chapter 4

UNIT: Letter Lessons for Kindergartners and Prekindergartners

Developing Understanding of Alphabet Knowledge and the Alphabetic Principle

I WILL NEVER FORGET WORKING WITH TROY, A KINDERGARTNER, who needed some help with alphabet knowledge. "I don't understand it," said his mother. "His teachers keep telling us that he needs to learn his letters, but he knows all his letters. He can say them right here. Go ahead, Troy." As Troy proceeded to say the names of the letters in order, I realized just how much confusion there can be when we say that students "know their letters." Of course, Troy could say the names of the letters, but he did not know that the letter name labels represented speech sounds (i.e., phonemes). He did not know how to *use* that information to read words.

Like Troy's mother, many adults and even some educators do not realize that "knowing the alphabet" actually means having a diverse set of skills around the fifty-two building blocks of words in English (e.g., recognizing letters, naming letters, naming the sound or sounds commonly associated with that letter, and forming letters). What educators mean when they say that children "know their letters" is *alphabet knowledge.*

When children really know their letters, they do not hesitate when asked to name them. They rarely get confused by similar letters (e.g., *b/d, p/b, m/w*), and they are able to name letters and sounds without showing inconsistencies (i.e., they do not name a letter correctly sometimes and incorrectly other times).

Different Types of Alphabet Knowledge

A child who has alphabet knowledge can

- **Point to letters.** When a teacher names a letter, the child can point to it.
- **Name letters.** When shown an uppercase or lowercase letter, the child can give the name of the letter.
- **Say letter-sounds.** The child can automatically identify the common sound or sounds associated with each single consonant and the short vowel sounds.
- **Write letters.** The child can correctly form the uppercase and lowercase letters and write the letters fluently to produce "invented" spellings.
- **Understand the alphabetic principle.** The child demonstrates understanding that the alphabet is a set of symbols used to encode speech into a written format that can then be decoded by a reader.

It *is* common for children to reverse letters, especially *b* and *d*, at the early stages of letter learning, but this does *not* indicate dyslexia. (See the box "Letter Reversals ≠ Dyslexia—Don't Contribute to the Panic!") Children tend to reverse letters early on because letters, unlike other objects in their world, can actually change their identity when flipped, rotated, or reversed. Think about it: a cat upside down is a cat. But a lowercase *Bb* upside down is a *Pp*. When children really know their letters, they *own* letter knowledge and it cannot be taken away from them or disrupted in any way. There is no point in teaching letters and phonemes without showing children how that knowledge is useful. Yet, in the busyness of the classroom, children can seem to be getting the "big picture," or understanding the alphabetic principle, when they are really not. The box on page 80 provides specific examples of things that children will say and do when they understand the alphabetic principle and when they do not.

When Troy's teacher started to teach him the names of the letters of the alphabet, Troy was at first very confused. Because the traditional alphabet song blurs the middle letters of the alphabet, *L, M, N, O, P,* together, he thought they were actually all one letter, "ellemenopee." Most teachers have encountered this phenomenon. A good teacher can exploit this rote knowledge to develop the alphabetic principle. Troy's teacher pointed out, "Look, each of these are separate letters. Say them slowly: 'El, Em, En, Oh, Pee.' *P* stands for the /p/ sound. Here is a *P* for /p/ /p/ *peanut.*" A teacher develops the alphabetic principle consistently over time by connecting these floating bits of information to the larger understanding that letters are the building blocks for words. This happens through explicit instruction in small groups, as described in this

How You Can Tell If Children Have the Alphabetic Principle

When children *do* understand the alphabetic principle, they will

- *say a word* when they are trying to spell it
- *use invented (temporary) spelling* with logical errors (e.g., *get* = *git*)
- *start a word* they are trying to read with the correct sound, even if they don't read the whole word correctly (e.g., *see* = say)
- *read back* writing (e.g., *trick or treat* = *trcrtreet*)
- *spell words* without needing to copy them from a book letter-by-letter

When children *do not* understand the alphabetic principle, they will

- *write* something but not know how to read it back because they are not using the letter–sound relationship
- *copy* words but not be able to read them back
- *write* letters without any correspondence to sounds (e.g., *I went to the store* = *bmlssmii*)
- *not talk or say the word* while trying to spell it
- *use* letters they know (e.g., in their own names) to write all words, regardless of sounds
- *look to the teacher* when they can't read a word
- *ask, "How do you write it?"* when they can't spell a word
- *say the name of a letter* when asked to read a word (e.g., *no* = *n*)

chapter, but it also occurs in the "big picture" practices described in Chapter 3 (see "Shared Reading with Print Referencing" and "Interactive Writing" on pp. 54–56).

According to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (NGA and CCSSO 2012), kindergarten children should be able to name all uppercase and lowercase letter–sounds. This standard is in line with decades of work and all states' standards. In prekindergarten, agencies and researchers have recommended a range from 10 letters (either upper or lowercase) to 18 uppercase and 15 lowercase letters (Piasta, Petscher, and Justice 2012). Thus, preschoolers should learn at least 10 letters and more if possible, and, more important, they need to be developing phonological awareness and concepts of print, including concept of word, comprehension, and vocabulary knowledge.

Letter Reversals ≠ Dyslexia—Don't Contribute to the Panic!

With current emphasis on diagnosing "dyslexia" in today's young readers, it is not uncommon for parents or even misinformed teachers to believe that reversing letters is a sign that a child might be "dyslexic." A flip-flopped *s* or a *b* and *d* reversal can create all kinds of concern. In fact, there is even a PSA produced by the Disney corporation that further perpetuates this myth. But letter reversals are *very common as children learn letters.* Children often reverse *b* and *d* throughout first grade. Think of it as analogous to learning your right hand from your left hand. At some level the distinction is arbitrary and it takes practice, mnemonic devices, and time to get it right. So when young learners reverse letters during the Spell-It portion of the lesson, provide a gentle reminder or suggest using an alphabet strip, but don't call in the school psychologist.

VIDEO 4.1

Letter Reversals Do Not Usually Mean Dyslexia

In this short clip, I explain why letter reversals are not always an indicator of dyslexia.

But What Is Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words. Dyslexia affects individuals throughout their lives; however, its impact can change at different stages in a person's life. It is referred to as a learning disability because dyslexia can make it very difficult for a student to succeed academically in the typical instructional environment, and in its more severe forms, will qualify a student for special education, special accommodations, or extra support services.

continues

The problems displayed by individuals with dyslexia involve difficulties in acquiring and using written language. It is a myth that individuals with dyslexia "read backward," although spelling can look quite jumbled at times because students have trouble remembering letter symbols for sounds and forming memories for words. Other problems experienced by people with dyslexia include the following:

- Learning to speak
- Learning letters and their sounds
- Organizing written and spoken language
- Memorizing number facts
- Reading quickly enough to comprehend
- Persisting with and comprehending longer reading assignments
- Spelling
- Learning a foreign language
- Correctly doing math operations

Not all students who have difficulties with these skills have dyslexia. Formal testing of reading, language, and writing skills is the only way to confirm a diagnosis of suspected dyslexia.

Source: International Dyslexia Association, www.DyslexialDA.org

Development of Concept of Word in Print

Concept of word in print refers to the ability of young children to understand how words work in print, how they are configured on the page. Specifically, when children begin to try to "read" books themselves or watch a teacher point to the words in a big book, they begin to notice that the words stay the same each time, that there is a connection between print and voice, that words are made of groups of letters, and that white space separates words. Children acquire concept of word by attempting to point to words as they say them in a line of print. Although it sounds easy, it is not! In fact, children go through distinct stages as they gain control over this (Ehri and Sweet 1991; Henderson and Beers 1980; Morris 1983; Morris et al. 2003).

Different Phases of Concept of Word

Full Concept of Word

In the example in Figure 4.1, the child is reading the line "Come again another day" from the nursery rhyme "Rain, Rain, Go Away." As she recites the words, she points exactly to the word that she is saying at the time, as indicated by the ✓marks.

FIGURE 4.1

Text:	*Come*	*again*	*another*	*day.*
Child Reciting:	"Come	again	another	day."
Child Pointing:	✓	✓	✓	✓

No Concept of Word

In the examples in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, two other children are pointing to the same line of print from the nursery rhyme. As these examples show, they are not showing any insight about words. Both of these children know that print carries meaning and that what is said can be printed, but they do not know where words begin and end. They don't really know what the system is. In the example in Figure 4.2, the child simply points to the first word, *Come*, and says the entire line.

FIGURE 4.2

Text:	*Come*	*again*	*another*	*day.*
Child Reciting:	"Come again another day."			
Child Pointing:	✓			

In the example in Figure 4.3, the child quickly runs his finger quickly under the print while reciting the words without pausing.

FIGURE 4.3

Text:	*Come*	*again*	*another*	*day.*
Child Reciting:	"Come again another day."			
Child Pointing:	✓ ———	———	———	———→

continues

Developing Concept of Word

In between full acquisition of concept of word and none, is a second stage where a reader can point to some words accurately but not others. Usually a reader has difficulty handling multisyllabic words. In the example in Figure 4.4, the reader points to each of the words in the line until encountering a multisyllabic word. Then the learner inaccurately points to the word *another* while saying the second syllable of *a-gain*. You can see that she "runs out of words" to point to. Syllables are very prominent in the speech stream and it is not uncommon for an inexperienced child to think that a spoken syllable represents a printed word on the page.

FIGURE 4.4

Text:	*Come*	*again*	*another*	*day.*		
Child Reciting:	"Come	a-	gain	a-	nother	day."
Child Pointing:	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?

Letter Names *and* Letter–Sounds

The following statement has resulted in some confusion, so let's unpack it:

> *The best predictor of beginning reading achievement is a child's knowledge of letter names. (Adams 1990)*

This statement is probably one of the most frequently cited bits of reading research. And like many excerpted statements from research, this one seems to suggest a clear, easy solution, a veritable cure—teach children to name letters and they will learn to read.

While research supports that letter naming *is* critical for learning to read, it is not a straight path to learning to read (Bond and Dykstra 1967; Chall 1967; Lonigan and Shanahan 2009). Invernizzi and Buckrop (2018) facetiously explain that letter naming has become like a "Ouija board" of literacy achievement: find out how many letter names children have and you can peer into their futures. Yet *naming* letters is only one facet of letter knowledge and probably not the most important one. It is the *use of* and *application of* letter knowledge that advances children.

