

Literacy Circle (Letter Recognition)

1. Introducing name cards and alphabet cards

Show children their name cards (cards folded in half with their names printed on both sides so the children and their friends can both see the name). See if children can identify the names (e.g., "Does anyone know whose name this is?"). Point out initial letters (e.g., "We have two friends who start with the same letter - Sherry and Sarah both start with the letter 'S'"). Explain what children are to do with the name cards (e.g., "You'll see your name on both sides, so you can see your name and your friends can see your name, too. Place your name card on the floor/table in front of you when I pass it to you").

Then introduce the alphabet cards for the children's names in your group (e.g., only S, J, K, B, M). Invite children to talk about the pictures on the cards (e.g., "What is this for 'J'?" "See the skyscraper? Why do you think it's called a skyscraper?"). Make connections to children's experiences (e.g., "We have tree for Tom. Tree and Tom both start with T. This tree looks like the tree outside our school").

2. Playing Alphabet "Memory" with name cards and alphabet cards

Invite children to help you distribute the name cards and place their name in front of them on the floor or table. Review the alphabet cards that start with the same first letter of the children's names (and a few extra pairs) (e.g., "Here's the bird for Barbara. They both start with 'B'"). Ask the children to help you lay out the alphabet cards face down in rows and columns. As you demonstrate how to play, describe what you are doing and the rules of the game (e.g., "When it's my turn I flip over two cards. I turned over ice cream. Ice cream starts with I for Isaiah's name. See the letter 'I' on the card, and the 'I' on Isaiah's name card? And I turned over a key which starts with a 'K' like Keisha's name. See the 'K' on Keisha's name card? But the letter 'I' and 'K' aren't the same. They don't make a match. So, I'll turn them back over and let the next person try"). Explain that when children make a match, they should place the cards in the "match pile." When children find a match, describe what they found (e.g., "Look! Lona turned over two houses. House starts with an H for Henry's name. See the H's? (point to the H's on both cards and on Henry's name card). Since they are the same letter we have a match! The match goes into the match pile"). Help children take turns trying to find pairs. During each turn, talk about the results and help children name the letters (e.g., "Whose letter is that?" "Yes, dragon starts with the letter 'D' like Damien's name").

As children learn letters, encourage the turn-taker to name the letter (e.g., "Tell us what letter you have"). Over time, mix up the groups of children, so children learn letters of other friends' names. You can also play with other cards. Later in the year you can play again with children's last names (we will provide the cards).

3. "Go Fish" with alphabet cards and name cards

Materials: Gather the children's name cards, and 15 pairs of alphabet cards (the letters of children in your group and a few extra pairs).

Ask children to help select their name cards and place them in front of where they are sitting. Explain how to play (e.g., "We are each going to have 3 cards. When it is your turn, you will ask everyone, "Does anyone have an 'H'?" If someone has the letter H, they pass it to you, and then you place your pair in the match pile. If no one has the letter you asked for, everyone says, "Sorry. Go Fish!" and you pick one from our fish pond here in the middle). Then distribute 3 alphabet cards to each child. Invite children to help you spread out the remaining letter links face down like a fish pond. Demonstrate how to play by asking all the children if anyone has the alphabet card that you have in your hand in order to make a pair. If they do, they pass you the alphabet card. If they do not, they say "No, sorry. Go fish." Then you have to "fish" for that letter card. Display the pairs, and call attention to names of objects and initial letters (e.g., "You made a pair with the ____; that starts with ____). Help children place matches in a "match pile." (Initially, children may need to ask their friends by the name of the object rather than by the letter. Over time, encourage children to identify the letter and ask by the name of the letter rather than the name of the object (e.g., "Today, when you ask for a letter link, say the name of the letter in the corner. For example, I'd say, 'Do you have the letter B card that has a blimp on it?").)

Throughout and at the end, help children identify the names of the letters on the letter cards that also begin each child's name (e.g., "So, Manny found two turtles. Whose name starts with the letter T like turtle? Let's look around at everyone's name cards. Look! Troy starts with a T like turtle"). Provide help, as needed. (Over time, an alternative to using pairs of cards with the same images, use cards that start with the same letter but have different images on them - for example a 'frog' and a 'fence' would then be a match because they both start with the letter "F". When children are ready for this version, again, explain how to play and demonstrate. Play each version over several weeks until children are really familiar with the first letters of their names and their friends' names. Then play again with different letters - you may choose to use letters from children's last names later in the year.) Also, over time, you can increase the number of cards children begin with (to 4 or 5, rather than 3). This makes the game a little longer.

4. Alphabet BINGO

Explain how to play (e.g., "Each of you will get a board, and I will hold up one letter card at a time. If you have the letter on your board, you cover it with one of these red chips. We'll play until everyone covers their whole board"). When you hold up the cards, ask the children to help identify the letter (e.g., "What letter is this?" "Does anyone have this letter?"). Help connect the letters to children's names and to familiar words around the classroom (e.g., "B for Blocks!"). Occasionally, you might invite the children to count how many of a certain letters all the kids have between them on their boards (e.g., "Let's count how many 'S's we have").

Try to avoid children competing and claiming to "win" by going out first. Explain that everyone's a winner, and that we play games for fun.

5. Alphabet Cookie Cutters & Playdough (at tables)

Materials: playdough, alphabet cookie cutters, and children's name cards

Ask children to find their name cards and place them on the table in front of where they are sitting. Show children the alphabet cookie cutters and the playdough. Explain that children are going to pair with a partner and work together to find all the letters in each friends' name. Children are going to work together to find the cookie cutter of the letter, and cut the letter out of playdough (then return the cookie cutter to the middle so other children can use it).

Demonstrate with a partner (e.g., "I'm going to work with Steve today. What letter should we look for first? Here's the curvy 'S.' Since I found the letter, maybe Steve can flatten a bit of playdough, and then we can work together to press it down, wiggle it, and press out our letter 'S.' Now what should we do with the 'S' cookie cutter? Right, put it back in the middle so other children can use it if they need to. And now what letter should we look for?"). Children may wish to work through one child's name and then the second child's name, or to do one letter in each name at a time.

Help children work together, taking turns, sharing, and passing cookie cutters to each other. Comment on children working together (e.g., "Look at the way Justin and Jasmine are both pressing down on the cookie cutter together. Great teamwork!").