of the alphabet someplace in your room or in the school building. Take digital photos of signs to make an electronic slide show or to add to a class alphabet book.

Alphabet Books and Extensions

Sharing alphabet books provides a context in which the forms and features of print, including letters, can be discussed with young children (Smolkin, Yaden, Brown, & Hofius, 1992). Reading alphabet books aloud also has the potential to support children's development of beginning phonemic awareness as well as alphabet knowledge (Murray, Stahl, and Ivy, 1996). However, some ABC books have better potential for learning letters than others, and how teachers use the books will influence student learning.

Although some alphabet books serve as a way to teach letter identification and letter sounds to young children, many alphabet books are designed for other purposes and a range of ages. Some are in the form of a storybook, such as Wanda Gag's classic *ABC Bunny*. Sometimes they showcase the art of the illustrator, such as *Alphabet City* by Stephen Johnson or *The Z Was Zapped* by Chris Van Allsburg. Other books offer content information and new vocabulary words, such as *The Underwater Alphabet Book* by Jerry Pollatto. Some of these books are appropriate for young children just learning the alphabet; others are best used with primary or even upper elementary students. Table 2.2 lists some of the factors to consider when selecting books. One research study found that teachers were most likely to focus on comprehension when using alphabet storybooks and did not talk about the letters and sounds much at all (Bradley & Jones, 2007).

It is actually rather hard to find a basic alphabet book with easily identified pictures that represent the prominent sound or sounds of each letter. One example is *26 Letters and 99 Cents* by Tana Hoban, which offers one familiar object for each letter. When selecting alphabet books for the purpose of teaching beginning sound associations, there are some cautions to keep in mind. Look for books that feature familiar objects that students can name so that they are saying the correct label to go with a letter (i.e., not saying *cow* for a *yak*). Many publishers of little books such as Rigby and The Wright Group have a book for each letter of the alphabet and, because they are designed specifically to teach letter-sound correspondences, the pictures are of everyday objects that the children are likely to know and name accurately. These types of books are especially useful for English learners who need to master basic vocabulary words.

TABLE 2.2 Alphabet Book Selection

When choosing alphabet books for letter instruction, try to find books that have the following qualities.

- Show clearly recognizable capital and lowercase letter forms in a simple font style
- Use pictures of common objects that young children can name accurately
- Avoid using consonant blends or digraphs for initial sounds
- Avoid a confusing array of sounds for the vowel letters and words in which the vowel is part of a letter name (Children only hear the *n* in *Indian*, the *l* in *elephant*, and the *r* in *artist*—not the vowel that comes before.)

Many letters have more than one sound, so some ambiguity is hard to avoid in alphabet books. You will often find hard and soft sounds for *G* (*goat* and *giraffe*) and *C* (*cat* and *circle*) mixed together on the same page. **Digraphs** like *sh* (*shell*) and *ch* (*chicks*) may be found on the *S* and *C* pages. This can be confusing to children because the sounds of /sh/ and /ch/ are different from the letter sounds for the single consonants *S* and *C* respectively. Words beginning with **blends**, such as *dr*, do not offer the best exemplars for a letter sound. For example, *dragon* might be found on the *D* page, but the initial consonant sound is really more like the sound of *J*, as in /jragon/, than *D*. **Vowels** represent many sounds, so *apple*, *ape*, and *artist* may appear on the same page representing the short, long, and *r*-controlled sounds of *a* respectively. *X* usually sounds like *Z* when at the beginning of words. At some point, these variations are welcome. But to children who do not yet know how to read or spell, the word *elephant* begins with “L,” not a short *e*, and the word *inch* starts with “N.” It’s important to be aware of these confusing examples and be prepared to discuss them explicitly with your students. For example, Lois Ehlert’s *Eating the Alphabet: Fruits and Vegetables from A to Z* features *jicama* and *jalapeño* on the *J* page. This provides an opportunity to recognize that the *J* in Spanish is pronounced like the English *H*—an important point if you have a child named José in your classroom. Likewise, if you have a *Cynthia* or *Georgio*, you will want to point out pictures that have the soft sound for *C* or *G* and explain that some letters have more than one sound.

Don’t worry if an alphabet book isn’t perfect. Just be prepared to address the complexities as you share the book with your children. Start with books that are more straightforward until children become familiar with the letters; then introduce more challenging books.

SHARE ALPHABET BOOKS. Collect a variety of age-appropriate alphabet books to share with your students and keep in your room. Some of our favorite titles appropriate for preK and kindergarten are in Table 2.3, but new ones are published all the time and there are too many to list. If you want children to benefit from examining alphabet books independently, it is important that you model how to use them. Show children how to touch and name the letters: “Here is capital *B* and here is lowercase *b*”; then form sentences such as “*B* is for *bear*” or “*Bear* starts with *B*.”

Share alphabet books as part of read-aloud time, and then make them available for children to look at on their own—perhaps in the alphabet center described later in the chapter. If the book is in the form of a story, read it in an interactive way. Solve puzzles such as finding the letters hidden in the illustrations. If the book features language play,

TABLE 2.3 Annotated List of Alphabet Books for Young Children

Anno, M. (1975). <i>Anno’s alphabet</i> . New York, NY: Crowell.	Objects are hidden in the borders of this book
Base, G. (1986). <i>Animalia</i> . New York, NY: Harry Abrams.	Letters are not prominently displayed, but children can have fun searching for all the pictures that begin with the target letter
Bayor, J. (1984). <i>A: My name is Alice</i> . Illustrated by S. Kellogg. New York, NY: Dial.	This lends itself to interesting variations, but some words are obscure (e.g., Nancy is a nutria and Ned is a newt)
D.K. Publishing. (1997). <i>My big alphabet book</i> . New York, NY: DK Preschool.	A classic format with capital and lowercase along with several easy-to-identify photographs for each letter
Dragonwagon, C. (1992). <i>Alligator arrived with apples: A potluck alphabet feast</i> . New York, NY: Aladdin.	Includes some unusual names of foods

