

Chapter 3 Online Resources

Independent Literacy Centers that Support Learning in Text Level Pre-A

In Chapter 3, you learned more about what is happening during the Pre-A small group lesson. Now, let's explore how literacy centers can support the learning away from the small group table. The purpose of literacy centers is for children to engage in literacy activities that are interesting and fun, while providing the practice they need to solidify what they are learning at the small group reading table. If you have chosen engaging and fun activities, and set up and practiced the expectations well, then your students will be able to:

1. get their materials.
2. get started right away.
3. stay engaged and work the whole time.
4. allow you to teach your small group without interruptions.

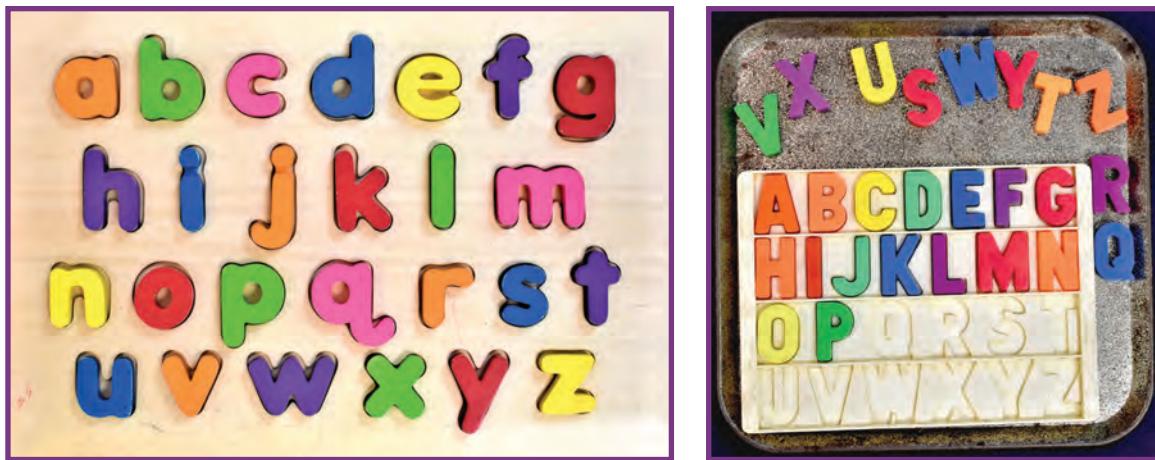
As you set up your literacy centers early in the year, you want to think critically about the activities you choose. Think about the learners in your class; what do they need to practice? Are the activities open ended, with student choice? Can they be differentiated to meet the needs of a variety of ability levels? Can they be used all year long with just a few tweaks? Are the activities fun and appealing? Are they hands-on activities or do you rely on worksheets? Hopefully, your answer to that last question is . . . hands on!

Here are a few ideas that work well for us at the beginning of the year that especially support those children needing Pre-A learning. Feel free to give them a try, tweak them a bit if needed, or ignore them if they won't work for you. We would be interested in hearing your thoughts and what works well for you, so be sure to connect with us on social media using #intentionalstart.

LETTERS AND SOUND CENTER

ABC Puzzles

We are always on the lookout for good ABC puzzles! For our low letter learners, self-correcting puzzles (Figure 3.1) are the best. They allow children to search for and match letters by their shapes. This searching helps students learn how to look critically at letters and to differentiate one letter from the next. For our more confident letter learners, we provide a variety of jigsaw-type ABC puzzles (Figure 3.2) that often lead to cooperation and teamwork.

**FIGURE 3.1***Self-Correcting ABC Puzzles***FIGURE 3.2***More Difficult ABC Puzzles*

Letter Bins

If you have been teaching for many years you have probably collected a large amount of *stuff* and, if you're like us, have it stored in many different places. Several years back, we decided to consolidate our *stuff* and put all the things that begin with *Aa* together, all the things that start with *Bb* together, and so on and this is how the idea of *letter bins* (Figures 3.3 and 3.4) was born. In a small, easily closeable, bin we put the following: letter cards, picture cards, letter books, vocabulary cards, small objects, tactile letters, and more similar items.

**FIGURE 3.3**

Letter bins include a variety of items that start with that letter's sound.