Children use letter knowledge to read and spell. However, possessing letter knowledge will not guarantee future literacy success. Simply put, you cannot become a skilled reader without letter knowledge, but you need many other skills as well (Lonigan and Shanahan 2009).

Letter naming predicts future literacy success because it is highly related to other important factors that also have a relationship with success in literacy (Share 1995). For example, Jasmin entered kindergarten able to name all twenty-six uppercase letters, but she also sat with her parents every evening reading books, engaged in many activities in the community (e.g., visiting museums, going on guided nature walks) that built world knowledge, and attended a small preschool that focused heavily on social skills and oral language in addition to more conventional content like letters. These experiences developed her vocabulary knowledge, her print awareness, her world knowledge, her phonological awareness (e.g., rhyming and beginning sounds), and her abilities to negotiate classrooms and peers. Her ability to name letters was simply the tip of the iceberg, an easily measured indicator of a set of rich early literacy (and other) experiences.

Knowing letter–sounds is different from knowing letter names. If a child knows the name of the letter *Tt*, he will say "Tee," but if he knows the sound, he will say /t/. In most US schools, children are taught letter names and letter–sounds, but in Great Britain and in some schools in the United States, such as those following a Montessori approach, only letter–sounds are emphasized (Ellefson, Treiman, and Kessler 2009). In order to decode words, children need to know letter–sounds; this is the essential information, but teaching both letter names and sounds gives better results (Piasta, Purpura, and Wagner 2010; Piasta and Wagner 2010). It appears that with some level of phonemic awareness children use letters names to help them extract sounds (Share 2004).

When children are taught letter names they will typically learn letter names first, and usually first those at the beginning of the alphabet (e.g., *A*, *B*, *C*), then those with salient forms (e.g., *O*, *X*), and then those in their names (Drouin, Horner, and Sondergeld 2012; Justice et al. 2006; Piasta, Petscher, and Justice 2012). If you are working with a four-year-old who knows one to five letters, these letters are probably among them. The last letter names to be learned are typically *U*, *V*, *N*, and *Q*. However, these generalizations will vary based on various factors, such as the letters in the child's name, which are typically learned earlier, and other letters that may have personal significance to the child (e.g., the first letter of a sibling's name). The last skill to come is associating letters with sounds, and there is a clear pattern to how these associations typically emerge as well (Pence et al. 2009; Treiman and Kessler 2004). However, this may be a function of the greater emphasis on letter names in the preschool years. I recommend teaching names and sounds simultaneously in prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms.

For children who learn letter names, the letter–sounds tend to be learned in a sequence that is connected to whether and how the sound of the letter is included in the letter's name (Evans et al. 2006; McBride-Chang 1999; Huang, Tortorelli, and

Invernizzi 2014; Jones and Reutzel 2012; Share 2004; Treiman and Kessler 2003). I use three labels to describe three types of letter–sounds based on letter names:

- *transparent* (also called *acrophonic*): letter names with the target sound of the letter at the beginning of the name (e.g., *b, v, t, d*); these often have a c-v structure
- *opaque*: letter names with the sound at the end of the name (e.g., *l, m, n, s*)
- *no-information*: letter names that provide no link to the sound (e.g., *w, x, h*).

Ever wonder why a child will tell you that the sound for *Yy* is /w/? Children will use information from the letter names to remember letter–sounds. Sometimes this information helps, but sometimes it does not (e.g., *Yy*'s name begins with the /w/ sound). Children typically learn the sounds for letters with *transparent* names before they learn the sounds for letters with *opaque* names, and they learn both of those prior to the *no-information* names (Treiman and Kessler 2003; Treiman et al. 1998). For example, the letter–sounds for transparent names like *Bb* are easier to learn because the name for the letter, "bee," starts with the target sound, /b/. The letter–sounds for *Yy* is learned later because the name does not match with the /y/ sound (Treiman, Weatherston, and Berch 1994). A researcher tested this pattern and found a direct, causal connection between names of letters and their sounds but only if children had some level of phonemic awareness (Share 2004). In other words, without the ability to hear sound similarities in words (e.g., *l*emon and *l*ady), children could not use the letter names information to help them. What this reinforces is that phonemic awareness activities that focus on identifying, contrasting, and matching beginning sounds help children learn letter–sounds.

Targeted Small Groups Instead of Whole-Group "Letter of the Week"

When I was growing up in the 1970s, I learned letters one at a time sitting in my kindergarten chair with the entire class. A recently published book, *No More Teaching a Letter a Week* (McKay and Teale 2015), describes why this traditional approach is ineffective:

- Teaching a letter a week does not assume mastery from week to week. Instead, the teacher moves on to the next letter each week, regardless of whether or not everyone has learned the letter.
- There is no differentiation in instruction based on the letter (*U, V* vs. *A, B, C*) and individual student knowledge is not addressed.
- The pacing of instruction does not provide the repetition and practice that it takes to learn all the elements of letters (e.g., letter–sounds, writing). With twenty-six letters and about thirty-six weeks of school for most districts, children would not be taught

> all the letters until the school year was almost three-quarters done. The instruction typically focuses only on naming letters even though the research tells us that phonemic awareness, letter–sounds instruction, and development of the alphabetic principle are essential (Piasta and Wagner 2010; Share 2008).

Sometimes letters are even used as the primary theme for class work—in *D* week, for example, everything revolves around *D*. Such a theme, however, is not likely to be as compelling and educative for children as a unit on fairy tales or jobs in the community or animal life cycles, for example.

Whole-group letter lessons, as the only structure for letter lessons, are often not effective. Children in kindergarten are often the most diverse in their literacy knowledge because some have had multiple years of preschool while others are experiencing their first year in a formal school setting. In one study, at the *beginning* of the year, kindergartners ranged in the number of uppercase and lowercase letters they knew (prior to any instruction) from 0 letters to 52 (Piasta 2014). Unfortunately, in many, many kindergartens everyone in the entire class gets the same letter instruction, day after day after day, on the carpet in the middle of the room.

Small-group instruction is also particularly beneficial for letter learners due to their age, maturity, and development. Young children can get distracted, zone out, or daydream. As Nancy, a kindergarten teacher, explains, "Oh yeah, I was the best teacher around when I only taught in large groups. Everyone knew everything. They were nodding and chiming in and smiling. But when I get them in a small group, I really figure out who really understands." In fact, small-group instruction actually adds value over and above *individual* instruction (Piasta and Wagner 2010). Perhaps children are learning from each other or benefiting from the feedback provided to others in the small group.

Letter Lessons Unit: Scope and Sequence

The Letter Lessons unit scope and sequence allows teachers to deliver the amount of letter instruction *based on what students need.* Teachers *use* initial assessment information to start instruction and then conduct a quick assessment at the midpoint to continue to direct instruction. The subunits in Letter Lessons are called "cycles" because the instruction keeps "cycling" back to letter–sound instruction, *based on what a student needs.* The term *cycle* most accurately captures what current research suggests about learning letters: that it is not a "one-shot deal" but rather content that should be reviewed in successive sweeps for children who need it (Jones, Clark, and Reutzel 2013).

From start to finish, the Letter Lessons unit is twenty-seven weeks, but many kindergartners start midway through. The scope and sequence covers an initial subunit for children will almost no entering letter knowledge, two subunits to teach the letter sounds, and a final subunit in which children use their knowledge to read a collection of high-frequency words. See Figure 4.5. After this unit, students should be ready for First Words with word families. In most kindergartens, this will occur by the last half of the school year, if not before.

FIGURE 4.5

Week of Instruction	Content	Notes
Letter Cycle 1: What's in a Name?		
◦ Children who know 0–5 letter–sounds		
1	Name (own)	Write name, read name, name letters, cut up names
2	Names (class)	Sort by first letter, sign in, find a word that starts with _____
3 optional	Names story (class)	LEA (language experience approach): stories with each person's name, "read" your own sentence with accurate pointing
Letter Cycle 2: First Pass		
◦ Children who know 6–10 letter–sounds (if Letter Cycle 1 is not done)		
◦ Slower pace, more time per letter		
4	m, a	Note: This sequence is *suggested* only. Although there are many different considerations in presenting letters (e.g., letter frequency, visual contrast, transparent letter name, sonority), there is not at this time a clear evidence-based sequence for teaching letter names and sounds together.
5	t, s	
6	e, b	
7	o, l	
8	f, g	
9	n, p	
10	r, d, i	
11	j, u, k	
12	c, v, y	
13	h, q, z	
14	w, x, h	

After Letter Cycle 2, *assess* all letter–sounds.

- Children with 21+ letter–sounds should do Letter Cycle: 4 Word Building
- Children with 11–20 letter–sounds should do Letter Cycle 3: Review/Solidify

Letter Cycle 3: Review/Solidify

- Children who know 11–20 letter–sounds
- Faster pace, less time per letter
- More focus on harder letter–sounds
- Note: Six weeks is suggested, but cycle length will depend on assessment.

15	Letter sounds that are *somewhat* challenging l, m, s	Letters taught in this six-week unit are based on the assessment taken after Letter Cycle 2 or the placement test. Content should prioritize ***letter–sounds not known***. The sequence on the left can be used if it matches student knowledge.
16	f, n	
17	g, h, q, e	
18	Letter sounds that are *most* challenging	
19	r, w, o,	
20	y, x, i, u	

Letter Cycle 4: Word Building

- Children who know 21+ letter–sounds
- Use letter–sounds to teach high-frequency words and related decodable words

21	so, no, go, + [the]	
22	we, me, he, be, + [said]	
23	up, not + [look]	*-ot* word family
24	it, in, is, his + [for]	*-it* word family
25	to, do, you + [and]	*-in* word family
26	can, man, ran + [little]	*-an* word family
27	Review	

Letter Cycle 1: What's in a Name? (0–5 Letter–Sounds)

Letter Cycle 1: What's in a Name? is a light introduction to letters based on children's names and it is based on Cunningham's (1988) brilliant work. This two- to three-week subunit is for children who truly know very few, if any, letter–sounds (0–5). Often this may mean children who are English language learners, children in prekindergarten, or children for whom kindergarten is their first formal schooling experience. During this subunit, the goal is for children to learn how to recognize their own name, write their own name, and understand, if possible, the target letter–sounds for the first letter in their name. (Note: Sometimes target sounds for first names can be complex.) In this whole-class subunit, the teacher will work with the class to analyze each child's name, count the number of letters, focus on the beginning sound, and/or group names with similar sounds together.