Ehlert, L. (1989). <i>Eating the alphabet: Fruits and vegetables from A to Z</i> . San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace.	Includes some rare words (e.g., <i>kohlrabi</i> for <i>K</i>), but illustrations are outstanding
Ernst, L. C. (1996). <i>The letters are lost</i> . New York, NY: Scholastic.	Alphabet blocks are lost along with objects that share their letter; for example, <i>F</i> took a swim with some fish
Fain, K. (1993). <i>Handsigns: A sign language alphabet</i> . New York, NY: Scholastic.	Nicely illustrated, but some pictures are obscure (e.g., <i>vixen</i> and <i>lynx</i> for <i>V</i> and <i>L</i>)
Folson, M. (2005). <i>Q is for duck: An alphabet guessing game</i> . New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.	A puzzle book for children who already know their letters (<i>A</i> is for Zoo. Why? Because zoos have animals.)
Gág, W. (1933). <i>The ABC bunny</i> . New York, NY: Coward-McCann.	A simple rhyming adventure story for reading aloud
Hoban, T. (1995). <i>26 letters and 99 cents</i> . New York, NY: HarperCollins.	One side opens to letters and the other to numbers; easy-to-name objects for most letters
Hobbie, H. (2000). <i>Toot and Puddle: Puddle's ABC</i> . Boston, MA: Little Brown.	An alphabet book inside a story: Puddle tries to teach a friend how to write his name but then finds he must teach the letters of the alphabet
Horenstein, H. (1999). <i>Arf! Beg! Catch! Dogs from A to Z</i> . New York, NY: Scholastic.	A favorite for dog lovers, but words are often actions (e.g., <i>C</i> for <i>catch</i>) or not clearly cued by pictures (e.g., <i>F</i> for <i>friends</i> and <i>G</i> for <i>good dog</i>)
Johnson, S. (1999). <i>Alphabet City</i> . New York, NY: Puffin.	Each letter is hidden in a realistic painting of city scenes
Kitamura, S. (1992). <i>From acorn to zoo and everything in between in alphabetical order</i> . New York, NY: Scholastic.	Lots of objects are featured for each letter and are labeled
Lobel, A. (1981). <i>On Market Street</i> . New York, NY: Greenwillow.	Familiar objects are used to create people, such as a man made of zippers
MacDonald, S. (1986). <i>Alphabetics</i> . New York, NY: Trumpet.	This Caldecott Award book offers striking graphics of letters transforming into objects; for example, the <i>K</i> acquires a string and becomes a kite
McPhail, D. (1989). <i>David McPhail's animals A to Z</i> . New York, NY: Scholastic.	Features capital letters and illustrations with a variety of objects, such as a gorilla playing a guitar or a goose with glasses
Miller, J. (1987). <i>The farm alphabet book</i> . New York, NY: Scholastic.	Features objects found on a farm, beginning with apples
Musgrove, M. (1976). <i>Ashanti to Zulu</i> . New York, NY: Dial.	This Caldecott winner tells about African tribes as it goes through the alphabet
Rankin, L. (1991). <i>The handmade alphabet</i> . New York, NY: Scholastic.	A large hand signs the letter on each page accompanied by an object
Seuss, Dr. (1963). <i>Dr. Seuss's ABC: An amazing alphabet book!</i> New York, NY: Random House.	A rollicking text in the Seuss style
Shannon, G. (1996). <i>Tomorrow's alphabet</i> . Illustrated by D. Crews. New York, NY: Greenwillow.	Is in all capitals and is potentially confusing, but features familiar objects with a twist; for example, <i>T</i> is for bread, tomorrow's toast
Slate, J. (1996). <i>Miss Bindergarten gets ready for kindergarten</i> . Illustrated by A. Wolff. New York, NY: Scholastic.	In this story of a teacher preparing for the first day of school, all her students are introduced in alphabetical order, starting with Adam the alligator and ending with Zach the zebra
Tyron, L. (1991). <i>Albert's alphabet</i> . New York, NY: Atheneum.	In this wordless book, a carpenter duck builds capital letters out of a variety of materials



enjoy the rhythm and rhyme. Just be sure to also take the time to involve children in naming the letters and pictures that begin with each letter as you go through the alphabet book. In some cases, the pictures may be familiar things like cats or butterflies; other times, they may be unfamiliar words like *dromedary* or *mercat*. Do not expect children to learn all these new words, but take the opportunity when possible to expand their concepts and vocabulary—especially when the new words will prove useful in the classroom curriculum. ABC books such as Mary Azarian’s *A Farmer’s Alphabet* can be incorporated into thematic units, as new words will be encountered in other contexts and are more likely to become new vocabulary.

ALPHABET BOOK FOLLOW-UPS. Some alphabet books lend themselves to many extension activities. *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* is featured in Lesson 2.1.

LESSON 2.1 *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten*

This storybook written by Joseph Slate and illustrated by Ashley Wolff is great to share at the beginning of the year, as it features a teacher getting her classroom ready on the first day of school while her students are simultaneously getting ready at home. Miss Bindergarten is a border collie and her students range from Adam the alligator to Zach the zebra, reflecting each letter of the alphabet. There is limited text, so students should be involved in talking about the pictures. As the clock on the wall shows, this remarkable teacher gets her room prepared in just two hours! (CCSS Foundational Skills: 1d, Print Concepts; 2a and 2b, Phonological Awareness; CCSS Language: 5c and 6, Vocabulary Acquisition and Use)

Materials

Copy of *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* and a set of alphabet letters on cards.

Step 1. Introduce

Show students the front and back covers of the book and ask them to speculate about what is going on. They will see children playing while Miss Bindergarten has her arms full with school supplies. Point to the words in the title as you read it, clap the syllables in *Bindergarten*, and name the author and illustrator. You might ask children to identify the capital letters in the title. Talk about the pictures on the title page that show Miss Bindergarten waking up and getting ready to leave for school. Point out the cockatoo and tell them to watch out for what the bird does throughout the book.

Step 2. Read aloud

Read the book aloud to enjoy the story and talk about what Miss Bindergarten does in the pictures. Then read it again to focus more on the children as they are introduced, pausing to let children supply the ending rhyme for each sentence. You may want to use the key in the back of the book to help you identify some of the rare animals like Noah the newt or Vicki the vole.

Step 3. Reread

Read the story again on a second day. Because the letters do not play a prominent role in the format of the book, pass out letter cards and make each child responsible for holding up his or her letter when the animal whose name and species starts with that letter is introduced. Help children identify an animal that

begins with the same letter as their name and brainstorm more animals. Damian's name starts with a *D* and *D* is for *dog*, but also *duck*, *dolphin*, and *dinosaur*. Follow up with all kinds of names activities.

Step 4. Extend

Talk with your students about how they get ready for school and create a **language experience approach** dictation with a repetitive language pattern such as "Anna gets out of bed. Benjamin puts on his shoes. Lisa has juice." Creating a class dictated response such as this might take several days if you include all the students in your class, or you can do it individually or in small groups.

Children can be asked to illustrate their sentence, and the pages can be compiled into a class book entitled something like "Our Class Gets Ready for Kindergarten."

Read more about dictations in Chapter 6.

