

*Especially for practitioners working with preschoolers!* 

# The First Letter Is . . .

*Phonological Awareness*

To be able to read when they enter school, preschoolers need to be familiar with letter sounds. Making the connection between pictures and letter sounds is a great way to introduce preschoolers to the alphabet.

## What is the practice?

While looking at picture books with preschoolers in your class, have them name the pictures. Repeat the name of the picture while placing emphasis on the beginning letter of the word. Have the children sound out the word or beginning letter of the word with you. Books that have pictures of the beginning letter by itself will help preschool children begin to recognize written letters.



## What does the practice look like?

There are many ways to help preschool children make connections between pictures and letter sounds. Reading and sharing books with your students provides a great time for pointing out things on the page and asking about beginning letter sounds. Point out letter sounds on signs around the classroom, on labels of items, or anywhere that children see written words.

## How do you do the practice?

Follow the children's interests when choosing books or other reading materials.

- If some of the children in your class like horses, read a book or share a magazine about horses with them. Point to the pictures while having them sound them out. You could point to a picture of a saddle and ask them with what sound/letter it starts. Remember to be encouraging and patient with the children.
- Play a game like 'I Spy' with the class. Instead of giving the usual clue, say "I spy something that starts with a B. Do you remember what sound the B makes? It makes a 'Buh' sound." Let the children have fun finding things in the room that start with the letter's sound.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the children becoming familiar with letter sounds?
- Do the children show more interest in picture books?
- Do the children make connections between letter sounds and words?

# Take a look at more first letter sounds

## Sounds Like Fun!

The children in Alma's preschool class enjoy playing an alphabet game. Alma calls out a letter sound and the children have to find something that begins with that sound. They can move two steps forward each time they are first to find something. The first person to reach the finish line that Alma made on the floor is the winner. Alma says, "Letter C" as she holds up a card with a large letter printed on it. "Kkk" she says to the class, pronouncing the hard C sound. "Who can find something that begins with the letter C?" "Cup!" Mia calls out excitedly as she picks up a cup in the play kitchen. Alma replies, "That's right! You can move two steps forward." With a proud smile, Mia takes two steps closer to the finish line.



## Everyday Opportunity

Several children in Chris' preschool class are curious about a very large package that has been delivered to their center. They gather around to watch as Chris starts to open the package. Seeing the children's interest, Chris pauses and says aloud "Hmmm, I wonder what could be in here?" She points to the words on the side of the box. "Let's see, what does this word say?" She points at the first letter in one of the words. "That's the letter B. What sound does B make?" One of the children says "Ba." Chris repeats the sound, "Bbb." She then reads the word aloud to the children, emphasizing the first sound, "Bbb-bowls. Let's see what's in here." She removes the tape to reveal paper bowls for morning cereal. "Just what we need for breakfast!" she says.



## Sign Along and Learn

Amanda teaches an inclusive preschool class, in which three of the children are deaf. She uses sign with them so they can join in the activities with the rest of the class. At circle time, Amanda chooses an alphabet book to read to the children. As she reads aloud, "A is for Airplane," she makes the sign for the letter A. She also points to the picture of the airplane on the page and signs the word. She does this for each page, so that all of the children, including those who are deaf, can learn the letter names and the corresponding words.



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# Sound Advice

 *Phonological Awareness*

By the time they get to preschool, most children are fairly adept at using speech to communicate their wants and needs to those around them and are ready to start doing more complicated tasks with language. Playing games that help preschooler in your class practice skills like rhyming, listening for different sounds, and putting sounds together will get them ready for reading and writing later on.

## What is the practice?

Playing games that involve listening for and manipulating sounds, as well as encouraging your preschoolers to use words in a variety of ways—for communicating ideas, needs, and playfulness—help preschoolers become more confident in their use of language. Research shows that children who have lots of opportunities to use words and listen to language in a wide variety of contexts have an easier time learning to read and write.