A few words about the length of the subunit: If the class is mostly beginners or if the class is large, then this unit could actually be closer to four weeks long. Twenty days would allow analysis of twenty different names. If the class has a lot of students who already know letter–sounds, it should not go for longer than three weeks, since most children will get bored and instructional time should be maximized with more instructionally appropriate activities.

Sometimes a child's name will not match to the typical sound that we think of when we have the letter. For example, *Juan* has a *Jj*, but the initial sound is not /j/. In these cases, it's best to simply acknowledge that the sound that the *Jj* represents in the name *Juan* is unique and special, just like people, and that it reflects the child's home, family, and culture.

Sometimes a teacher will actually do this subunit with everyone in the class. This subunit is unlike any of the other letter cycles, and its goals are simple. Children should be able to

- **Recognize and write their own names.** One of the very first real applications of letter knowledge to which children are exposed is their own name. Many kindergartners can recognize their own names, but they may not know how to write their names, put the letters in their names in order, or identify their names without context. For kindergartners, practicing spelling their names is both a highly pragmatic and exciting activity. At the very least, this subunit should address writing *first names*; if 60 percent or more of the kindergartners can write their first name, this unit can also address *last names*.
- **Identify an increased number of uppercase and lowercase letter names.** Children at this very early stage are still learning letter names, and the activities in What's in a Name? will help them add more letter names to their knowledge.

- **Distinguish a word from a letter and practice concept of word.** During this subunit, children begin to see how letters and words are related to each other. Through activities such as counting letters and doing word puzzles, they acquire the insight that letters are the building blocks of words. Words are groups of letters. As children "read" their sentences with *their* name and *their* ideas, they point to each word as they say it, practicing this essential starting point for the alphabetic principle. They use letter names and letter–sounds as they point to words in these sentences.

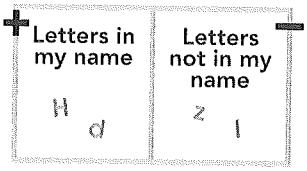
What's in a Name? Lesson Framework with Activities

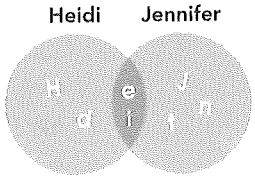
Unlike all other subunits in this book—which follow the sequence of Review-It, Hear-It, Decode-It, Spell-It, Read-It—What's in a Name? has *three* lesson parts:

1. alphabet review
2. names with the whole group and
3. names with an individual or partner.

See Figure 4.6 for activities in weeks 1, 2, and 3 for each lesson part (review, whole group, small group, or individual).

FIGURE 4.6

1. Alphabet Review	2. Names Whole Group	3. Names Individual or Partner Activities
Every day, the teacher models pointing to letters and naming them using an alphabet arc or a letter strip. *Children* sing and point to letters once they have watched the teacher enough to handle their own manipulatives. Always remind them, "Look at the letters when you say them!"	**Week 1**	
	Put each name on a sentence strip. Stack the names up in a column and compare them. • Which is longest? Which is shortest? • Which start with the same letter? • How many letters do they have? • What words rhyme with *Tate*?	Name Card: Child traces name card. Child uses a dry erase marker to write name using name card as a guide.
	Hold up each name and ask the child to come up and "claim it."	
	Play the "In My Name?" game. Draw a line on a dry erase board with one side labeled "Letters in my name" and the other side labeled "Letters not in my name." Pull out a child's name card and grab a handful of magnetic letters. Hold up a letter, and ask the child to decide if it is "in my name." Put the letter in the correct column.	Child plays the "In My Name?" game. 

1. Alphabet Review	2. Names Whole Group	3. Names Individual or Partner Activities
	Week 2	
	Compare names using a Venn diagram. Pull out two name cards. Draw a Venn diagram. Write the names at the top of the diagram. Place the letters in proper places.	Child plays Venn diagram game with a partner. 
	Cut off the beginning sound of a name and then put it back on the name.	Name Puzzle: Child has a name card and name puzzle (cut-up letters of the name). Child puts the letters of the name in the correct order using the name card. Later in the unit, take the name card away and have the child do this from memory.
	Cut up the entire name and then use another copy of the name to match the cut-up pieces back.	Magnetic Letters: Same as name puzzle but with magnetic letters.
	Star Child (Cunningham 1988): Put all the name cards into a basket and randomly choose one each day. Pull it out. Analyze the name.	

continues

1. Alphabet Review	2. Names Whole Group	3. Names Individual or Partner Activities
	Week 3	
	Create a sentence for each child in this format: _____ likes to _____. (e.g., *Katie likes to ride her bike.*) Point to the words and read. Ask the child to point and read.	Sentence: Child illustrates sentence. Child reads sentence.
	Make a class book with all the LEA sentences. Read each sentence each day. Have each child illustrate their page.	LEA Book: Create a small version of the sentences in the LEA book and let children work together with buddies to read the LEA book.

Letter Cycle 2: First Pass (6–10 Letter–Sounds)

Letter Cycle 2 is the first powerful dose of instruction and presents all the letter–sounds across eleven weeks. It is for students who know 6–10 letter–sounds. Most kindergarten students will start here. Depending on the school calendar, Letter Cycles 1 and 2 will be completed after three and a half months, at least by the winter holidays in mid-December. After Letter Cycle 2, teachers reassess and identify students who know 21 or more letter–sounds or 20 or fewer letter–sounds.

Letter Cycle 3: Review/Solidify (11–20 Letter–Sounds)

Letter Cycle 3 is a second pass of Letter Cycle 2 for students who know 20 or fewer letter–sounds. It is a review for children who need it. Both letter names and letter–sounds are emphasized, with particular focus given to letter–sounds because that is the information needed for reading. Pictures are used to help children listen for sounds, and alphabet strips or alphabet arcs are used to review naming the letters every day. Simple "caption" books with one to three words per page help students acquire concept of word and use their burgeoning letter–sounds knowledge in authentic print experiences.

The specific sequence for the letter–sounds in Letter Cycles 2 and 3 is simply a suggestion. There are probably about as many different sequences for teaching letters as there are teachers, and research has yet to establish one perfect sequence. (Note, however, that children learn certain letter–sounds more easily than they learn others, as discussed earlier.) In general, the order and groupings of letter–sounds were identified by considering the frequency of a letter (how often it appears in print), the sound of a letter (whether it can easily be stretched, e.g., *s*, *m*), the difficulty of the letter–sound in relationship to its name (*b* vs. *h*), and visual properties (*b* vs. *p* vs. *d*).

Letter Cycle 3 is a faster-paced six-week subunit to review and solidify letter–sounds. It is for children who have 11–20 letter–sounds. Instruction in Letter Cycle 3 is based on the letters that a group of children do not know. Thus, the content cannot be listed specifically. If Letter Cycle 3 starts at the beginning of the year, the placement test results are used to identify the letters taught. If Letter Cycle 3 follows Letter Cycle 2, then the teacher gives the test for Part A.3: Letter–Sounds again, after Cycle 2, and uses this information to guide the content.

Even though the content is specific to assessment data, it is likely that many children in this cycle will need the same letters. As described above, there is research that indicates the letter–sounds that tend to take longer to learn. In Figure 4.5, the section for Letter Cycle 3 lists letter–sounds that are most challenging and those that are somewhat challenging. Of course, children can have gaps in their knowledge and it is common for some of the "easier" letters to be taught in this review cycle.

Although six weeks are dedicated to this cycle, it is possible that it might only take three. Letter Cycles 2 and 3 do not vary in the content and in many respects the lesson activities will be very similar. Each lesson has a brisk, engaging format with five predictable parts:

1. All-Alphabet Review and Letter Banks (5 minutes)
2. Hear-It (phonemic awareness) (5 minutes)
3. Target Letter Activity (7–9 minutes)
4. Spell-It (5 minutes)
5. Read-It (text reading) (5 minutes)

For Letter Lessons, each child should have

- a laminated alphabet strip with their name clearly written on it as a model
- their own "letter bank"—a ring of cards with the letters on it
- a dry erase board and marker, and
- the text that is being read.

Letter Lessons usually take place in small groups for about twenty to twenty-five minutes, five times per week. Letter Cycles 2 and 3 both focus on helping children to become automatic with letter–sounds knowledge and use that knowledge as they attempt to spell words. The primary difference between these two cycles is that Letter Cycle 3 is often a review for children who need more work or a subunit for children who

enter kindergarten with 11 or more letter–sounds. Thus, the pace is a bit faster in Letter Cycle 3 and the content of the cycle is shaped by what the assessments tell us children need to learn. Usually more emphasis is given to the harder, later-developing sounds (e.g., *y, w, h, g, x, qu*). Figure 4.7 shows the goals for Letter Cycles 2 and 3. For some children these will be met with only one letter cycle, but for others it may take two.

- **Say all single-consonant letter–sounds and short vowel letter–sounds fluently.** In order to *use* letter–sound knowledge in their future decoding and writing, students need to gain command of all consonant letter–sounds. The Common Core State Standards require this to be obtained by the end of kindergarten.
- **Identify the sound at the beginning of a spoken word.** Research shows that letter instruction that combines with phonemic awareness will result in better letter–sounds and letter name learning (Piasta and Wagner 2010). As letter instruction takes place, a simple series of oral activities builds capacity for hearing sounds at the beginning of words.
- **Use letter–sound knowledge to spell and read words.** One of the best ways to gain fluidity with letter–sounds is to practice spelling dictated words or words of students' own choosing that begin with the target letter–sounds. Even if students cannot spell the word fully and include the vowels, the practice of pushing themselves to use invented (or temporary) spellings is very powerful.
- **Develop concept of word.** Concept of word is developed in a small-group lesson by allowing children to "read" memorized simple books. What is most important during these readings is that the child say the words and point to them at the same time. A coordination between print and voice should be occurring. This is not reading in the traditional sense because children are not sounding out words or using all the patterns.

Lesson Framework with Activities for Letter Cycles 2 and 3

The lesson framework for Letter Cycles 2 and 3 is shown in Figure 4.7.