Chicka Chicka Boom Boom

This book by Bill Martin and John Archambault has become a classic alphabet book for good reasons. Letters become characters in the rhyming story. The lowercase letters climb up a coconut tree until it bends under their weight and dumps them on the ground. Capital letters then come to soothe their pains. After reading the story, spread out a collection of letters and have children find the letters as they are named in the story, putting them in order and matching capitals to lowercase. You can create a large coconut tree on the side of a metal filing cabinet so that children can act out the story and match capital and lowercase forms using magnetic letters. The supplement *Letter and Picture Sorts for Emergent Spellers* (Bear, Invernizzi, Johnston, & Templeton, 2010) has more ideas and materials to use with *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*.



Create Class Alphabet Books

After enjoying a variety of alphabet books, involve children in creating their own. For preschoolers this might be a class alphabet book in the form of a big book or an electronic presentation (made with a tool such as PowerPoint) that includes photos of the children. A book focusing on actions might include photographs and sentences such as "Samantha sifts in the sand. Jason and Julie jump. Martin plays on the monkey bars."

For kindergarten students, individual alphabet scrapbooks can be an ongoing project. (See Figure 2.5.) Prepare a blank book for each child by stapling together seven sheets of paper folded in the middle. Here are some different things that can be added over time:

1. Provide digital photos of classmates to add to appropriate pages.
2. Practice writing a few capital and lowercase forms of the letter on each page.
3. Paste in letters in different sizes and fonts cut from magazines and newspapers.
4. Draw and label pictures that begin with the letter's sound.
5. Cut out and paste magazine pictures that begin with the letter's sound. These pictures, too, can be labeled.
6. Add words to create a personal dictionary.

LETTER FORMATION. Children need to learn to produce letters as well as recognize them. Teaching letter formation early helps children to develop good habits and directionality. Fink-Chorzempa, Graham, and Harris (2005) offer some guidelines appropriate for preschool and kindergarten:

1. Talk aloud as you trace a letter, describing the strokes. In forming a capital *F*, for example, say, "Start at the top and pull down. Go back to the top and slide right. Then go to the middle and slide right."

FIGURE 2.5 Alphabet Scrapbook



TABLE 2.4 Practicing Letter Formation

1. Draw letters with fingers in trays or flat box tops with a thin layer of sand, rice, salt or grits. Color the rice or grits by shaking in a tablespoon of alcohol and a few drops of food color and then spreading it out to dry. Ground-up colored chalk can be used to color sand and salt, or you can find colored sand at a craft store.
2. Write letters in chocolate pudding, shaving cream, or finger paints. A spoonful of finger paint can be sealed inside a zip lock bag for repeated use.
3. Shape letters out of play dough, clay, pipe cleaners, Wikki Stix, or other materials. Laminated letter cards can be used as a template on which to form letters.
4. Look for textured letters in school supply catalogs or make them by cutting letters out of medium grit sandpaper, felt, or foam and gluing them to cardboard. Students trace the letters with their fingers.
5. Do rubbings of sandpaper letters. Use clothespins to clip lightweight paper in place while children rub with the side of a broken unwrapped crayon.
6. Paint letters with water using large brushes on chalkboards or sidewalks and watch them disappear on a sunny day.
7. Write letters on classmates' backs using a finger to see whether they can guess it.

2. Ask the children to imitate you as you model the strokes and to verbalize their movements.
3. Provide visual models with arrows that show the order and direction of strokes.
4. Talk about the visual features of letters and how letters are alike and different. Point out, for example, that capital *B* and lowercase *b* begin with a line and then curve, whereas lowercase *d* begins with a circle before the line.

As students trace or write letters, guide them to follow a standard series of strokes. Check with the primary teachers in your school or local school system for the letter formation system that is used. You can also search the Internet for “letter formation” or “manuscript handwriting” to find directions. There are different systems and they do not all agree. But what seems most important is to decide on a system and use it consistently as you model and direct children.

Although handwriting instruction during preschool may be informal with a focus on learning to write one’s own name, children in kindergarten should have more systematic instruction with plenty of practice writing all the letters. Encourage the children to write letters on unlined and lined paper, white boards, magna doodles, and magic slates using markers, chalk, pencils, crayons, and brushes. From time to time, ask them to select their best-formed letter. Give feedback as needed and pull aside children who need more practice. Provide a variety of writing media to enhance their multisensory experiences, and encourage children to write in centers and during play. Table 2.4 lists some creative ways to get students practicing their letter formation with sensory materials.

LEARNING LETTERS WITH CHILDREN’S NAMES. The names of children in your class are an ideal point from which to begin the study of alphabet letters because children are naturally interested in their own names and their friends’ names. Pat Cunningham has described many activities based on children’s names (Cunningham, 1988), and creative teachers have come up with more of their own.



Name of the Day

We like the idea of a “name of the day” so much better than a “letter of the week,” because more letters are covered in a much shorter time. Teachers of young children find that it can be difficult to break young children of the habit of using all capitals to write their names, so we recommend using lowercase letters from the start. The basic format for name of the day is described in Lesson 2.2, and there are many possible variations and extensions.



At the PDToolkit, watch Jackie talk about children’s names and then work with Fabiola as she learns to write her name. Click the Videos tab and then choose Emergent Stage. Look for “Names and Handwriting.”

LESSON 2.2 Name of the day

This lesson is repeated every day until all the children in your class have been featured. You can add names of classroom pets or special stuffed animals if you want. (CCSS Foundational Skills: 1, 1b, and 1d, Print Concepts; 2b, 2e, Phonological Awareness; CCSS Language: 1a and 2c, Conventions of Standard English)

Materials

Prepare cards with names of children written in neat block handwriting; have blank ones available. Put all the names in a box, gift bag, or decorated can. A pocket chart is handy for displaying the names and letters.

Step 1. Introduce the name and talk about its features

Each day, with great fanfare, a name is drawn and becomes the “name of the day.” The teacher holds up the card and begins with a very open-ended question: “What do you notice about this name?” Children will respond in all sorts of ways, depending on what they know about letters: “It’s a long name.” “It has three letters.” “It starts like Tommi’s name.” “It has an O in the middle.” If children don’t offer any ideas, be ready to model your own by saying something like, “I notice that there are two letters in the middle of this word that are the same.” Develop **concepts about print** by asking questions such as “What is the first letter? What is the last letter? Which letter is a capital?” Say, “Let’s count to see how many letters are in the name. Let’s clap to see how many syllables are in the name.”

Step 2. Chant the letters

Lead the children in a chant as you point to each letter. A cheer led by the teacher can go like this:

Teacher: “Give me a <i>K</i> .”	Children: “K”
Teacher: “Give me an <i>I</i> .”	Children: “I”
Teacher: “Give me an <i>M</i> .”	Children: “M”
Teacher: “What do we have?”	Children: “Kim!” (Repeat three times)

Step 3. Cut apart the letters and reorder

On a separate card, write the name of the child as the children recite the letters again. Then cut the letters apart and hand out the letters to children in the group. The children are asked to put the letters back in order to spell the name correctly. This can be done in a pocket chart or on a chalkboard ledge and repeated many times. We recommend starting with a capital letter and using lowercase for the rest.

