



Hands-On Learning

Moveable Alphabet

Primary Concepts®

The Moveable Alphabet is available in two forms: molded plastic and magnetic foam.

These products are also available from Primary Concepts:

- Alphabet Letter Organizer Box with compartments for storing each of the letters
- Build and Write Magnet Board on which students can build the alphabet and practice writing letters

For these and other literacy materials, please consult a Primary Concepts catalog or visit us at **www.primaryconcepts.com**.

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Moveable Alphabet

Most young children are tactile learners. They learn best when they can touch and move things and discover on their own. That is why the best hands-on alphabet materials for the youngest learners are molded alphabet letters. Later, you can progress to printed letter tiles or alphabet stamps, but in the beginning, it is advantageous to let children feel the three-dimensionality of these engaging manipulatives. The activities in this guide describe some of the many ways you can use molded letters to help children become familiar with the alphabet. Children will learn to

- name each letter
- compare letters and their shapes
- match uppercase and lowercase letters
- put the letters in alphabetical order
- build their own names and other words with the letters
- write the letters
- find examples of letters in the environment



Activities in this guide are designed for work with small groups or individuals, either for mainstream or remedial instruction.

Learning About Letters

Letters are everywhere in a child's world. Yet learning to name the letters of the alphabet is no easy task, especially for those children whose parents have not been actively involved in teaching the letters from infancy. Letters themselves are simply abstract symbols made up of straight and curving lines. Knowing the letter names is basically a memory task.

To learn the alphabet, children must pay close attention to details. The letter *F* looks a lot like the letter *E*, yet they are two different letters. The orientation of the letter is critical. The letter *A* is not *A* if it is upside down. Some letters—*p*, *b*, and *d*, most notably—are basically the same shape; their orientation determines which letter it is. It is easy to see why letter reversals cause problems for many children. And to make matters worse, letters are made in two ways: uppercase and lowercase. For some letters, these two formats are very similar (e.g., *C* and *c*), but in others, they are completely different (e.g., *R* and *r*).

To move beyond letter naming, children need to be able to say the letters both accurately and quickly, without any hesitation. Most letter names relate to the sounds they represent. Only the letters *h, q, w, y, c, g*, and the short vowels are different. Children who have not developed solid alphabet knowledge are less equipped to move to the next step: connecting the letters to the sounds they represent and using that knowledge to read words.

Writing letters of the alphabet is a good way to focus on letter shapes and the ways they differ. Children need to get plenty of practice writing letters. Fluency in handwriting assures that children can focus on *what* they write rather than *how* they write. The molded alphabet letters serve as a model for careful writing. However, it may also be necessary for an adult to guide a child's writing so that the child knows the most efficient way to form the letters. Keep in mind that the most important thing is that the letters a child writes are recognizable.

Assessing Progress

The main goal of these activities is for children to learn to name the letters of the alphabet instantly. To assess progress towards mastery, set out the letters in rows, and have the children read them as quickly as they can. Note whether the letter identification is labored or fluent. With which letters does the child have difficulty?

Aa Bb Cc

Xx Yy Zz



Activity 1: What's in a Name?

In this activity, children string letters to build proper nouns, including the most important one of all—their own name!

Materials: baggies

Activity

Give each child a baggie in which you have placed the letters of the child's name. Tell the children that if they unscramble the letters, they will find the name of someone special.

When the children have built their names, ask them questions like these:

- Are any letters repeated?
- How many letters are red (vowels)? How many are blue (consonants)?
- How many letters are there in all?



On Their Own

Write words for the children to build with the letters. Use words from a current theme or holiday (e.g., pumpkin, seashore, Thanksgiving) or children's names. Ask questions like those above.

T h a n k s g i v i n g

Assessing Progress

- Are the letters in the correct order?
- Are the letters in the correct orientation (e.g., not backwards)?
- Are any letters missing?



Activity 2: Letter in My Pocket

Children enjoy looking for environmental print. Families can get involved, too.

Activity

Begin this activity with a game of Concentration. Mix up two sets of letters and lay them out on the table. Have the children take turns finding pairs of identical letters and saying the name of the letter.



On Their Own

Tell the children that you will give each of them a special letter. During the next few days, they should take care of their special letter. They are to look for words that contain the letter. Point out that letters can look different depending on their typeface. Talk about places children might look: cereal boxes, street signs, on television, and so on. Challenge children to see how many different places they can find their letter.

Hand out a letter to each child and let the hunt begin! Make sure each child knows the name of his or her letter.

During another week, have children take a different letter home in their pocket.

Extension

Give each child a letter. Then invite the children to look in books to see if they can find their letter in print five times. Make sure the children are holding their letter in the correct orientation.

Assessing Progress

- Are children able to name the letter?
- Are they able to match the molded letter to the printed letter?



Activity 3: Letter Shape Sorting

In this activity, the children look carefully at letters and how they are formed. They compare letter shapes and put them into groups that are alike in some way.