FIGURE 4.7

		Lesson Part	Content	Sample Language	Activity Choices
1	5 minutes	**All-Alphabet Review** (Rehearse)	Say the names and sounds of letters.	Teacher: Watch me as I sing this song and point to each letter. I am making sure that my finger matches the letter that I am saying in the song.	Sing and point the alphabet with an alphabet strip. _____ Easier: Name the letters on a letter ring. Harder: Alphabet Arc: 1. Name each letter. 2. Say its sound. 3. Place it on the arc. Other games you might try: Find It!, Reverse Bingo, Slap It! Pick Up.
2	5 minutes	**Hear-It** (Analyze) Phonemic Awareness (Beginning Sounds)	Orally identify two words that have the same beginning sound or identify the beginning sound in a word.	Teacher: This is Larry. Larry Lion. Larry likes *lemons*. Larry likes *limes*. Larry likes *lollipops*. Teacher: Same or different? I am going to say two words. You tell me if they start the same. *Ffffish, ffffun. ffffish, ffffun*. Do they start the same? Yes, /f/ and /f/ are the same.	Picture Sorts Same or Different? Silly Sentences

continues

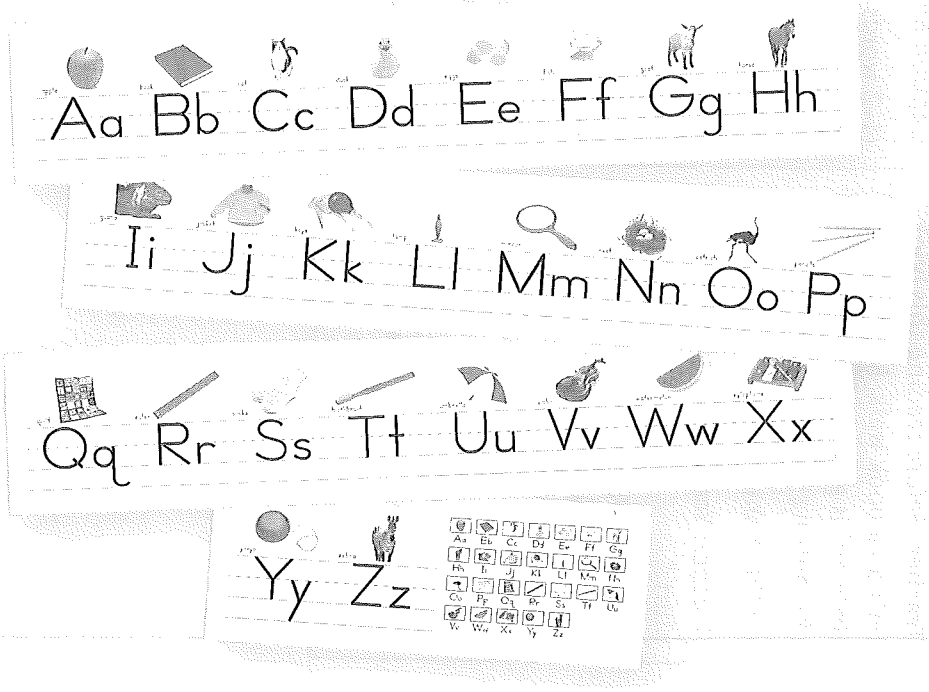
FIGURE 4.7 **(continued)**

		Lesson Part	Content	Sample Language	Activity Choices
3	7–9 minutes	**Target Letter** Activity (Analyze)	Identify the letter–sounds for each letter.	We have these two letters Nn and Pp. What are their sounds? /p/ and /n/. Let's draw a sound. /p/ what could I draw that starts with the /p/ sound? Oh I know! Pillow. I will draw a pillow and write the letter *p* next to it.	Matching Games Letter Scavenger Hunt Letter Dominoes Bingo Letter Sound Match Draw a Sound Turn It
4	5 minutes	**Spell-It** (Synthesize)	Write the beginning sound (or more) in dictated words.	Teacher: I am going to start to write the word *happy*. Let's see, how would I start this word? /h/. Oh, *h*. Now let me keep saying this word, *hhhaaapy*. I hear *p, p*. I think there's more: *hhhhhapppy*. I hear *e, e*. [At the earliest stages it really helps for teachers to model invented (nonperfect) spelling that matches a reasonable approximation that a child might make.]	Magnetic Letters Dry Erase Boards

		Lesson Part	Content	Sample Language	Activity Choices
5	5 minutes	**Read-It** (Apply)	Develop concept of word: accurately point to words while saying them in a simple book using beginning sounds.	Teacher: Before reading this book, let's do a book walk. Look, this little girl is getting dressed. What is she putting on? What's this? Child: A shirt. Teacher: Yes, there it says, "my shirt." Teacher: Watch me as I read and point. [Read and point without looking at the words.] Is that right? Do I need to look at the words? Okay, I'll try again. I'll be very specific, and when I point to a word, that's when I'll say it.	Caption Books (1–2 words per page) Predictable Books (1 repetitive sentence per page) Routine: 1. Book Walk (teacher led) 2. First Reading (teacher led) 3. Second Reading (individual readings of the book *with accurate pointing* and teacher feedback and correction)

How to Choose a Good Alphabet Strip

Alphabet Strip



Why is an alphabet strip so important?

The alphabet strip provides a clear example of each uppercase and lowercase letter and a picture mnemonic for the target sound for each letter. Alphabet strips are important because they are the first "go-to" for primary learners when they need help with letters and sounds. Students are going to look at that alphabet strip when they want to remember which way the *b* goes or cannot quite remember what sound /v/ makes. It's easy to simply glance over an image on a computer or in a catalog and think, "Oh, that's cute. It's colorful. The kids will love it," but I strongly suggest reviewing each picture and each letter on the strip to make sure that the images and letter forms are accurate and helpful. Without careful attention to details, a teacher may be paying the price all year (e.g., "No, that's a *jaguar*, not a lion. Remember *J* makes the /j/ sound. No, we don't make the *a* that way. We just use a ball and a short stick."). Know that many commercially made alphabet strips contain images that do not connect to the learning purposes for those images.

When choosing an alphabet strip, ask:

Are the letters clear and simple? Do they match the way you want children to *write* letters?
The letters should be perfect models of the manuscript system. Avoid alphabet strips that include letters with cursive-like embellishments or that obscure the letter's shape or distract from it.

Do the pictures serve as good exemplars for the target sound?
The purpose of the picture is to provide an easily recognizable cue that will help the children remember the sound represented by the letter.

- **Vowels:** We want children to learn both the long vowel sounds and the short vowel sounds, but because the vowel name automatically teaches the long vowel sounds (e.g., the name *Aa* [ay] *is* the long vowel sound), we typically picture the hardest vowel sound to learn, the short sound (e.g., /a/ as in *apple*.). For short vowels, make sure that the target picture begins with a clear short vowel sound. For example, a picture of an orange for the letter *O* is not a good idea because it starts with the /or/ sound and not the /o/ sound.
- **Consonants:** Make sure that for consonants the pictures begin with a clean consonant sound, not a digraph (e.g., *sh*, *ch*, *th*, *ph*) or blend (e.g., *br-*, *gr-*, *bl-*). For example, a picture of a shirt for the letter *S* is a problem because it does not start with the /s/ sound but starts with /sh/. In addition, pictures with blends at the beginning (e.g., *grapes*, *float*) are difficult because it is very challenging to say only the consonant sound in the blend (e.g., it is difficult to say /g/ and not /gr/ in the word *grapes*.)
- **Beginning sound is not a letter name:** Sometimes the beginning sound of a word is actually the same as the name of a letter. For example, *elephant* begins with the sound of the letter name *El*, a fact that could confuse a child in learning letters.

Are the pictures in the children's spoken vocabulary?
If children do not know the words represented by the picture, then the picture cannot help them (e.g., *yacht*). Pictures should represent very common words, with age-of-acquisition levels that are lower than five years, to account for the many young children who enter primary grades with less than optimal vocabulary knowledge.

Are the pictures unambiguous?
The pictures should not be easily confused with something else. When a child looks at a picture of what is supposed to be a carpet and thinks *rug*, then the picture is not helpful for cueing the letter–sound. Another example is a picture of a puzzle piece under the letter *J* for which a child is supposed to think *jigsaw*.

continues

Do pictures represent a holiday or event that is offensive to a particular group?
Things like jack-o-lanterns, birthday cakes, or Christmas trees are not good choices because they may offend a group of people. On an alphabet strip that is going to be seen and used almost every day, this can be a particular problem.

Are the pictures realistic?
The pictures should not be fantastical renderings of the target item, animal, or person (e.g., an cat in pajamas). The pictures should be realistic interpretations that cue the letter–sounds. The easiest items for children to interpret are simple, high-quality photographs of items.