Step 4. Write the name

In kindergarten, children should attempt to write the featured name. This might be done on individual whiteboards, chalkboards, or pieces of paper clipped to cardboard. This is an opportunity to offer some handwriting instruction as you model for the children. Discuss the details of direction and movement of letter formation as the children imitate your motions. Prior to kindergarten you might elect to focus on just the first letter in a child’s name for children to practice as a group activity.

Step 5. Compare names

The featured name is added to a display of all the names that have come before. Names can be arranged in alphabetical order and updated as new names are added. As each name is added, it can be compared to previous names with questions such as “*Kim* has an *m* at the end. Who else has an *m* in their name? *Kim* has three letters. Who else has three letters in their name? Do you see another name with an *i* in the middle?”



Literature Connections

Read aloud stories that feature names and name writing such as *Puddle's ABC* by Holly Hobbie, *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* by Joseph Slate, *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes, and *Leo the Late Bloomer* by Robert Kraus.



Initial Sound Substitution

Speculate about how other names would sound if they all started with the same letter as the featured name of the day. What if everyone's name started with *K* like Kim's? Jason would be Kason! Leslie would be Keslie. Change the words of Raffi's *Willoughby Wallaby Woo* song accordingly, as described in the next chapter, on page 69.



Make Up More Names

It is unlikely you will have a child for every letter of the alphabet. Consider naming classroom pets or stuffed toys with unused rare letters (Zoe the guinea pig or Queenie the fish) and include them in the activities! If a new pet is introduced during the school year, challenge children to come up with a name that starts with an unused letter.



Research the First Letter

Look for the first letter in the featured name in other places. Find it on an alphabet chart. Pass out alphabet books and ask children to find the letter in the book they have and report on other words that start with that letter. Look for interesting variations in print styles.



Name Grids

Some children need quite a bit of scaffolding to learn to write their own name, especially if their early writing experiences have been limited. One way to provide structured support is to provide laminated paper divided into a grid as shown in Figure 2.6. In the first row, the child's name is printed. In the second row, the child places letter cards into each box to match the name written in the top row. In the third row, the child writes each letter into the corresponding box in each column. These name grids can be put into a names center, as described later in the chapter.



Guess the Name

Once all the children's names have been introduced and displayed, you can play Guess the Name. Offer children five clues, beginning with the broadest and narrowing down the possibilities. This game, which

FIGURE 2.6 Name Grid

B	e	t	h
B	e	t	h
B	e	t	h

can be played when you have just a few minutes, draws attention to all the letters in children's names. For Jason, for example, the clues might be as follows:

1. This name has five letters (or two syllables).
2. This name has an *a* in it (or an *o*).
3. This name ends with the letter *n*.
4. This name has an *s* in the middle.
5. This name starts with a *J*.

Name Puzzles

Put the cut-up letters from the "name of the day" into an envelope with the child's name and picture on the outside. The envelope can be added to a name puzzle collection at an alphabet or name center. Children love to pull out the letters in their friends' names to put them together in the correct order using the name on the envelope as a model. Over the course of time, you may want to substitute letters made of different materials (die cut paper, plastic, magnetic, etc.) in the envelopes to keep this activity fresh.



Name Cards

Make a permanent set of name cards by printing children's names neatly on 2- by 10-inch pieces of cardstock or sentence strips. Name cards are introduced in "name of the day" activities described previously but will have many uses, so make several sets and laminate for durability. Add a picture of the child and use different colors as support until children learn to identify their name. However, withdraw these supports fairly soon so that students need to attend to the letters carefully to find their name cards. Use name cards for the following:



1. During daily sign-in or attendance taking, have students find their own names and place them in a pocket chart or in-box. Or have the children use the cards as guides to write their names.
2. During the morning lunch count, have the children put their name cards under pictures of what they want for lunch or what they packed for their lunch. Cut off the tops of two milk cartons—one white milk and one chocolate. Each child puts his or her name in the carton of their choice.
3. Hold up name cards to silently call on children to answer a question, to line up, to go to a certain activity, or to leave the group. Once children all know their names, call them by focusing on different letters: "Line up if you have an *N* in your name (if you have five letters in your name, if your name has three syllables, etc.)."
4. Ask the children to use name cards to cast their votes for their favorite characters or their favorite colors or to express any other opinion. In this way, you create visual graphs that can be counted and compared. After reading *The Gingerbread Man*, Jackie has her class vote for their favorite character by putting their names in a pocket chart under a picture of either the fox or the gingerbread man.
5. Keep a collection of name cards in the alphabet center and writing center so that students can use them as a model for spelling.
6. Sort names by the number of letters, the number of syllables, male/female, or whether the name has a particular letter. Make this active by handing out the name cards and asking the children to stand up or move into groups as features are called out.
7. Alphabetize the names. Children can be asked to put the names in alphabetical order (by first letter only). Model alphabetical order by occasionally calling students to line up alphabetically: "If your name begins with *A*, line up. If it begins with *B*, line up . . ." Remember to mix up the letters you call out from time to time so that Zachary is not always last!
8. Draw attention to names in many other ways and make use of them so that learning how to read and write names serves important purposes in your classroom:
 - Students may have personal belongings, lunch boxes, or baskets labeled with their names and should learn to store things by their name.



- Names are used on job charts to identify helpers.
- Children should learn to write their name on artwork that is displayed in the room or in the hall so everyone can identify the artist.
- Jackie creates driver's licenses with the child's picture and name on a laminated card. Each day different children are presented their licenses and given first choice at riding the tricycles during outdoor playtime.



Word Walls

An alphabetic display of words that grows during the year has become widely popular in classrooms (Cunningham, 2012). In preschool such a word wall should be limited to children's names. In Jackie's classroom, she tapes magnets on the back of photographs and laminated name cards and then posts them on a metal board. During center time children can take down the names and pictures, match them up, and return them to the proper beginning letter to learn alphabetizing. In kindergarten, names are often the first words that go up on the word wall. Later, high-frequency words that the children are expected to learn to read and spell—like *red*, *big*, *was*, and *can*—are gradually added (several a week). Word walls in preschool and kindergarten should be displayed at child level near the place where children gather for shared reading and writing. There will be many opportunities to refer children to the names of classmates during literacy activities.

Read more about word walls to support the learning of sight words in Chapter 6.



