

# Teaching *the* Alphabet

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**Author**

Lesley Mandel Morrow

**Foreword by**

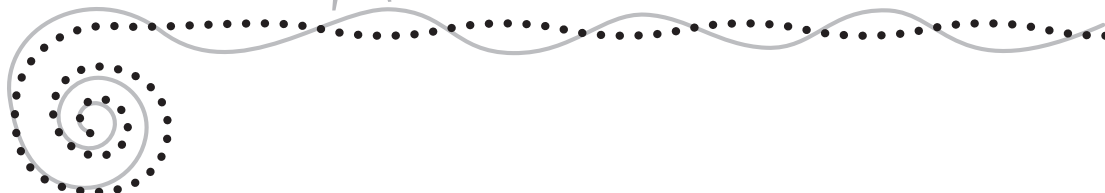
Ruth A. Yopp



**SHELL EDUCATION**




# Table of Contents



<b>Foreword</b> .....	5
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	7
<b>Introduction and Research</b> .....	9
The Motivation for This Book .....	10
Familiar Alphabet Activities .....	12
Research Support .....	13
Overview of Chapters .....	16
Features of <i>Teaching the Alphabet</i> .....	17
<b>Chapter 1: Creating a Literacy-Rich Classroom</b>	
<b>Environment</b> .....	21
Designing Classroom Literacy Spaces .....	24
The Classroom Library .....	27
Choosing Books for the Library .....	30
Genres in the Classroom Library .....	32
The Writing Center .....	41
Letter-Recognition Materials in the Writing Center ..	43
Environmental Print .....	44
Reflection: In My Classroom .....	48
<b>Chapter 2: Building Children's Alphabet Awareness</b> ..	49
Learning the Alphabet .....	51
Systematic Teaching of the Alphabet .....	55
Selecting Letters to Teach .....	60
Reflection: In My Classroom .....	63



<b>Chapter 3: Activities for Teaching Letter Recognition</b>	65
Basic Lesson Plan for Teaching Letter Recognition	68
A Collection of Letter-Recognition Games	75
Reflection: In My Classroom	86
<b>Chapter 4: Parents: Partners in Learning</b>	87
Communicating with Parents	89
Tips for Parents	94
Reflection: In My Classroom	102
<b>Chapter 5: Creating Personalized Alphabet Books</b>	103
Directions for Making Personal Alphabet Books	104
Reflection: In My Classroom	108
<b>Chapter 6: Assessment Guides Instruction</b>	109
Assessing Children's Alphabet Knowledge	112
Assessing Children's Knowledge of Book Parts	115
Assessing Children's Behavior in the Writing Center	115
Reflection: In My Classroom	116
<b>Appendices</b>	117
Appendix A: Reproducible Checklists	118
Appendix B: Resources for Teachers and Families	132
The Sensory Alphabet	132
The American Sign Language Alphabet	133
Template for Personal Alphabet Book	134
Alphabet Letters Template	135
Appendix C: Recommended Children's Literature	151
Children's Books for Recognizing Letters of the Alphabet	151
Children's Books Categorized by Theme	164
Appendix D: Online Resources	169
<b>References Cited</b>	171
<b>Children's Literature Cited</b>	179
<b>Contributing Authors</b>	181



lowercase is another key component of alphabet recognition. By the time children complete kindergarten and first grade, they should be able to perform all of these activities (Reutzel 2010). As children develop the ability to recognize letters of the alphabet, they may incidentally learn some letter sounds. Some learning of letter sounds can occur in prekindergarten and should become more formalized in kindergarten and first grade. Although letter recognition is a key to reading success, other aspects of language are important in preschool literacy programs. Other skills, such as phonemic awareness, concepts about print, vocabulary, and listening comprehension, are all as important as letter recognition and should be taught concurrently (Reutzel 2010).

## Overview of Chapters

**Chapter 1: Creating a Literacy-Rich Classroom Environment** describes a classroom that is designed to foster children's interest in letters, words, and books. The library corner and writing center form the core of the activities designed to build children's alphabet recognition. The chapter includes guidelines for choosing books for the library, descriptions of genres for the library, and suggestions for evaluating alphabet books and ebooks. The role of the writing center and the resources that make the center an effective place for letter-recognition activities is explained. The chapter concludes with a description of the role of environmental print in children's literacy development.

**Chapter 2: Building Alphabet Awareness** describes learning activities that facilitate children's development of letter-recognition skills. Several approaches to teaching the alphabet are presented, including Letter of the Week, Letter of the Day, and Letters in Thematic Units. The challenge of determining the sequence in which to teach letters is addressed, along with research-based recommendations.

**Chapter 3: Activities for Teaching Letter Recognition** highlights a basic lesson plan for introductory lessons in letter recognition. Materials and procedures are described for each element of the lesson. This chapter features a collection of 10 letter-recognition games that provide review and practice in the context of interactive activities.

**Chapter 4: Parents: Partners in Learning** discusses two important aspects of home-school relationships—communicating with parents and supporting parents in literacy-related activities they can do with their children.

**Chapter 5: Creating Personalized Alphabet Books** is the capstone for *Teaching the Alphabet*. This chapter provides directions for creating personal alphabet books for children in your classroom. Modeled on the alphabet books I created for my grandchildren, the description includes a list of words to accompany each letter of the alphabet.

**Chapter 6: Assessment Guides Instruction** offers ideas and checklists for observing and assessing children's alphabet knowledge and how they apply this knowledge to various tasks and classroom settings.