**FIGURE 3.4**

Kate is working with the Letter Cc bin and practicing writing the letter c correctly.

We put out one new letter bin each week, and children are free to explore the *stuff* in the bin. Our only requirement is they put something on paper from their exploration. Most students draw what they explored, while others draw and label using the vocabulary cards, pictures cards, or letter books. These letter bins provide our Pre-A learners with opportunities to interact with a variety of materials focusing on one letter, while helping build vocabulary, foster oral language, and provide a fun, playful way to learn and practice letters.

ABC Construction Set

This is our new discovery and we can't live without it! We wish we had found it earlier in our careers! The ABC construction set (Figure 3.5) is a collection of straight pieces and curved pieces that come in different sizes. Children can use their knowledge of letter shapes to explore and construct the letters of the alphabet. Students LOVE them! For our Pre-A learners, it forces them to look closely at letters and notice the details that separate them from the other letters.



FIGURE 3.5

Ben and Landon are building letters with the ABC construction set. Building letters helps children notice the different features of each letter as they construct it.

WORD CENTER

The gateway into printed literacy for a Pre-A learner often begins with the child's name, so we focus on names in the Word Center at the beginning of the year. We want children to write their name correctly, upper case first letter and lower case for the remainder of the letters, as soon as possible. So, we provide various ways for them to practice doing it.

Name Tracing

There are many letter tracing fonts available free or for purchase and we highly recommend finding one because it is very useful for many different activities. We teach students how to pay attention to where to put their pencil to start writing a letter, and which way their pencil is supposed to go with the first stroke.

We make our students their own name tracing page (Figure 3.6), with their names printed in the tracing font three times. We use a variety of colored paper to help children find their own name faster. These name tracing pages are placed in sheet protectors to be used repeatedly with a dry erase marker. At the word center, children practice tracing their name and then write it independently below several times.

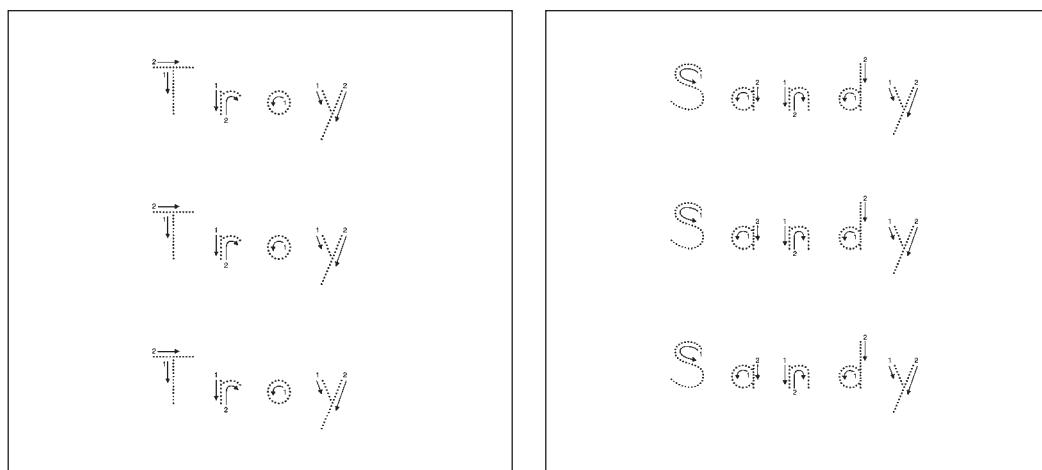


FIGURE 3.6
Examples of Name Tracing Sheets

Rainbow Writing

Rainbow writing (Figure 3.7) allows students to practice writing a word in correct letter case and letter sequence, and it creates a beautiful piece of work. Students are provided with a model, in this case their name cards, to copy. We have them copy the word big with a regular pencil first and then write over it repeatedly using colored pencils. You can also use fine-tipped markers if you don't mind the messiness of the work. Both options provide an interesting tactile feel to this word practice.