Alphabet Strips

Children learning the alphabet and attempting to write should have a class alphabet strip posted close to eye level as well as individual alphabet strips right at their fingertips. You can use the three-row strip we provide in Appendix B or cut the rows apart and glue them together for one long strip. You can also use commercially available strips, which come in rolls and have adhesive for sticking on desks. The strips can be used for many purposes:

1. Track the letters as children sing the song or recite in alphabetical order.
2. Find and touch letters that you or a student in the class calls out. Begin by holding up the letter so the student can see it before they begin to look for it. For example, "Here is the letter *B*. Can you point to the *B* on your alphabet strip?" Make this into a game by providing a box, bag, or cup of letters that children take turns drawing from. Once the letter is identified, participants find it as quickly as possible and point to it on their alphabet strip. Take turns pulling out letters so everyone has a chance to lead.
3. Ask students to touch the letter that comes "before" or "after" a target letter such as, "Name the letter that comes before *M*. What comes after *M*?" These terms are not always clear to students but are important for orienting them to the directionality of print.
4. Cover up a letter while children close their eyes; then ask them to figure out the missing letter. Talk about strategies they can use such as reciting the letters or singing the song. Show children that they do not have to start with *A* every time, but can instead start any place in the sequence. This is an important alphabetizing skill.
5. Cut apart a second copy of the strip and then have children glue the letters down in order. Use the first strip for reference as needed. The letters can also be used as headers for individual alphabet scrapbooks (see Figure 2.5).
6. Use the strip for reference when children are writing and need to produce a letter.
7. Highlight letters on the strip as they are mastered. This will serve as a record of which letters need more work.



Letter Cards or Letter Tiles

You may have sets of letters on individual cards but to make your own run several copies of the letters provided in Appendix B on cardstock and laminate for use in activities. Make an enlarged set for use in

the pocket chart or to hold up for everyone to see. You can also make a copy and cut them apart to send home with the children. These letter cards have many uses:

1. Put the capital letters in order and then match lowercase letters below. Time children in kindergarten to see how fast they can do it and whether they can beat their own time.
2. Use letters to spell names. (Provide models using the children's name cards.) As described above, prepare envelopes for each child in your room. On the outside write their name and paste on a picture. Inside place all the letters needed to spell their name. Put these in a name or alphabet center to do independently.
3. Display the letters in a child's name (or other relevant word that is familiar to children), ask children to close their eyes, and then take away a letter or turn the letter over. Ask children to identify the missing letter.
4. Play Guess My Letter. Put all the letters in a container. Children take turns pulling out a letter. Then they have to give some clues such as "This letter has four lines. It comes after L in the alphabet. It is the first letter in *Matthew*." Teachers will need to model this and can make up various rules. The first person to guess may go next or they may get to keep the letter card until the end to see who gets the most.
5. Create a name letter graph. On students' "name day" give them the letter cards that spell their name. Paste each letter in the correct column: all the A's in the A column, B's in the B column, and so on. When you finish the whole class, count the letters in each column and record the total underneath. Lead a discussion of what children notice. What letter is used the most in your class? What letters are used the least or never used? If you lose or gain students in your classroom, you can demonstrate adding or subtracting letters on the chart.

Three-Dimensional Letters

Increase tactile associations by using three-dimensional letters formed or cut out of different materials. Plastic magnetic letters are available in the toy section or from teacher supply catalogs and can be arranged on cookie sheets. Cut-out foam and wooden letters can be found in craft stores in many styles and sizes. Your school may have a machine for die cut letters. Use simple fonts for students just learning the alphabet, but welcome the variety when students are ready to extend their understanding to include other fonts.

1. As with letter cards, three-dimensional letters can be put in alphabetical order, matched by capitals and lowercase, and used to spell names and words. (Provide a name card if needed as a model.) For beginners limit the letters to the ones in their name so they only have to put them in order. Later they can search out the necessary letters from the whole alphabet.
2. Make "feely letters" by putting letters in an old sock or deep container. Let children reach in to feel the letter and see whether they can guess it before pulling it out to check. Make this easier by laying out three to five letters that children in a small group need to master; or just use the letters in one person's name. Name the letters together and then put them in the sock. A variation might be to name a letter for the child to find.
3. Make a letter grid. Collect a variety of small three-dimensional letters made from different materials (magnetic letters, foam letters, scrabble game pieces, etc.) in both capital and lowercase forms. Mix them together and provide a sorting board like the one in Figure 2.7. Students can be asked to sort letters into the appropriate spaces. The size of the grid will depend on the size of the letters you have.
4. Create letter boxes by cutting the tops off 27 eight-ounce milk cartons. Cover them with paper or spray paint before labeling with the letters of the alphabet. These can be used for sorting three-dimensional letters instead of the grid described previously.



FIGURE 2.7 Alphabet Sorting Chart

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd	Ee	Ff	Gg
Hh	Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll	Mm	Nn
Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt	Uu
Vv	Ww	Xx	Yy	Zz		





Large Floor-Size Letters

Large letters (about 7 by 7 inches or larger) have lots of uses and come ready made in foam, carpet squares, or cardboard. They can also be made by gluing large letters to cardboard and laminated for activities like the “Bingo” song described at the beginning of this chapter:

1. Lay out the letters in order and ask children to step on each one as they name it. Make a winding path that they must follow to wash their hands, line up, get a snack, and so on. To make this easier at first, put only a section of the alphabet. Slowly build up to the whole alphabet. When this becomes easy, put the letters in random order to name and step on.
2. Lay out the letters randomly. Someone (a teacher or child) calls a letter for another child to stand on. (Show the letter if needed.) When another is called, they try to step or jump to the next one without touching the floor.
3. As letters are called, the child whose turn it is tries to toss a beanbag to land on the letter.
4. Letters can be in or out of order. Children are asked to find the first letter in their name to stand on. Then they move to the next letter in their name and so on. Several children could do this at the same time. Children still learning the letters in their name can be given a strip with their name on it.
5. Scatter a collection of capital letters and matching lowercase letters (not all at once). Students need to step on both when a letter is called.
6. String up a clothesline and let student hang up the letters in order with clothespins.

ALPHABET CENTER. An alphabet center is essential in preK and for early kindergarten for children learning their letters. Many of the activities described in this chapter can take place in a center. Below are some suggestions for what to include. Don’t put everything out at once. Change the materials often to keep children coming back.