Activity

Show the children a set of alphabet letters, either laid out on a table or displayed on a magnet board. Start with just the uppercase letters. Ask children to name pairs of letters that have similar shapes. For example, children may hold up the *Q* and the *O* and say that they are the same except that the *Q* has a line in the circle. Examples:

E F	P R	C G	M N	I T
M W	W V	U V	O Q	K X

Now, put away the uppercase letters and repeat the activity with the lowercase letters.

b d p	m n	a c	h n	g q	m w
v w	y v	b h	f t	n u	i l

The most confusing pair of letters for young children is *b* and *d*. To help, build the word *bed* with letters, and point out how the word looks like a bed. What does the word *bed* begin with? (*b*) What is its ending sound? (*d*) Remind children to visualize the word *bed* when they are having difficulty knowing whether a letter is a *b* or a *d*.



On Their Own

Each child or pair of children will need a set of uppercase letters. Tell the children to sort the letters into groups that are alike in their shape. For example, they might sort the letters into three groups: those that have only straight lines (*A, E, F, H, I*, and so on), those that have only curving lines (*C, S*, and *O*), and those that have a combination of straight and curving lines (*B, D, P, R*, and so on).

Next, have them sort the lowercase letters.

Assessing Progress

- Are children able to detect differences in the shapes of the letters?
- Can they identify letters that are alike?



Activity 4: Feel It. Say It.

What does a *Q* feel like? How about an *O*? Can you feel the difference?

Materials: bag or hat

Activity

Place a set of uppercase letters in a bag or a hat. Go around the group inviting the children to reach into the bag and to pick a letter without looking. Ask them to guess what the letter is without opening their eyes. Were they able to guess the letter correctly? What helped them figure it out? Which letters are most difficult to identify?

Repeat the activity on another day with lowercase letters.



On Their Own

Have the children do this activity on their own. If they guess a letter correctly, they can take it out of the bag. If not, they must return it to the bag, shake, and pull out another letter.

Assessing Progress

- Are the children able to remember the shape of a letter mentally?
- Are they able to name a letter they are visualizing?



Activity 5: Nine-O

Learning to recognize the letters of the alphabet is more fun in a game format.

Materials: counters, bag or hat

Activity

Tell the children how to play the game Nine-O. Have each player take 9 letters from a set of 52, either uppercase or lowercase letters. Players should lay out the 9 letters in a row in front of them. Check to make sure that the letters are all correctly oriented so that the child is looking at letters that are not upside down or backwards.

Now take another set of 52 letters and put them in a bag or a hat. Reach in and take out one letter at a time. Call out the letter name and have the players look through their sets to see if they have that letter. If they do, they can trade it for a counter. The first player to get 9 counters wins.



On Their Own

Let the children play this game on their own, with one child calling the letters. Make sure the caller checks that the letter he or she called matches the letter a player found before giving the player a counter.

Assessing Progress

- How easily and quickly can children identify named letters of the alphabet?



Activity 6: LetterLand

Here is another game for practicing letter recognition. It works with uppercase letters, lowercase letters, or a combination.

Materials: counters, dice

Activity

Mix up the letters and lay them out in a winding path. Tell the children how to play the game. In turn, each player tosses a die and then moves a counter down the path that many letters. They must say the name of the letter on which they land.

Variation

Set out the letters in rows. Have the children play the game by moving along the bottom row first, left to right, then the next row, right to left, and so on until they get to the end. As with the game described above, players need to identify the letter on which they land. If they are unable to do so, players must go back to the beginning. You might add this bonus: If players land on a letter that is at the beginning of their name, they can move ahead ten letters.



On Their Own

Have the children set up and play one of the games described above.

Assessing Progress

- Are the children able to identify the letters of the alphabet?



Activity 7: My ABC Book

In this activity, children find examples of the letter of the day in magazines and newspapers.

Materials: paper, old magazines and newspapers, scissors, stapler, glue sticks
(Note: You may prefer to use ready-made *My ABC Books* available from Primary Concepts.)

Activity

Pick a letter for the day. Show the children both the uppercase and lowercase letters. Write the letter on a piece of construction paper. Then show the children how to look through magazines and newspapers in search of the letter. Have them cut out the letters they find and paste them on the paper.

When they have finished, talk about the letters on the page. How many uppercase letters are there? How many lowercase? In what ways do the type fonts differ? Point out that fonts are not all the same.

On another day, pick a different letter and repeat the activity.

When you have a page for every letter of the alphabet, put the pages in alphabetical order. Staple the pages together with a construction paper cover.



On Their Own

You may wish to have children create their own *My ABC Book* after you have demonstrated how to create a page.

Assessing Progress

- Are students able to identify letters of the alphabet with different typefaces?



Activity 8: 52 Pick Up

In this activity, students match lowercase and uppercase letters.