FIGURE 3.7
Rainbow Name Writing

Playdough

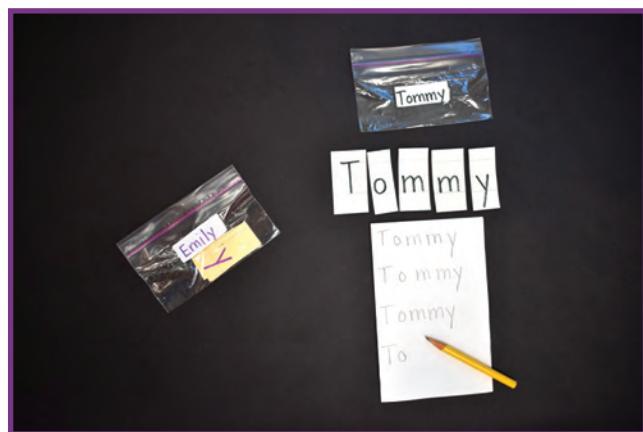
One of the activities we do together on the first day of school is make playdough. We use it through the year for different purposes. At the Word Center, we want children to roll "snakes" or "worms" and explore the lines and curves needed to construct the letters of the alphabet, their own name, and the names of their peers. See Figure 3.8.

**FIGURE 3.8**

Playdough Names. Althea made a sentence with her name and then made her friend's name in playdough.

Name Puzzles

Beginning on the first day of school, we focus on learning the names of our friends. Our names are the pathway to understanding that a word is made up of a set of letters in a certain order. We take a small amount of time each day to focus on one friend's name and create a name puzzle (Figure 3.9). Together, we hear the word spelled, see it written and cut up, count the letters, put it back together in the correct order, and individually practice writing it. Once a name puzzle has been made for every student, these are put into the word center for everyone to practice building and writing names.

**FIGURE 3.9**

Tommy's Name Puzzle

WRITING CENTER

Vocabulary Cards

The writing center is an open-ended center with plenty of student choice. We provide different paper options, as well as a variety of writing and illustrating tools. We also provide vocabulary cards (Figure 3.10) for children to use that match the theme we are studying. Each vocabulary card has several pictures along with the word to match. Some emergent readers need to expand their vocabulary and these cards give them a meaningful way to do that. So, at this center, we encourage students to illustrate pictures and label them.