1. An alphabet strip posted at eye level for reference
2. Alphabet books that have been shared with the class
3. Alphabet puzzles and alphabet games like those described here or commercially available
4. Name cards for all the students in the room to be used as models
5. Name puzzles: envelopes for each child with letter cards needed to spell their name
6. Rubber stamps and ink pads, chalkboards or whiteboards, magnetic letters, and metal boards that the children can use to put the letters in order, spell names and other words, match capital and lowercase, and so on
7. Plastic letters, textured letters, letter cards, and tiles as described previously
8. A variety of paper and implements such as pencils, felt markers, pens, and chalk

COMPUTERS AND SOFTWARE. There are lots of computer games and applications that you might use with young children that teach various aspects of the alphabet. Some applications that we recommend are iWrite Words (an app that teaches letter formation), Fish School (alphabet activities as well as numbers and colors), and Interactive Alphabet. Search “alphabet games” on your favorite search engine for free options you can download or use online. However, for many children, the chance to use the keyboard can be an alluring incentive to hunt and peck letters of the alphabet. Here is a simple activity you can do in Microsoft Word. Change the page setup to landscape and the font size to 24 or larger. Pick a font style that will have familiar forms of *a* and *g* (e.g., Century Gothic, Comic Sans MS, Chalkboard, Futura). Provide a model of the alphabet sequence right on the screen to follow if needed. Change the font and color of the font from time to time. Ask children to do the following:

1. Type all the letters in order from *A* to *Z*.
2. Learn how to shift and do both capital and lowercase forms of each letter.
3. Type their names and names of their friends.

LETTER SEARCHES AND FONT VARIATIONS. Children need to see a variety of print styles before they will be readily able to identify their ABCs in different contexts. Draw children’s attention to different letter forms wherever you encounter them.

Letter Searches

Environmental print is especially rich in creative lettering styles. A good way to get practice with letters in many sizes, colors, and font styles is to send children on letter searches:

1. Ask students to look through magazines, junk mail, advertisements, catalogs, and newspapers to find and cut out as many font variations as they can for a particular letter. Students might work together initially. Have the children collect the letters in labeled paper bags, baggies, shallow boxes, or trays and use them to create a class bulletin board, a class alphabet book, or individual alphabet scrapbooks.
2. Do a search of the room. Provide a pencil and clipboard. Assign a letter for students to find—one that they are learning to recognize or write perhaps. Let them move around the room and write the letter every time they find it.
3. Give students a page from the newspaper and a colored highlighter. Ask them to highlight a particular letter every time they find it—another good way to work on letters they need to learn. Provide a different color and ask them to look for another letter.



The PDToolkit has some prepared font sorts to print. Click on the Sorts and Games tab, type “font” into the keyword box, and hit “apply.”

Fonts

Create font sorts as described in Lesson 2.3. Collect letters from newspapers, catalogs, magazines, and other print sources or search your computer fonts and print out letters in the largest size possible. Cut the letters apart, mount them on small cards, and laminate for durability. Use both capitals and lowercase, but avoid cursive styles for now. Focus on no more than five letters at a time. After modeling the



LESSON 2.3 Sorting letters by case and font style

Decide on two to four letters to study at a time. Create a collection of letters as described in the preceding list (item 4). You can simply sort on a table or carpet, or a manila folder can be divided into columns and placed in a center with the letters needed for sorting stored inside. This lesson will focus on C and D. (CCSS Foundational Skills: 1d, Print Concepts)

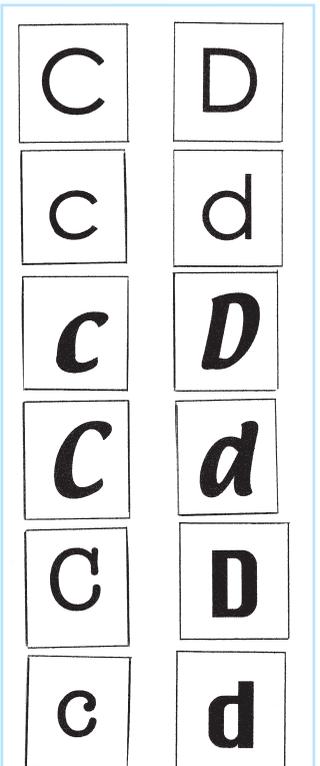
Step 1. Discuss the letter C

Lay out your collection of letter cards in a random fashion. Hold up a card with the capital C and say something like this: “Here is the capital C. *It* looks like a circle with the side missing.” Trace the letter as you say this. “Here is a lowercase c. It looks just like the capital C but is smaller. I am going to start a column here with these letters and look for more C’s. I notice this C has thick lines instead of skinny lines, but it still looks like a circle with the side missing. It looks a little small so I think it is a lowercase c. Can someone find another C and tell us about it?” Find several more and help the children talk about any special visual features and decide whether each is a capital or lowercase letter.

Step 2. Discuss the letter D

Hold up a capital D, trace it, and say something like this: “Here is a capital D. *It* has a straight line and then a curve that looks like a big belly. Here is a lowercase d. Hmmmm, it doesn’t look much like the capital D, does it? It is as tall as the capital D but has a circle and then a straight line. I will put the capital and lowercase D’s in a column over here. I am going to look for another capital D. *This* letter has thick lines and is sort of leaning but it still has a straight line and a big curve. Can you help me find some D’s and tell me about them?”

FIGURE 2.8 Font Sort with C and D



(continued)

LESSON 2.3 Sorting letters by case and font style (*continued*)

Step 3. Sort

Sort all the letters into the two groups, as shown in Figure 2.8. If you have time, do a second sort, but this time create four columns and sort the capitals separate from the lowercase letters.

Step 4. Summarize

Say something like this as you point to examples: “Letters come in lots of different styles and sizes. They may have thick lines or skinny lines; they might lean; they might have little lines added here and there; they might be fancy or plain. Sometimes the lowercase letters look just like the capital letter and sometimes the lowercase letters are different. Today you have learned about C and D. You can do this sort by yourself in the alphabet center during playtime.”

sort with a group of children, place the materials in a center where the children can work independently. *Words Their Way: Letter and Picture Sorts for Emergent Spellers* (Bear, Invernizzi, Johnston, & Templeton, 2010) has letters to use for font sorts.