### **Features of *Teaching the Alphabet***

This book provides practical suggestions for teaching alphabet recognition to young children. The importance of alphabet knowledge in children's literacy development is underscored with selected references from research. The instructional activities follow a consistent pattern using materials that are readily available in early childhood classrooms. These activities are designed to provide many opportunities for children to be engaged with print, such as identifying letters, matching letters, talking about letters, and writing letters. Many teachers use alphabet books and other forms of children's literature to extend

their young children's experiences with print. In these situations, children encounter print in meaningful contexts, an important component of effective literacy instruction. However, to ensure that children become proficient in their knowledge of the alphabet, teachers need to provide multiple opportunities for practice with letters in contexts that are most relevant to the children. Such activities form the core of *Teaching the Alphabet*.

Each chapter of this book includes the following features:

- ❖ References to research provide evidence of the important role of alphabet knowledge in young children's literacy development.
- ❖ "Viewpoint" boxes feature quotations that capture key themes about literacy development.
- ❖ Classroom-tested activities provide multiple opportunities for children to practice alphabet recognition.
- ❖ "Reflection: In My Classroom," a feature at the end of each chapter, offers questions and comments that invite you to reflect on your teaching.

Additionally, the appendices contain resources to support your teaching. The following resources to facilitate planning for instruction and guidance for communicating with parents are also provided:

- ❖ The checklists and templates that accompany selected topics in the chapters.
- ❖ The Sensory Alphabet presents familiar words for each of the senses—sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell.
- ❖ The American Sign Language Alphabet illustrates the hand signals for each alphabet letter.

- ❁ Recommended Children's Literature includes lists of children's books categorized by alphabet letters and themes.
- ❁ Suggestions of online resources that support parents and teachers as they teach the alphabet.



letter, and matching letters to letters in their name. Child of the Day, a common practice in early childhood classrooms, provides additional practice in letter recognition. Children match letters to that child's name or write the child's name. (McGee 2007, 131–132). Figure 2.1 below presents guidelines for teaching letters.

**Figure 2.1 Guidelines for Teaching Letters**

<b>Children's Names</b>	Young children learn the letter names of the first initial in their given or first name ( <i>D</i> for <i>Dylan</i> ) and the other letters in that name more quickly and easily than letters that do not occur in the name.
<b>Alphabetical Order</b>	Young children learn the names of the letters at the beginning of the alphabet ( <i>a-b-c-d</i> ) more quickly and easily than the names of letters that appear later in the alphabet (e.g., <i>l-m-n-o-p</i> ).
<b>Letter Name Pronunciation</b>	Young children learn letter names earlier and more easily and quickly when the letter name contains the typical sound associated with the name (e.g., <i>b</i> /bē/; <i>p</i> /pē/; <i>f</i> /ef/; or <i>m</i> /em/) than those letter names that do not contain the typical sound associated with the letter (e.g., <i>c</i> /see/; <i>g</i> /gee/; <i>h</i> /āch/; <i>q</i> /cue/; <i>w</i> /double u/; <i>y</i> /wī/).
<b>Letter Frequency</b>	Young children learn letter names more easily and quickly when these letters occur more frequently in print (e.g., <i>n-r-s-t</i> ) than those that occur less frequently in print (e.g., <i>q-x-z</i> ).
<b>Consonant Phoneme Acquisition Order</b>	Young children learn consonant letter names corresponding to consonant phonemes that are mastered earlier in oral language development ( <i>n-m-p-t-k</i> ) than those letters in which the corresponding phonemes are mastered later ( <i>l-r-z-sh-j</i> ).
<b>Letter Writing</b>	Young children learn letter names at a deeper and more lasting level when they learn to write the letters of the alphabet concurrently with learning the letter names.





## Basic Lesson Plan for Teaching Letter Recognition

An introductory lesson for the whole group is an effective way to center children's attention on the important features they need to learn about letters. Although new letters may be introduced in a Morning Message, the focus on the letters is incidental to the purpose of that routine. To ensure that children learn the letters, they need opportunities for explicit instruction, which is provided in whole-group lessons and followed up with small-group and individual activities. A basic lesson plan for introductory lessons follows. The activities in this lesson plan would be conducted over several days or weeks, depending on the children's learning needs.

### Introductory Lessons

**Note:** Items marked with an asterisk are optional depending on children's familiarity with the focus letters.

**Objectives:** Children will

- ✿ learn the name of the focus letter.
- ✿ repeat the name of the focus letter with the teacher's guidance.
- ✿ match the appropriate letter to the teacher's model.
- ✿ identify (or write) the symbols for the uppercase and lowercase forms of the focus letter.\*
- ✿ listen to the sound the letter represents.\*
- ✿ say the sound the letter represents with the teacher's guidance.\*

### **Materials:**

- ❁ letter card (large enough for all the children to see)
- ❁ letter-picture card (e.g., *B* and picture of a ball)
- ❁ letter cards for uppercase and lowercase forms of the letter
- ❁ a set of letter cards for each child
- ❁ container of mixed alphabet letters
- ❁ whiteboard or chart paper
- ❁ small dry erase boards and washable markers
- ❁ copies of enlarged print page
- ❁ highlighter tape

### **Procedures:**

1. Begin by distributing a mat (or dry erase board and marker) and a container (e.g., envelope or plastic sandwich bag) of alphabet letters to each child.
2. Show children how to spread out the letters so they can see all of them.
3. Point out that you will be using chart paper (or a whiteboard) to show a letter to them.

**Explanation:** Tell children that they will learn about a new letter.

- ❁ They will learn the name of the letter.
- ❁ They will say the name of the letter together.
- ❁ They will find the letter in their set of letters.
- ❁ They will write the letter in uppercase and lowercase form.
- ❁ They will hear the sound the letter represents.
- ❁ They will say the sound the letter represents.