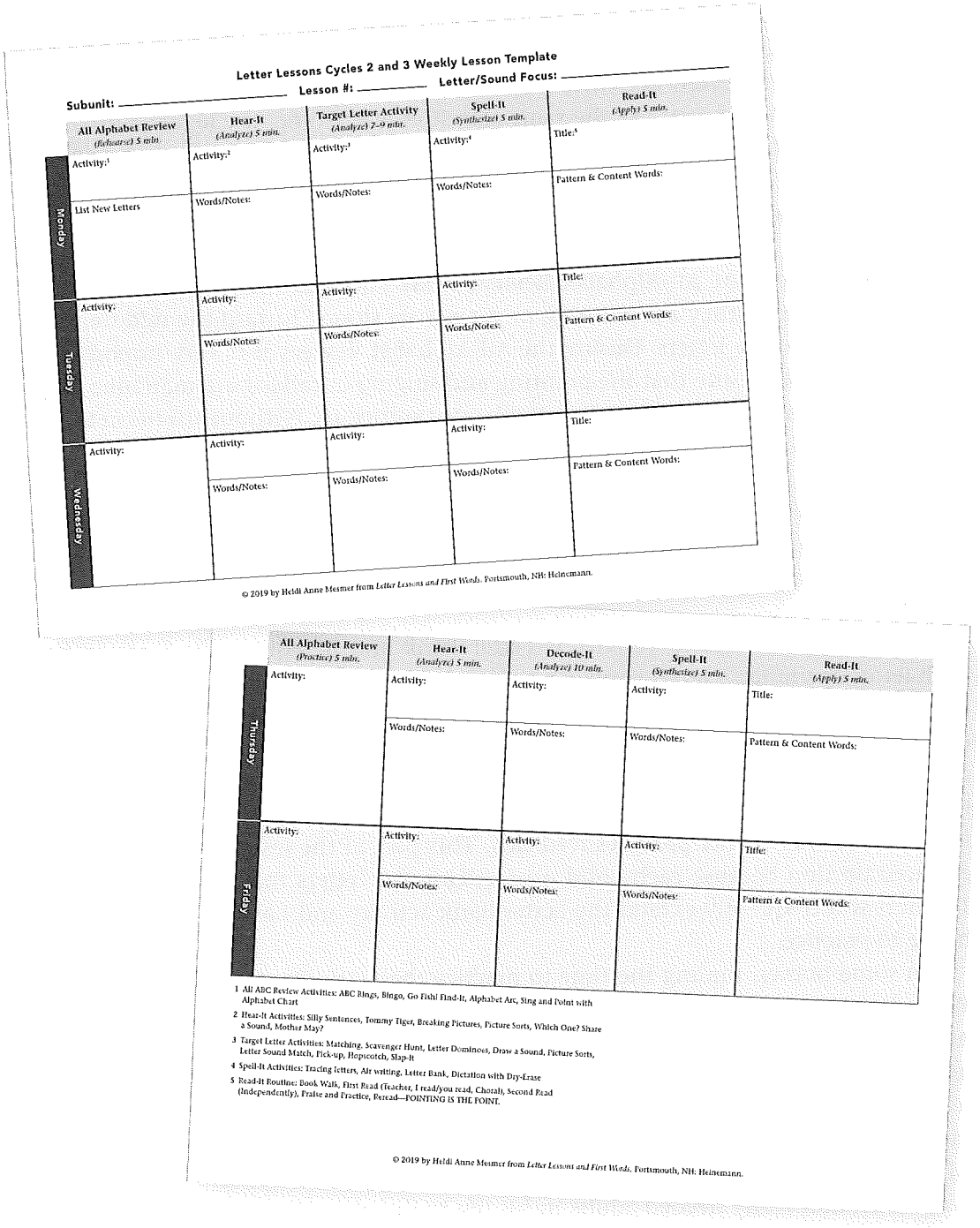
Some Pictures for Letter–Sounds (Duke 2016)

Short *A* is for *Apple*, long *A* is for *Acorn*
B is for *Ball*
C is for *Cat*
D is for *Dog*
Short *E* is for *Egg*
F is for *Fish*
G is for *Goat*
G is for *Giraffe*
H is for *Hat*
Short *I* is for *Iguana*
J is for *Jump rope*
K is for *Key*
L is for *Leaf*
M is for *Moon*
N is for *Nose*
Short *O* is for *Octopus*
P is for *Pumpkin*
Q is for *Queen*
R is for *Rainbow*
S is for *Sock*
T is for *Toothbrush*
Short *U* is for *Umbrella*
V is for *Violin*
X is for *X-ray* (or you might want to do *Exit* or *Fox*—this is a hard one to deal with; I do suggest avoiding *X* is for *Xylophone*, as that sound for *X* is so rare)
Y is for *Yo-yo*
Z is for *Zebra*

Letter Lesson Template

The lesson template in Figure 4.8 can be used to plan lessons for all the subunits in Letter Lessons.

FIGURE 4.8



Letter Lessons Cycles 2 and 3 Weekly Lesson Template

Subunit: _____ **Lesson #:** _____ **Letter/Sound Focus:** _____

	All Alphabet Review *(Rehearse) 5 min.*	Hear-It *(Analyze) 5 min.*	Target Letter Activity *(Analyze) 7–9 min.*	Spell-It *(Synthesize) 5 min.*	Read-It *(Apply) 5 min.*
Monday	Activity:[1]	Activity:[2]	Activity:[3]	Activity:[4]	Title:[5]
	List New Letters	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Pattern & Content Words:
Tuesday	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
		Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Pattern & Content Words:
Wednesday	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
		Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Pattern & Content Words:

	All Alphabet Review *(Practice) 5 min.*	Hear-It *(Analyze) 5 min.*	Decode-It *(Analyze) 10 min.*	Spell-It *(Synthesize) 5 min.*	Read-It *(Apply) 5 min.*
Thursday	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
		Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Pattern & Content Words:
Friday	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Activity:	Title:
		Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Words/Notes:	Pattern & Content Words:

1 All ABC Review Activities: ABC Rings, Bingo, Go Fish! Find-It, Alphabet Arc, Sing and Point with Alphabet Chart

2 Hear-It Activities: Silly Sentences, Tommy Tiger, Breaking Pictures, Picture Sorts, Which One? Share a Sound, Mother May?

3 Target Letter Activities: Matching, Scavenger Hunt, Letter Dominoes, Draw a Sound, Picture Sorts, Letter Sound Match, Pick-up, Hopscotch, Slap-It

4 Spell-It Activities: Tracing Letters, Air writing, Letter Bank, Dictation with Dry-Erase

5 Read-It Routine: Book Walk, First Read (Teacher, I read/you read, Choral), Second Read (Independently), Praise and Practice, Reread—POINTING IS THE POINT.

For a downloadable PDF of this template, go to http://hein.pub/letterlessons-login.

What follows are a series of activities organized as they would appear in each section of the lesson. For example, after the All-Alphabet Review description are games like Find It! and activities like Sing and Point. The activities listed in Figure 4.9 are all routines that can be used during All-Alphabet Review.

All-Alphabet Review Depending on the skills of the learners, teachers can use different review techniques, including singing the alphabet and pointing to letters on an alphabet strip, games with the alphabet strip, letter banks, or alphabet arcs. Keep in mind that these review activities and routines should not be conducted the same way every time. When you use the same activities every time, the lesson turns into a "drill." As described in Chapter 3, students do need to practice beyond the point of mastery. However, remember that the key is multiple exposures in multiple contexts, meaning that students should see letters on an alphabet chart and a ring of cards and an alphabet arc.

When I have done All-Alphabet Review, I have noticed that some children look around the room as they are pointing or get a little sloppy toward the middle, where they don't know the letters. During the All-Alphabet Review, it is very important for the teacher to make sure that the pointing and singing or talking are matching *exactly* and that each child's eyes are on the letter being pointed to. Without attention to these two details, children are not getting anything from the activity.

Sing It One of the easiest alphabet activities is singing the alphabet using an alphabet strip to point to letters. Once the children have become skilled at accurately pointing to the letters and naming the letters, the teacher can play games like Find It!

Letter Bank The second activity is Letter Bank and it requires students to name each letter or sound. A letter bank is a collection of letters that the child knows and is learning, a bit like a word bank. After assessing each child, the teacher identifies some of the letters that the child can name (both uppercase and lowercase) and puts them on a ring. As the small group learns new letters, the teacher adds them to the letter bank ring. During the Letter Bank part of the lesson, each student simply names the letters while the teacher provides feedback. This part of the lesson is the most differentiated portion because each child is practicing the letters that they need to know. Teachers will frequently extend the Letter Bank activity and have the children take it home to practice.

In some homes, finding the time to practice the Letter Bank activity is a struggle. When Hunter, a child whose single mom worked two jobs, was not retaining his letters, his teacher decided on a different approach. She had him go to a different "special teacher" in the building every morning to "show off" his letter bank. The guidance teacher, art teacher, assistant principal, and cafeteria manager all listened to him name his letters and signed a laminated card on the ring. On Friday, Hunter was rewarded with time "helping" each of these people for ten minutes before school. This worked because Hunter really needed adults in his life to practice the letters with him and he also needed adult attention and affection.

Alphabet Arc The Alphabet Arc is the most difficult activity for students, but it is a great challenge for students in Letter Cycle 3. The arc is a mat with outlines of uppercase or lowercase letters in an arc. Students place plastic letters in each space on the mat. Students name, sound, and place each letter on the mat (e.g., a student picks up an *F*, says "*F*, /fff/," and then places it in the *F* space). After the letters are placed, students check their work by touching and saying each letter. In the beginning, the routine is untimed, with the focus on all three essential parts of the routine: naming, sounding, and placing. Students start with an uppercase arc and then move to a lowercase arc. Once students can successfully place all the letters, teachers can time them. Most children can name, place, and sound the letters in two minutes.

FIGURE 4.9

Activities for All-Alphabet Review (Easier)

Sing and Point—Alphabet Tune Alternative (to "Mary Had a Little Lamb")

A, B, C, D, E, F, G	Mary had a little lamb,
H, I, J	little lamb,
K, L, M	little lamb.
N, O, P, Q, R, S, T	Mary had a little lamb,
U, V, W,	His fleece was
X, Y, Z	White as snow.

Find It! (Alphabet Strip)

After students can sing, point, and name the alphabet during All-Alphabet Review, play Find It! Ask the children to point to different letters on the strip.

"Find *B*."

Make it more complicated by asking children to find an uppercase or lowercase letter.

"Find uppercase *J*. Find lowercase *t*."

Turn the game over to the children and let them call out letters for the group to find.

continues

Pick Up! (Letter Bank)

The teacher tells the students to pick up different letters.

"Pick up *x*."

Reverse Bingo (Letter Bank)

Using the letter bank cards and a three-by-three grid, students place their cards face down on the grid. The teacher identifies the bingo pattern (straight line, diagonal, X, or blackout). Each child turns over a card and names the letter. If the answer is correct, then the letter can stay turned over. The student to first make the pattern wins.

Name It! (Alphabet Strip)

Once students can point to letters that the teacher names, ask them to name the letters that the teacher points to.

"Name this letter" (point to *f*).

Activities for All-Alphabet Review (More Difficult)

These activities are designed to practice quickly saying the letter–sounds of known letters and those being learned.

Alphabet Arc

Alphabet arcs, letters, and activity books are available from Neuhaus Education (neuhaus.org). Give students a set of alphabet letters and ask them to match the letters to the outlines on the arc. For this to work, students *must* follow this routine:

1. Name it. (Student says the name.)

2. Sound it. (Student says the sound.)

3. Place it.

4. Check after placing all the letters.

Caution: Handing a student in the early phase a pile of twenty-six plastic letters and an arc will result in a lot of confusion and distraction. Students in the early phase can use letter cards (also available from Neuhaus) that include only five letters on a card.

Slap It!