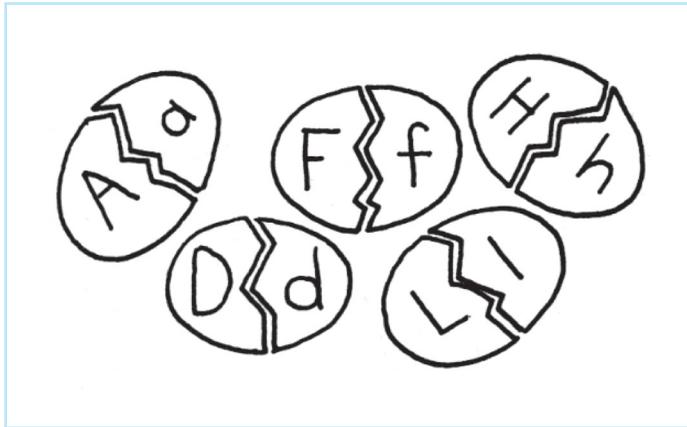


Valentine's Day

This holiday offers a special opportunity to focus on names and letter learning, and it is celebrated in most schools. Provide specific directions to avoid children's cards being signed and addressed by their parents in cursive handwriting:

1. Send home a list of names carefully printed in a large simple font. Also send directions for parents to help their children sign their name on all their valentines and address them with their classmate's names. This might take several sittings but the motivation will be high.
2. If you think some children might not purchase valentines (due to cost or the fact that it is not a holiday celebrated in their culture) be ready to provide alternatives. You can send home some red and white paper and simple directions for how to make cards, or you might make cards in school as an art project instead of expecting parents to provide them. Some teachers buy discounted valentines on February 15 and save them for the next year to be sure that all children will have some to send.
3. Prepare individual valentine mailboxes, bags, or pockets with each child's name clearly printed. When children bring their valentines to school, they should “mail” all the cards themselves. Sometime prior to opening the valentines you may want to check and see that all the cards ended up in the right place or ask the children to check before they begin to open them. For example, cards for Jeremy and Jenny are likely to be confused.
4. If children have been learning and using their classmates' names all year, they should be able to read those names as they open their valentines.

ALPHABET GAMES. Simple games are a way to provide additional practice in an engaging way and can be used independently in centers (once modeled) or supervised by volunteers (parents or older students) and assistants. Although many of the activities described previously are game-like, we include a few additional games that are easy to create and play. Many follow traditional game formats such as concentration or bingo. You may choose to target particular letters in these games for children who are still mastering the alphabet. Consider the level of challenge your students can handle. As a general rule when preparing games, mix in letters your students know with letters they are learning so some initial success is ensured. Competition and winning should not be emphasized when playing games with young children. Focus on participating and working together.

FIGURE 2.9 Alphabet Eggs

Alphabet Eggs

Create a simple set of puzzles designed to practice the pairing of capital and lowercase letters. On poster board, draw and cut out a four-inch egg shape for each letter in the alphabet. Write an uppercase letter on the left half and the matching lowercase letter on the right portion. Cut the eggs in half using a zigzag line (see Figure 2.9). Make each zigzag slightly different so the activity is self-checking. Children should say the letters to themselves and put the eggs back together by matching the capital and lowercase form.

There are many other shapes that can be cut in half for matching. In October, for example, pumpkin shapes can be cut into two; in February, heart shapes can be cut apart the same way. There is no end to the matching possibilities. Acorn caps can be matched to bottoms, balls to baseball gloves, frogs to lily pads, and so on. These matching sets can also be created to pair rhyming words or pair a letter with a picture that starts with that letter. Pictures can be found in the appendix.



Alphabet Concentration or Memory

Create cards with capital and lowercase forms of the letters written on one side. You can use the letter cards from Appendix B (page 224), but run them on colored paper or glue them to cardstock to be sure they cannot be read from the back side. Select both familiar and not so familiar letters. Avoid using too many letters at a time; 8 to 10 pairs is probably enough. Place pairs of letters face down in a scrambled order. Players turn up two cards to find a match. If the cards match, the player names the letter and keeps the cards.

To introduce this game or to make it easier, play it with the cards face up or use just capital letters. As letter sounds are learned, matching consonant letters to pictures that begin with that letter sound can change the focus of this game.



Letter Spin

Make a spinner with six to eight spaces, and label each space with a capital letter. Write the lowercase letters on small cards, creating five or six cards for each letter (see Figure 2.10). The arrow on the spinner can be cut out of soft but rigid plastic like that used in milk jugs. Make a hole in the middle of the arrow using a hole punch so that it turns freely around a brad. Push the brad through a slit in the base so that it does not turn. A square of foam core board or mat board makes a sturdy base that will not bend and can be easily held by the children. Inserting a washer between the arrow and base ensures that the spinner turns freely.

Lay out all the lowercase cards face up. Each player in turn spins and lands on a capital letter. The player then picks up one card that has the corresponding lowercase form, orally identifying the letter. Play continues until all the letter cards have been picked up.

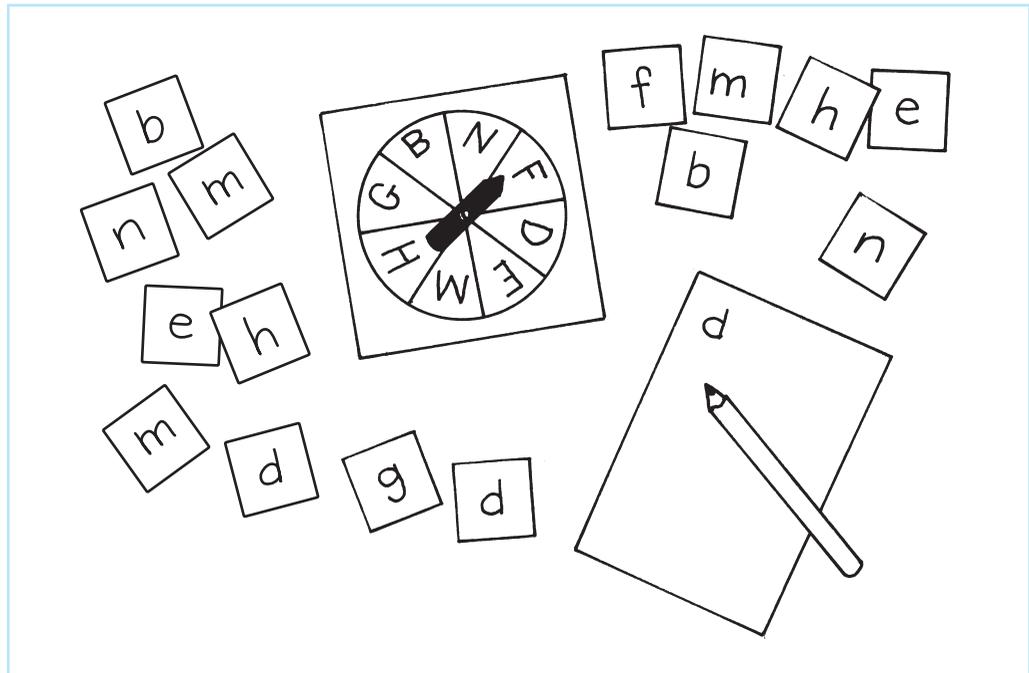


Alphabet Bingo or Lotto

Divide 8½ inch squares of cardboard, cardstock, or paper into 9, 16, or 25 equal spaces. (Use fewer spaces for younger children.) Print or glue a letter into each square, making each bingo card random and creating a different card for each player. Laminate the cards if desired. Use paper squares, buttons,



FIGURE 2.10
Letter Spin



PD TOOLKIT™
for Words Their Way®

The PDToolkit has “Alphabet Eggs Matching” and “Alphabet Spin” in PDF file format. Click the Sorts and Games tab and select Emergent Stage. Type “games” in the search box and hit the Apply button. Scroll down to find games.



poker chips, or any kind of small object as markers. Make a set of letters to pull from a box or bag. These can be the same as the letters on the board or might be lowercase or capital pairs.