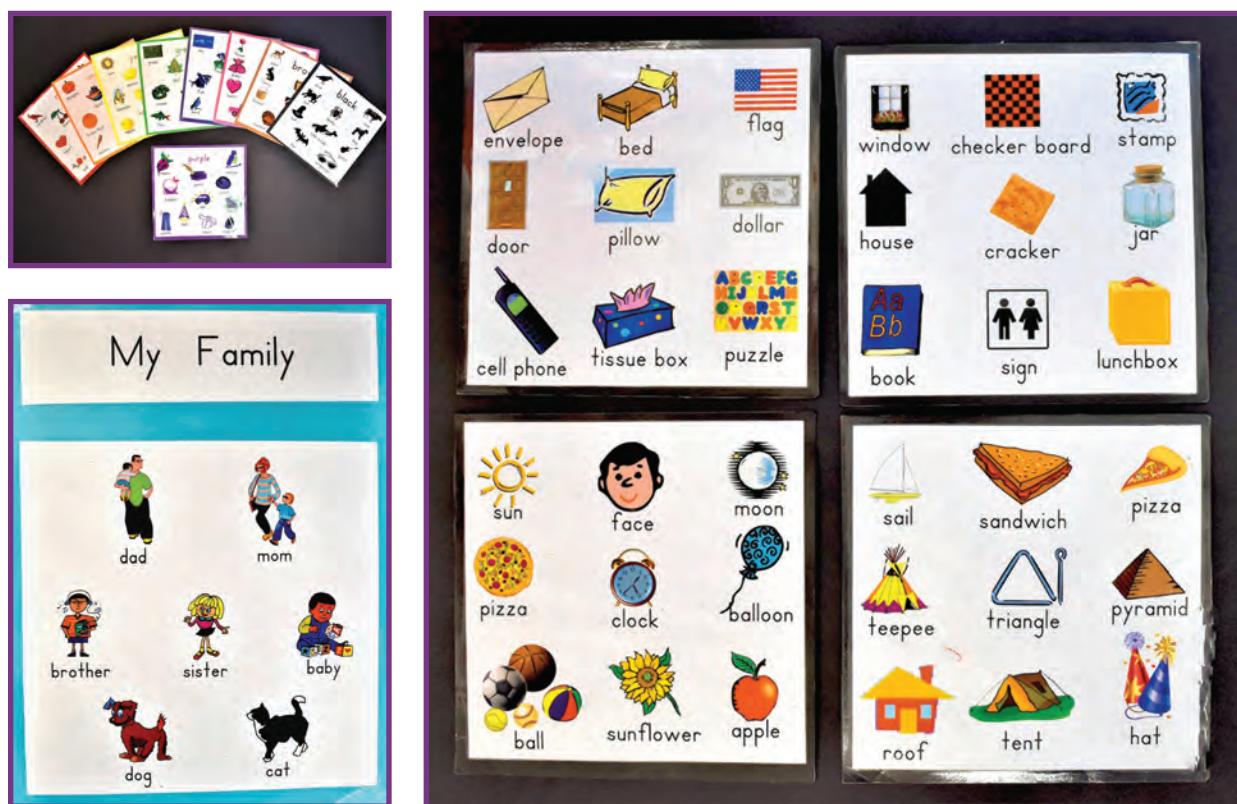


FIGURE 3.10

Vocabulary cards that focus on shapes, colors and family members.

LISTENING CENTER

Tablets With QR Codes

It's important to remember we want our emergent readers to experience authentic texts even if they are not looking at print, yet. Listening to stories read aloud models the act of fluent reading and allows the brain to focus on meaning making. So, we encourage you to have a listening center and provide a wide range of stories and nonfiction books for students to enjoy.

Gone are the days of cassette tapes and CDs for the listening center! Tablets with Sym-baloo webmixes, Bitmoji reading rooms, or QR code readers are the way to go (Figure 3.11). You can find a plethora of stories read aloud on YouTube. Some versions of stories are better read than others, so we encourage you to be picky. Regardless of how you choose to have your students listen to stories, be sure to use a purifying website so the ads are removed.

The process is easy to create a QR code for stories. Here are the simple steps:

1. Find the story you like on YouTube.
2. Copy and paste the YouTube story URL into a purifying website. This will remove the YouTube ads from the story.
3. Copy and paste the purified URL into a QR creator website.
4. Copy and paste the QR code into a word document.
5. Add a picture of the cover of the book.
6. Save.
7. Print.
8. Put the QR code story in the listening center for children to enjoy. We change our stories often to match the theme we are exploring at the time.

We have our tablets set so that only the QR code reader can be accessed. This ensures that children can listen to the stories independently rather than surfing the web or accidentally visiting inappropriate websites. See Figure 3.12 for an example of a QR code story.



FIGURE 3.11

QR Code for the Story Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?



FIGURE 3.12

Aubrey Is Listening to a QR Scanned Story on the Tablet

READING CENTER

A classroom library is essential to literacy learning and development. You want children to have access to a variety of excellent fiction and nonfiction texts every day. How you set up your library will depend on your space and your preference. Some teachers have a rotating library based on children's interests and the theme being taught. Other teachers have a more permanent library organized by author and illustrator and/or topic. Still, other teachers provide the books and have their children organize the classroom library in a way that makes sense to them. You get to decide what works best for you and your children.

"Reading" the Pictures

Early in the year, we want our nonreaders to explore books and enjoy the experience. We model and practice how to pick a book and care for it. Most importantly, we model how to enjoy and take in the beauty of the illustrations. We are careful to notice characters, details, colors, and illustrator decisions. We also model extensively how to read the illustrations, make meaning, and begin to construct an oral story using the illustrations (see Figure 3.13).



FIGURE 3.13
Children Enjoying Books in the Reading Center

10 Intentional from the Start: Guiding Emergent Readers in Small Groups

Hopefully, you find some of these ideas useful. Our purpose is to get you thinking about your own students and their needs as they work and practice independently. Remember, you want to provide purposeful, interesting, and fun activities for your children to engage in. However, keep in mind, your activities should focus on correct practice and building express neural pathways. Unlearning a bad habit or something learned incorrectly takes a tremendous amount of effort and extra practice to correct.