Slap It! is a card game that is played with a deck of letter cards. Pairs of students play this game. A deck of cards is placed between them. One player flips the card and the first player to slap the card and correctly name the sound gets to keep the card. The student with the most cards at the end of the game wins. In order to validate their "win," students must recite the letter–sounds of all the cards they are holding.

Caution: Some children really do slap and some children never get a chance to name a sound because their partner is too fast. If this is the case, simply change the game so that each person gets a turn. One person flips the card and counts quietly ("1, 2, 3"). If the other player can name the sound in three seconds, then that player gets to keep the card.

Letter–Sounds Hopscotch

This game is a bit like regular hopscotch, but not exactly. Students simply practice hopping to different letters and saying the sound of each letter landed on. Use a large shower curtain liner to re-create an alphabet mat. This is a favorite "reward" activity that can be done on Friday.

S	F	U	A	G	R
E		L	T		U
B	N	O	P	A	X
M	L	A	W	O	J
D		K	J		H
C	Y	I	Q	V	Z

Hear-It (Phonemic Awareness) The goal of this part of the lesson is for students to say the sound at the beginning of a pictured or spoken word (e.g., "What sound do you hear at the beginning of fffffish?"). The sounds that students will recognize in this part of the lesson will match the target letters for the week. Remember that phonemic awareness concentrates on oral and aural (listening) work. If a manipulative is used, then it is usually a picture or item that represents the sound.

Because phonemic awareness usually develops in very predictable ways (Anthony et al. 2003), activities should move from the least difficult to the most difficult, following this sequence:

Easiest: Discriminating Between Different Sounds

- Same sound?

  Student can tell you if words begin with the same sound.

  "Do *boy* and *cat* begin the same way? Do *boy, ball,* and *bib* start the same way?" (Start by contrasting two words, and then move to three.)

  Student can tell if two to three sounds are the same.

  "Are these the same? /s/ /s/. Are these the same? /f/ /f/ /l/." (Pause between sounds.)

- Same or different sound?

  Student can tell you which sounds or words are the same and which ones are different.

  "Are these sounds the same? /f/ /f/ /l/. Which one is different?"

  "Do these words begin the same way? *Cat, keep, sip.* Which one is different?"

Harder: Matching First Sounds in Oral Words

- Student can group/sort pictures or items by sound.
- Student can categorize or sort pictures by initial sound.

  "Here are some pictures. *Cat, bag, kite, boy, bowl.* Does *bbbbbag* go with *cccccat* or *bbbbboy?*"

Hardest: Saying the First Sounds in Words

- Student says the beginning sound of a word or picture.

  "What sound is at the beginning of *late?*"

FIGURE 4.10 **Teacher Language That Helps Children Focus in Letter Lessons**

When reviewing the alphabet	Look at the letters when you say them.
After writing a word	What does that say? Ask the child to read the word they wrote, pointing to the letter–sounds.
When "reading" a caption text	Point to each word as you say it. Insist on accurate pointing.

Following are activity ideas for Hear-It (Figure 4.11). There are three important things to do when planning and conducting Hear-It:

1. Keep the activities very simple. Many times, the subunit is only oral.
2. Think carefully about the words that will be used and look through pictures before starting. At the very beginning of this type of work, single-consonant sounds are easiest (i.e., *not* consonant blends such as *tr, sl, str*). In addition, *continuant* sounds, those that can be continued or stretched out, should be used (e.g., *f, l, m, n, r, s, v, z*). When using pictures, teachers should name the pictures up front and be ready to take out any one that students chronically mislabel.
3. Remind students to *say* each word or sound. Speech sounds have both physical and aural (heard) components, and when children say the sound, they learn how the sound feels in their mouth.

FIGURE 4.11

Activities for Phonemic Awareness

Same or Different? (Discriminating Sounds)

Using pictures or just oral words, the teacher names words, emphasizing the first sound, and asks students if the sounds are the same or different.

"Listen to these two words: *mat, mike*. Same or different? Listen again: *mmmmmmat, mmmmike*."

Extensions: Once students can contrast two words or sounds, add a third.

If the sounds are different, ask the student to identify a word or a sound that is the *same* as the target.

"Yes, *bbbbballl* and *ssssssip* are different. What word sounds like *bbbbball*?"

Silly Sentences (Identifying a Word with the Same Beginning Sound)

This light and playful game is adored by kindergartners, who find making up silly words and sentences hilarious. It is based on children's intuitive, semiconscious awareness of sounds. The teacher says a silly sentence with words that begin with a target sound. Children complete the sentence.

"Silly Sara sang songs in [on/at] her _____."

continues

Picture Sorts (Identifying Words with the Same Starting Sounds)

Students sort pictures with either two or three different sounds (e.g., *b, l, m*) into groups. Select pictures that are easy to interpret and that represent contrasting sounds. *Words Their Way: Letter and Picture Sorts for Emerging Readers* has over thirty sorts with pictures already selected. Use the following routine:

Routine for Picture Sorting

1. *Name* each picture.

2. *Set up* the anchor pictures. (Use pictures that match the target sound, e.g., a ball, a leaf, and a mop.)

3. *Say* each picture and compare it to the key letter/words/pictures by *saying the picture name.* For example:

   "This picture is a *log. Ball/log? Leaf/log? Mop/log?* [A student answers.] Yes, *leaf* and *log* start the same. I will put the leaf here, under the log."

4. *Check* for mistakes.

   Take the anchor picture and hold it beside each picture that was placed in the group, saying the anchor and the words.

   "*Ball/box, ball/bag, ball/bear.* Do they all match?"

5. *Reflect.*

   "These pictures are in this column because they all start with /l/."

Breaking Pictures / Blending Pictures (Blending and Segmenting Onsets and Rimes)

The goal of this game is to have students practice orally breaking words into onsets and rimes (e.g., *b-at*) or blending an onset and rime together (e.g., *bat*). Start with blending, and then move to segmenting.

Use a set of pictures that are single-syllable words and cut them in half. Sometimes it is even fun to do this as you break the word.

"Did you know that words have parts and that we can break them up? Watch me, I am going to cut this bee in half and say the first sound. *B-ee* [cut as you are speaking]. *B-ee.* Two parts, *b-ee.*"

"Look at the picture. I am going to say the parts and you are going to put the parts together like this. I would say *'b-ee'* and you would answer *'bee!'"*
Give each child a picture. Say the word in parts and ask them to say the word back to you.

After several days, once the children have become skilled with blending, reverse the task.

"Now I am going to give you a picture and you are going to break the first sound off for me. So if I gave you this picture [show a picture of a peach cut in half], you would say *'p-each.'"*

Follow the same routine, giving each child a practice item and rotating items as you move from child to child.

Caution: This is not as easy as it sounds. Children frequently need a lot of practice and a lot of modeling. Do not give up if this does not come easily. The activity is really quite powerful.

Target Letter Activity The Target Letter Activity is at the heart of the lesson. The goal of the Target Letter Activity is for the student to name and provide the sound for both uppercase and lowercase letters. It would be close to impossible to enumerate the many different activities that could take place. The activities in Figure 4.12 provide some ideas. There are, however, certain principles to keep in mind in choosing activities.

Early in Letter Cycle 2, children need to visually discriminate the letter shapes and attend to the most salient features of each letter's shape. Visual matching activities help with visually discriminating letters (e.g. What makes an *Nn* different from an *Mm*?). Examples might include games with letter cards, or letter clip games where students use clothespins on a letter wheel.

As students move into the middle of Letter Cycle 2 and into Letter Cycle 3, they should do activities that focus on letter–sounds, saying the sound that matches the letter, or finding objects that start with a letter's sound. These are the most challenging activities because they require students to call up the letter–sounds themselves, which is necessary to read words. Simple card games where students turn over and then name the letter and its sound are great. Follow-the-path games where students move to a space and name the letter and sound are also good.

In essence, the activities in the Target Letter Activity part of the lesson will consistently target the same skills. The content of the activities will be repetitive, but they should be creative, fun, engaging, and brisk. They should not feel boring to the children (see Figure 4.12).

FIGURE 4.12

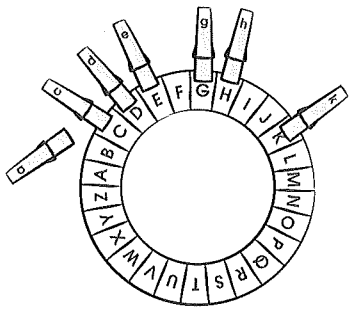
Activities for Target Letters

Early Phase (Letter Naming, Recognition, Visual Discrimination)
Students name letters and match letters that are the same (uppercase to uppercase, uppercase to lowercase).

Matching Games

Students match letters at two levels. In the first level of matching games children match the uppercase forms (e.g., *A* to *A*, *B* to *B*), and in the second level they match the lowercase forms to the uppercase forms (e.g., *A* to *a*, *B* to *b*).

It is also possible to match lettered clothespins to letters on a wheel.



Font Sort/Match

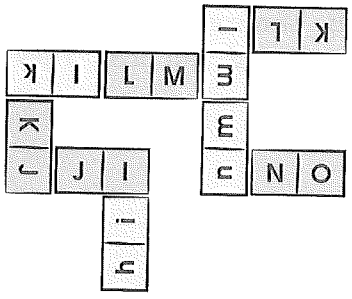
One activity that helps children generalize the visual features of letters is to do a font sort. Letters written in different fonts are provided and children group them together.

Letter Scavenger Hunt

To reinforce the alphabetic principle and the purpose of letters, have children go on an alphabet scavenger hunt. Each child takes a magnetic letter and a dry erase board and tallies the number of times they find their letter in the classroom, the hall, a walk around the school, or a big book.

Letter Dominoes

Students match letter dominoes with the target letter. Dominoes with all uppercase letters, all lowercase letters, or a mix can be created for different levels of matching.



Activities for Target Letters

Later Phase (Naming Letter–Sounds)
Students identify the sound that connects with a letter.

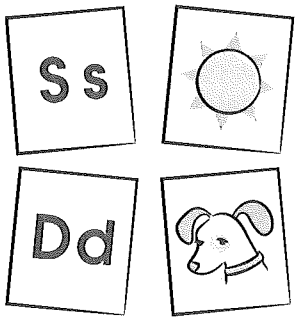
Matching Items or Pictures to the Correct Letter

Items or pictures that begin with the target sounds are laid out on the table. Near them are bags or just the letters (*Bb*, *Ss*).