Activity

Start with a set of 52 letters, one of each lowercase letter and one of each uppercase letter. Randomly spread the letters out on the table or desktop. Don't worry if the orientation of the letters varies; it's good to give children practice recognizing the symbol no matter what its orientation. Have the children take turns picking up a letter and its matching partner so they have a pair of uppercase and lowercase letters (e.g., *A* and *a*). Have them describe in words how the uppercase and lowercase letters are different. Which uppercase and lowercase letters are exactly the same except for size? (*C, O, P, S, V, W, X, Z*)



On Their Own

Let the children play this game on their own.

Assessing Progress

- Are the children able to match upper and lowercase letters correctly?
- Are they able to recognize a letter no matter what its orientation?



Activity 9: A, B, C, D,...

Now we know our *ABC*'s. Next time won't you sing with me?

Materials: alphabet books

Activity

Lay out all the alphabet letters in alphabetical order. Invite the children to sing the alphabet song as you point to the letters. Be sure to slow down for the letters *l*, *m*, *n*, and *o*.

Then build the alphabet again, either uppercase or lowercase, this time with one or more mistakes. Letters could switch places, or a letter could be upside down. Challenge the children to find any mistakes.



On Their Own

Ask the children to build the alphabet, pointing to each letter as they sing the alphabet song. Then ask a partner to check their work.

Extension

Give the children alphabet books. Then have them find the letter that goes with each page, lining up the letters to form the alphabet.

Assessing Progress

- Are the children able to sing the alphabet song?
- Are they able to put the letters in alphabetical order?



Activity 10: Chicka Chicka

In this activity, children use the alphabet letters to act out the story *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom*.

Materials: *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* by Bill Martin, Jr. and John Archambault (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 1989), construction paper, scissors, glue stick, drawing materials

Activity

Have the children make a picture of a coconut tree as suggested by the illustrations in the book. They can draw the tree on paper or cut and paste construction paper in the form of a tree. When the children have completed their trees, have them put a set of letters (either uppercase or lowercase) in alphabetical order. They may use the alphabet song to help them.

With the children's letters lined up and ready to go, read the book *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* aloud, and have the children use their letters to act out the story. The starting line—"A told B and B told C, I'll meet you at the top of the coconut tree."—for example, would be acted out by pretending that the letter A is talking to the letter B, and then the letter B talks to the letter C. Finally, all three letters dance to the top of the coconut tree. Children will especially enjoy the part when all the letters fall out of the tree.



On Their Own

Let the children listen to an audio version of the book and act out the story again with their letters and their coconut tree drawing.

Assessing Progress

- Are the children able to identify each letter of the alphabet correctly?
- Are they able to put the letters in alphabetical order?



Activity 11: The Green Dot Marks the Spot

Deciding where to start is often the most difficult part of writing a letter of the alphabet.

Materials: green round color coding labels (1/4-inch diameter)

Activity

Introduce each letter one at a time. Use your finger to show the children how to write the letter. Emphasize the beginning spot. Mark it with a green dot. Describe how your fingers are moving. For *D*, for example, you might say, “Green dot down to the bottom, then up to the top, and around to the bottom again.” For *g*, you might say, “Green dot around and back to the green dot, then down and around for the tail.” Point out that on almost all the letters, the green dot is at the top or near the top.



On Their Own

Let the children practice “writing” the letters with their fingers on the molded letters, then in the air. Make sure they are starting by pointing to the green dot.

Extension

Children can write the letters in a sandbox using the molded letters as a guide. They can draw the letter with glue and stick on shiny sequins, or they can paint the letters with water and watch them disappear.

Assessing Progress

- Are the children starting at the right spot?
- Are they ending at the right spot?
- Are they skipping any part of the letter?



Activity 12: Letters and Sounds

With this last activity, children learn one of the most important concepts of print: that letters represent sounds.

Materials: bag or hat

Activity

Place all the uppercase or lowercase letters in a hat or a bag. Ask a child to reach in, pick a letter, and identify the letter for the class. Then ask the class to think of words that might start with that letter. For *Bb*, for example, children might think of *bear*, *boat*, and so on. Continue this way until you are finished with all the letters in the hat.

Note: If the child picks any of the following more difficult letters, tell the class a word that starts with the letter, and then ask them to name other words that start with the same letter/sound. For *Hh*, for example, you might say, “hen,” and the children will then say things like “hat” and “hope.”

c g h q u w y



On Their Own

If the children have their own *My ABC Books* (see page 11), invite them to draw pictures of things that start with the letter of the alphabet on each page. They can also cut pictures from magazines or newspapers and glue them onto the page.

Assessing Progress

- Are the children able to think of words that start with a particular letter/sound?



The Moveable Alphabet makes learning letter names a joy for both students and teachers. Children feel the shapes of the molded letters, compare their differences, and use them as models for handwriting. An ideal manipulative for instant letter recognition, letter writing, and word building. Comes in magnetic and plastic versions with guidebook of hands-on activities.

- Moveable Alphabet sets are made of durable plastic.
- Magnetic Moveable Alphabet sets are made of solid foam with magnetic backing.

For more information, visit us online at **www.primaryconcepts.com**.

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