The teacher, a child, or an assistant pulls a letter and calls it aloud. Show the letter if needed for extra support when children are learning the letters. When a child covers all the letters in a row, they call “bingo” and then must name all the letters as the markers are removed. A variation is black-out bingo, in which all spaces must be covered before anyone can call bingo.

Name bingo is a variation to play once children have had a chance to learn each other’s names. Prepare 4- by 4-inch bingo cards by writing in the names of students in the class, making each card different. Use a set of name cards to pull from a bag or box. The players will cover up a student’s name when it is called.

Alphabet Draw

Print letters in the upper left corner of cards or cardstock cut into 2- by 3-inch pieces. Create pairs such as capital and lowercase letters for matching. Include a card with a star or other shape as a wild card. Make at least 10 pairs (20 cards) so, when playing with three or more players, each player can be dealt six to seven cards. During a player’s turn, any pairs should be laid down. Players not holding a pair draw a card from the person to their left. If they make a match with a card in their hand, they can lay it down. Play proceeds until all the cards are laid down.

Assessing Letter Recognition and Production

To determine what students know about letters, teachers can use several tasks of increasing difficulty that assess different aspects of alphabet knowledge. Written forms and directions for alphabet assessment may be found in Appendix A and online.

1. *Sequence of letters.* Sing the alphabet song to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” as a class. Take note of who knows the song and can handle *LMNOP* as separate letters.

PD TOOLKIT™
for Words Their Way®

At the PDToolkit, click the Assessment Tools tab and then choose Emergent Stage. Look for “Alphabet Recognition.”

2. *Recitation and pointing.* Ask students to point to an alphabet strip as they recite the letters in order. If they get tripped up on *LMNOP*, see whether they can self-correct and get back on track. If they are singing the song and pointing, you might suggest that they say the alphabet and slow down on *LMNOP*.
3. *Random recognition.* The letters can be shown randomly to assess letter recognition, starting with the capitals that students are most likely to know first. Students can be asked to identify letters printed on a single sheet of paper (see page 192) where they have been randomly reordered, or you may want to use letter cards and hold up one letter at a time for children to name. Note how easily and quickly students name the letters. If they have to stop and think about a name (perhaps by reciting the ABC song to themselves), that is a sign that they do not know it automatically.
4. *Letter production.* Call letters aloud, in or out of order, for students to write. Seat children where they cannot refer to an alphabet strip for this assessment. Consider not only whether the child is able to create a recognizable form of the letter but also whether they write it in a standard direction. By kindergarten, children should be learning how to form letters in conventional ways to develop handwriting fluency.
5. *Name writing.* Take note of how well children can write their names and whether they use all capitals or a mix of capital and lowercase letters.
6. *Sounds.* Knowing the sound or sounds associated with a letter is also part of alphabet knowledge. We will discuss assessing letter sounds in more detail in Chapter 5, but you can simply point to letters and ask the children for the sounds instead of the names. If you have students who come to your class having learned sounds instead of names, this will give you important information.

A name-writing task that is scored developmentally is described in Chapter 4.

Benchmark Scores

According to research conducted with hundreds of thousands of kindergartners using Virginia's PALS assessment, most kindergartners recognize and name, on average, 19 lowercase letters (presented in random order) in the fall of the year, and nearly all of them by the end of kindergarten (Invernizzi & Huang, 2011). Four-year-olds know 12 to 21 capital letters and 9 to 17 lowercase letters by the spring of preschool. End-of-year first graders who read on or above grade level were shown to have recognized 21 to 22 capital and lowercase letters, on average, at the end of their 4-year-old preschool year (Invernizzi & Huang, 2011).

Instant and accurate recognition matters, and rapid naming tasks that measure speed in letter naming have long been another strong predictor of early literacy achievement. Although some literacy assessments record how many letters children can name in one minute, these are best used as a screening measure, to find out who is above or below a grade-level benchmark. One-minute timed assessments of alphabet recognition do not cover the entire alphabet, and it is important to find out what specific letters children need to learn. For this reason, we prefer alphabet recognition assessments that inventory the entire corpus of letters.

Working with Parents

There are many ways that parents can support learning of the alphabet. Figure 2.11 provides a possible letter that you might want to send home. In addition, you might want to send home copies of alphabet cards, like those in Appendix B, printed on heavy colored paper so families have letters to work with.

FIGURE 2.11 Parent Letter

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Your child is learning the letters of the alphabet. Attached to this letter are sheets of letters that you can cut apart and store in an envelope to use with your child. Below are some ideas about how to help your child learn their letters. Keep it fun, and do only as much as your child is interested in.

- Find out what letters your child knows. Start with the capital letters. Lay them out in order and ask your child to name and touch each one. Then mix up the letters and see which ones your child can name. Make piles of the ones they know and the ones they don't know. Repeat this with the lowercase letters.
- Print a model of your child's name using one capital letter and the rest lowercase on an index card or ordinary paper. Pull out letter cards for the letters in your child's name and ask your child to put the letters in order to make his or her name. Provide help as needed until your child can do it alone. Repeat with the names of other family members or friends.
- Help your child put the letter cards in order from A to Z. Start with the first ten letters in capitals, then move on to the whole alphabet. After your child learns the capital letters, add the lowercase letters.
- Lay out all the letters face up and call out letters for your child to find. You might focus on four or five letters that your child does not know. Name the letter and ask your child to find it. Give clues like "Find the C. C is like a circle, but it has an open mouth."
- Use the letter cards to play Concentration or Memory. Select four to eight letters with both the capital and lowercase forms. Scramble them face down. Take turns trying to make a match as two cards are turned over. If they match, keep them. If not, turn them back over in the same place before the next player goes.
- Point out letters in books you read that your child is learning. Begin with the letters in their name.
- Look for alphabet books to read and share. If there are just letters and pictures, say something like "Here is a capital A and here is a lowercase A. *Apple* (or whatever it pictures) begins with A." Help your child name other things that start with a letter.
- Ask your child to look for a particular letter on road signs or in the grocery store. Give them a pad and paper to write it each time they find it.
- There are many Internet resources for alphabet learning, including free games and videos. There are also alphabet apps for a small fee. Some good ones are iWrite Words, Fish School, and Interactive Alphabet.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,