Students find the items or pictures that begin with the sounds and put them in the corresponding bags.

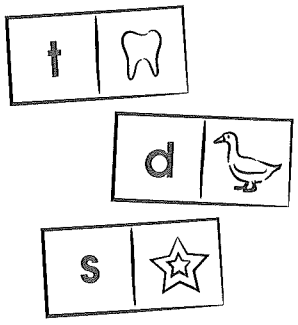
Letter–Sounds Match

Students have a group of cards with the target letters and a group of pictures. They match the letters to the pictures that begin with that sound.



Letter–Sounds Dominoes

Students have dominoes with both pictures and letters. They match the pictures on the dominoes with the letters that match the beginning sound.



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Activities for Target Letters

Draw a Sound

Students create a table, with two to three letters at the top. Then, they draw items that have the first sound that matches the letters.

Nn	Pp
	

Bingo or Turn It

The teacher has a pile of pictures that begin with the target sounds. Students have letter cards with the target letters or a bingo board with the target letters. The teacher flips the card with the picture, say the name of the picture, and students identify the letter that matches the picture by turning the letter card over or removing it. Three-in-a-row wins the game.

Gg	Rr	Gg
Rr	Nn	Nn
Nn	Gg	Rr

Spin a Letter

The teacher has a bag full of letters or a spinner with the target letters. Students have pictures that match the target sound. The teacher spins the letter, says the letter name only, and the students must know the letter–sound and choose the right picture.

Spell-It

In Letter Lessons this part of the lesson amounts to writing letters, first to learn the general shapes and then later to begin "spelling" by thinking about letter–sounds. Children use a dry erase board and marker to complete a number of different activities. Early in Letter Cycle 2, when children are first learning the letters, Spell-It is about simply making the letters. The teacher models how to write a letter and the children repeat it on their boards. Large dry erase markers are fine-motor-skills-friendly for little

hands. When showing children how to make letters, don't get too bogged down in handwriting, which can be done later as a whole group. The idea is to simply practice once or twice the letter form. In the Spell-It portion of the lesson in Letter Cycle 3, the child writes to match a dictated word. See Figure 4.13.

FIGURE 4.13

Activities for Spell-It
Tracing Letters (Easier)
Children trace letter cards with the target letters on them after the teacher models where to start each letter and how to make it.
Air Write (Easier)
After the teacher models how to write a letter, the children and teacher together "air write" the letter. A fun game is "guess my air write," where a child or the teacher air writes a letter and the others have to name the letter.
Letter Bank Writing (Easier)
After some practice writing letters, students use their letter banks and practice writing letters that they know on a dry erase board.
Dictation (Harder)
The teacher says a word that matches a target sound and students write the first letter (and any other letters that they hear) on a dry erase board. In earlier lessons, when students need support, an alphabet strip is displayed. In later lessons, students write the letter without the alphabet strip reminder.

Read-It Letter Cycles 2 and 3 finish with text "reading," an authentic application of letter knowledge. When people hear about "book reading" with kindergartners, they either think of a read-aloud, where the teacher is doing the reading, or they think of a developmentally inappropriate activity, because most kindergartners are not really reading. In Letter Lessons, what is called "text reading" focuses on concepts of print and concept of word practice. It has two goals: (1) accurate pointing to words while saying them and (2) using letter–sounds to ground pointing.

Children each have a simple book, they hold that book *themselves*, and point to the repeating words as they say them. It's the very first step. Children are not really blending and decoding full words. In many cases, they would not know the words in text without the pictures. But they are *using* letter–sounds at the beginning of words in a very exciting way.

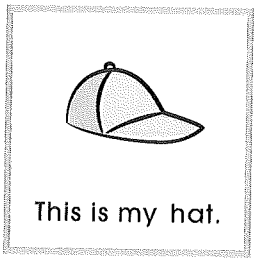
Two types of books are used during Read-It in Letter Cycles 2 and 3. One type is simple repetitive caption books, which literally label the pictures with one to two words (e.g., "My pants."). When children "read" these texts, they are practicing differentiating words from pictures, pointing to words, and differentiating two words from each other. In order to point to the words in the caption in the figure, the learner does use the pictures and memory but must pay even closer attention to each word because there are two. To read "My pants," the child must distinguish the word *my* from *pants* in a more technical approach.

Caption Book

- One or two words per page in a repetitive sequence.
- All print on one line.
- Minimal multisyllabic words.
- Interchanged word is directly pictured.

The other text type is a slightly more complex, "predictable" text where a sentence stem is repeated (e.g., "This is my hat. This is my jacket."). The text design, with the repetition and the close match to the picture, helps children memorize the text so that they can coordinate their pointing.

Predictable Text



- Predictable one-line sentence.
- One repetitive sentence per page.
- All on one line.
- Minimal multisyllabic words.
- Interchanged word is directly pictured.
- The child uses the repetitive structure ("This is my _____ ,") memory, pictures, and letter–sounds to support word recognition. The interchanging last word may encourage more attention to letter–sounds.

Often at this stage children are impulsive or careless with their pointing. Text reading must be carefully monitored. I like to remind children, "Eyes on the page. Fingers ready." By reminding them that they must point to the word that they are saying, we are helping them learn that using letter–sound knowledge is a very precise endeavor.

Figure 4.14 shows the routine for Read-It.

FIGURE 4.14

Read-It Routine

Before the Lesson: Preview the Book

Never use a book in a lesson without first previewing it.

Before using any book, preview it and find the sentence pattern (e.g., "This is my _____.") or the category (e.g., fruit, clothing, toys). Review the content words and pictures. Look to see how closely the target content words match the pictures or if the content words are likely to be in a child's vocabulary.

For example, if a book has a word like *iguana*, which children are not likely to know, you have to teach that vocabulary prior to reading.

Step 1: Book Walk

In a book walk, I hand the children the book and we talk about the content and story, flipping the pages. I ask them what they see in the pictures. This helps them remember the target content words (e.g., *hat*).

If there is a content word that I don't think they know, I tell them the word and define it (e.g., *tower*).

Step 2: First Reading—Teacher Guided

At this stage I rarely ask children to "read" these books without practice. We do that together for the first time. There are three options:

- Teacher read (easiest): I read the whole book and they point. Sometimes we do this two times.
- I read / you read: I read and point a page and then they do. "'This is my hat.' Now you do it."
- Choral read (hardest): We read and point the book all together. This is for the easiest books.

Step 3: Second Reading—Child Reads *and Points*

The *pointing* is the *point*, so make sure it happens.

After one or two times with me, the child reads and points to the print alone. I watch, looking for accurate pointing and helping when it gets off track.

Step 4: Praise and Practice

At the end of the book, I find something the child did well.

"When you came to *hat*, you weren't sure. You paused and looked at the word, then you said '/h/' and I think that you remembered *hat*. You used your letter–sounds."

I also might return to a place that caused trouble and review or reteach.

"Let's look at this part again. It said, 'This is my belt,' but you said 'This is my pants.' Could that be *pants*? Watch me point to that word. My mouth says '/ppp/,' but I am pointing to this word [*belt*]. Is that right?"

continues

Step 5: Reread

After the children have read the book once by themselves, I ask them to reread the book to other teachers, cafeteria staff, counselors, family members, and friends. I like to say, "If you read it once, you should read it six more times!"

What Is a Book Walk?

A book walk is a preview of the book that a teacher does with a student *before* the student reads. The purpose of the book walk is to practice reading words, give the student a sense of what the story will be about, and also to review, front-load, or preteach words in the book that might be challenging. Book walks should be different at different stages of development. In Letter Lessons, when students are using predictable or caption books and beginning sounds to read, the book walk focuses on introducing the pattern in the book (e.g., "I like green grapes. I like yellow pears.") and the content words (e.g., *grapes*, *pears*). These words are usually pictured and they cannot really be sounded out. During the book walk, the teacher points out the pictures and might also note the colors, since they are part of the pattern. Sometimes the teacher also points out high-frequency words that the child knows. After the book walk, the teacher and child read the book.

A book walk for a decodable text, which contains words that the child can sound out, will get a different kind of book walk. In this kind of book walk, the teacher identifies words that have patterns that the child knows (e.g., "Do you see any words with *-ap*?"). This gives the students a chance to practice sounding out those words prior to reading them in the text and draws their attention to known letter–sound patterns.

VIDEO 4.2

Book Walk Explanation

This clip explains what a book walk is and why it needs to be different with different types of books.

VIDEO 4.3

Book Walk for a Predictable Text

See this video for an example of a book walk for a predictable text.

VIDEO 4.4

Example of Why a Book Walk Is Necessary

See this video for an example of why a book walk is necessary. (The student did not know the word *pears*.)

Letter Cycle 4: Word Building (21+ Letter–Sounds)

Because the need for review is increasingly not common, Letter Cycle 4: Word Building bypasses a second dose of letter instruction and introduces students to the first 25 high-frequency words by helping them *use* their newfound letter–sounds knowledge to read words. As discussed in detail in Chapter 5, high-frequency words are those that occur a great deal in English and must be learned early because they are so important to text reading (e.g., *the, said, you*).

The Word Building subunit, Letter Cycle 4, is for students who know 21 or more letter–sounds, and it focuses on learning 25 words on the preprimer Dolch list and applying letter–sounds knowledge to read these. What we know is that children will retain high-frequency "sight words" best if they use letter–sounds (Ehri, Satlow, and Gaskins 2009; Steacy et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2013). Based on research, instead of having children memorize these "sight words" holistically, teachers should not give high-frequency sight words heavy instructional attention until solid letter–sounds knowledge (as well as concept of word and initial phonemic segmentation) is established. (Note: Some high-frequency words can and should be taught while children are acquiring letter–sounds. In the course of reading charts, doing interactive writing, and engaging in print referencing activities, it makes sense to teach a handful of useful words like *the*. However, systematic instruction using high-frequency lists is best given once students have solid letter knowledge.)

Each week usually has a group of words that are very similar (e.g., *so, no, go*) and then one additional word that is less predictable (e.g., *said*). See Figure 4.15. In the first weeks, most of the words have two sounds and usually two letters (e.g., *so, no, go, we, me, the, in, it, is, to*). In later weeks, word families are introduced that can be built from known high-frequency words. Three-sound / three-letter words are added (e.g., *can, man, ran*). Beginning in the third week of the unit or Lesson 23, students can learn c-v-c words in families that match a taught high-frequency word. For example, the students learn the word *not* and build words with the *-ot* family (e.g., *hot, pot, got*). (See Chapter 5 for word family strategies.) When you encounter patterns that the children have not learned, for example, the *th* digraph in *the*, show them how to map the sound to the two letters, without overteaching or worrying too much about the complexities. Take the same approach with the *ou* in *you* and the *ai* in *said*.