## What does the practice look like?

Singing songs, reciting nursery rhymes, playing games where children say words more quickly or slowly, and helping preschoolers use words to describe the world around them are all ways that they build their vocabularies and become sensitive to all the sounds that make up our language.

## How do you do the practice?

There are many ways to incorporate verbal play into your daily classroom routines with preschoolers. Some games can be played in groups at circle time, and some opportunities occur naturally during the free play periods of the day with several children or only one at a time. The important thing is to follow the interests of the children in your care to make sure they are actively participating and benefiting from these activities.

- With a large group of children, you can teach songs or nursery rhymes—particularly those with movements or hand gestures—to help children begin to pay attention to rhymes. Pause at the end of a line to let children fill in the rhyming word, and point out which words it “sounds like.” Have the children help you compile a list of words that “go together” or rhyme.
- Another group game is to pick a particular sound—**Mmmm**, for example—and have children help compile a list of words that *begin* with that sound (or, for more advanced preschoolers, that *end* with that sound). Allow children to work as a group to write and/or draw a list of such words.
- Help children learn the characteristics of words by drawing out compound words slowly (for example, **bbaath...ttuubb**) and having them repeat the sounds together quickly. You can reverse this, too, by saying words quickly and having children break them down into individual sounds. As children get better at these games, you can use shorter words with less obvious breaks, such as **ccc...aaa....ttt** to challenge them.

## How do you know the practice worked?

- Are the children in your care eager to participate in songs, including making up their own?
- Do they show awareness of sounds and rhymes?
- Do they use increasingly complex structures when talking with adults or peers?

## Take a look at more 'sound advice'

### Simon Says...Listen!

Mary's preschoolers have been learning new vocabulary in their week-long theme of learning about their bodies. At circle time, she organizes the children to play *Simon Says* to help them with listening skills and with identifying body parts. "I'll be Simon first," she says, "and then we'll take turns." She adds to the traditional game by telling the children that each time they touch a body part or do an action, they will say the name of the body part they are using. She starts with "Simon says, touch your head." The preschoolers reach for their heads and say *head!* "Simon says, jump up and down." They jump in place but have different ideas about which body parts this uses: some say *feet*, some say *legs*, some say their *whole bodies*. Mary pauses in the game for a moment so they can all contribute their ideas and be heard. The game continues with children taking turns as Simon, practicing both their listening and speaking skills.



### Snacking on Conversation

Gina's preschool class is seated at their table for snack time. Once everyone is served and they are ready to eat their pretzels, fruit slices, and juice, Gina encourages the children to talk about what they are tasting. "How does this snack taste to you?" she asks. "Salty," one child volunteers. "The pretzels taste salty to you?" Gina asks. "What else?" "Soft," someone else said. "What's soft?" Gina asks. "The oranges," the children say. "And the pretzels are...?" "Hard," they answer. "So pretzels are hard and salty, and

what else?" Together, they compose a list of the characteristic tastes of pretzels, then move on to the fruit and juice. The activity keeps the children focused on what they are eating, as well as engaged in using their words and listening to everyone's contributions.

### Signs and Rhymes

In Portia's inclusive preschool class, the children are working through a unit on nursery rhymes, and have been talking about listening for and identifying rhymes they hear in speech. At circle time, she leads the children in reciting a short rhyme—*Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, Jack jump over the candlestick*—while taking turns being Jack and jumping over the candles made from rolled cardboard they glued and painted earlier in the week. When it's time for Henry, a child with difficulty in language processing, to take a turn as Jack, Portia teaches all the children the sign-language sign for *jump*. "Okay, Henry, you're Jack," she says. "Go stand by the candle, and listen and look for *jump*," she says, emphasizing the word vocally and with the sign. Together, the class recites the rhyme, leaning on the rhyming words at the end of each line. Henry watches his teacher's hands, and when he sees the sign for *jump*, he jumps over the candlestick. During the next few days of this exercise, Portia gradually fades the signing until Henry jumps each time he hears *jump*, and starts joining in on the other words in the rhyme as well.