FIGURE 4.15

Lesson	Week	Content	Extra Word Families
21	1	so, no, go, + [the]	
22	2	we, me, he, be, + [said]	
23	3	up, not + [look]	*-ot* word family
24	4	it, in, is, his + [for]	*-it* word family
25	5	to, do, you + [and]	*-in* word family
26	6	can, man, ran + [little]	*-an* word family
27	7	Review	

The goals of the Word Building subunit are to

- **Read and spell 25 high-frequency words both in isolation and in text.** Although there is nothing unique about teaching kindergartners high-frequency "sight words," focusing on the letter–sounds in these words *is* unique. Often we try to tell students that these words are so irregular that you could not possibly learn the letter–sounds, but this is not true.
- **Orally blend and segment the words.** What we know is that both reading words and spelling words require students to blend and segment sounds. In this subunit, children begin to do that with the simplest of words, those that have two sounds. During this part of the lesson Elkonin boxes are used to segment the word, and this provides an important practice for decoding later in the First Words unit.
- **Use high-frequency words to build c-v-c word families.** In most of the units, the students use one of the high-frequency words to build new words with word families.
- **Read high-frequency words in books.** Students practice applying their knowledge of words by reading predictable and caption books.

Word Building Lesson Framework with Activities

Children in kindergarten usually get really excited when the focus of lessons moves to "real words." The lesson format is similar in many respects to First Words lessons but with a few differences. The review section of the lesson in Letter Cycle 4: Word Building involves mostly the high-frequency words that are being learned, but since children still need to solidify a few letters, there are some letters in the review. See Figures 4.16 and 4.17. The word ring will have letters and words, usually letters like *Vv*, *Ww*, and *Yy*, which are typically the last to be learned. During the review section, students will most often simply read the words, since this is time efficient. However, some games are included in Figures 4.16 and 4.17 to add interest. It's ideal if the words can come off of a word ring so that students can sort the words or play other games.

FIGURE 4.16

		Lesson Part	Content	Sample Language	Activity Choices
1	5 minutes	**Review-It** (Rehearse) Practice reading individual high-frequency words.	High-frequency words from scope and sequence and previous lessons.	Teacher: Please get out your word ring and whisper read each word.	Word Rings or Cards, Matching Games (Pick Up, Concentration, I'm Thinking)—see video: **WATCH**  **VIDEO 4.5** **Word Card Practice** Watch this video to see children practicing words in a whole group lesson.
2	5 minutes	**Hear-It** (Analyze) Phonemic Segmentation and Blending	Orally break a word into each sound (*go* = /g/ /o/, *you* = /y/ /ou/). Orally blend words together (/g/ /o/ = *go*).	Teacher: I am going to break this word into its sounds. Here I go. /s/ /o/. Now watch me push my finger into a box for each sound. /s/ /o/, *so*. I'll do it again. /s/ /o/, *so*. Now you do it.	Elkonin Boxes Unifix Cubes Secret Word Secret Word—see video: **WATCH**  **VIDEO 4.6** **Secret Word Activity** In this video the teacher is playing Secret Word with the whole class.

continues

		Lesson Part	Content	Sample Language	Activity Choices
3	7–9 minutes	**Decode-It** (Analyze) Decode high-frequency and related decodable words.	Decode each sound in a word.	Teacher: Take the words off your rings. [*I, a, so, no, go, we, me, the, in, it, is.*] Now I am going to put these in two groups. Here's a group with *o—so, no, go,* here's a group with *e—we, me,* and here's a group with *i—in, it, is.* so me in go we it no is	Word Sort Read the Words Cut up Words Unifix Cubes
4	5 minutes	**Spell-It** (Synthesize) Spell high-frequency and related decodable words.	Write words letter-by-letter, paying attention to sequence.	Teacher: Now we are going to start with the word *go.* /g/ /o/. Spell that word. Touch the part that makes the /g/ sound. Pull that down. Now spell *so.* /sssss/ /o/. Teacher: This word is hard. It has the sounds /th/ /u/. The first sound is tricky; it has two letters. Spell /th/.	Magnetic Letters Dry Erase Boards Word Building Making Words

		Lesson Part	Content	Sample Language	Activity Choices
5	5 minutes	**Read-It** (Apply) Read in text	Practice reading high-frequency words in connected text.	Teacher: Before reading this book, let's do a book walk [see videos 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 to look for words that we know. Do you see *no*? What about *the*? Teacher: Watch me read this and point. "I go. You go. We go. Go, go, go. Yipppeee!"	Predictable or Caption Text Routine: (1) Book Walk (teacher led); (2) First Reading (teacher led); (3) Second Reading (individual readings of the book *with accurate pointing* and teacher feedback and correction).

FIGURE 4.17

Activities for Word Review

Read the Words

The most frequent activity in this section of the lesson is simply reading the words. Students can do this alone or with a partner.

Slap It!, Find It, and **Reverse Bingo** are all great games for word review, and they were described earlier on pages 105–107.

Sample Language for Find It

Find the words that

- have an *o*
- have three letters
- have two letters
- have the sound /e/

Hear-It

This section of the lesson is all oral. There are no word cards and no letters. The purpose of this part of the lesson is to analyze the *sounds* in the new words that are being taught for that week (e.g., *in, it, is* | *so, no, go*). So children will analyze one of the high-frequency words listed in this unit. At this stage, children break words into two

sound parts, either the onset and rime (e.g., *c-at, b-ig*) or the phoneme if the word has only two sounds (e.g., *g-o, th-e, s-ee*). The harder activity is breaking a word into parts or segmenting. The easier activity is blending parts together into a word. A variety of activities present this content to children through games (see Figure 4.18); examples include Robot Talk, Sit Down, and Unifix Cubes (Figure 4.18). (Note: Pay attention to the number of *sounds* in a word, not the number of letters. Many two-phoneme words have more than two letters [e.g., *see, the*]. In this section, words are broken down by sound.)

FIGURE 4.18

Activities for Hear-It: Orally breaking words into two parts
Unifix Cubes (Onset-Rime)
In this activity, each cube represents a sound and children move them together, saying the sounds and then blending the word together. ("/g/ /o/, /g/ /o/, /g/ /o/, *go*!")
Elkonin Boxes (for Two-Phoneme Words)
Boxes is a technique for breaking down words or segmenting them. It is fully described on pages 173–175.
Secret Word
Secret Word is a game where the teacher says the "secret word," broken into parts. For words with more than two phonemes, the parts are onset and rime. For words with two phonemes, the parts are the sounds. The teacher says the secret word and then the children whisper the fully blended word to a partner. (Blending is easier than breaking words down.) Once children can blend words together, then the teacher lets them say the secret word for the group, in parts. (For a demonstration, see the "Secret Word Activity" video on page 121.)

Decode-It

During this section of the lesson, students practice decoding the high-frequency Word Building words and related decodable words, using the techniques listed in Figure 4.19. Starting in Week 3 of the subunit with the *-ot* family as in *not*, students can build new words (e.g., *hot, pot, not*). Thus, the Decode-it portion of the lesson will include both the high-frequency words and those words that can be built from them. Remember, high-frequency words should be taught by using letter–sounds. Do not encourage a holistic, memory-based approach. All the strategies in Figure 4.19 are based on using letter–sounds.

FIGURE 4.19

Activities for Decode-It: Accurately reading the 25 words in the Word Building unit and related decodable words

Read the Words

When a new word is being introduced, children can simply be taught to read the new word. The following questions can guide analysis:

- What does this word start with?
- How many letters does this word have?
- What does this word end with?
- Does this look like another word we know?
- Which sounds do you here?

Word Sort

Word sorting is an activity in which children put words in groups based on similarities. Usually the teacher sets the categories (e.g., all the words with *i*) in what is called a "closed sort." With kindergartners and for the Word Building unit, create sorts in which there are two categories: words that *do* (e.g., have two letters, have *a*, have *e*) and words that *do not*. This is easier for the young child.

Words that do have *e*	**Words that do not**
me	i
we	it
be	it

After successful closed sorts, once the children understand sorting, ask them to do their own "open sort," in which they create categories. This is really useful for understanding what they are seeing in words.

continues

Activities for Decode-It: Accurately reading the 25 words in the Word Building unit and related decodable words

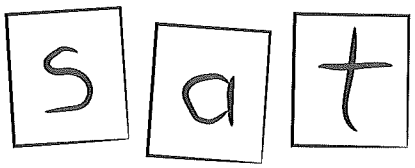
Cut-Up Words

A very simple activity to help children think about word architecture is this little game where you give children words written on cards and scissors.

1. Read the word.
2. Cut off the first sound.
3. Scramble the two parts.
4. Put the word back together.
5. Read the word again.

Optional Additional Steps

6. Cut apart all the letters. (For words with more than two letters.)
7. Scramble the word.
8. Put the word back together.



Match

Using their word rings and books with high-frequency words, students match word cards to high-frequency words that they see in their books.

Building on a high-frequency word

Using the high-frequency word as a base, show students how to add consonants to make new words. For example, show students how to decode *in* and then add consonants to it (e.g., *p-in, f-in, b-in*). (See Figure 5.7, pp. 153–155.)

Spell-It

In Letter Cycle 4: Word Building, the spelling activities are ones in which the teacher says the word and the children build the word. See Figure 4.20. The expectation is that children spell each word accurately, with the letters in the correct order. More than

any other activity, this one solidifies the knowledge of these high-frequency words. Do you remember, in the Introduction, when we discussed the idea of "word architecture"? This is the start. Children take words apart, and then build them back to solidify and properly store those words cognitively. Because the Word Building unit is focused on learning 20 words, children are held accountable for correctly spelling these words. When a word is not spelled correctly, it is corrected and rewritten, with a gentle reminder (e.g., "Hmm you have *o* and *n*. Does that say *no*? */nnnnn/* is at the beginning. Can you fix that?")

FIGURE 4.20

Activities for Spell-It: Accurately spelling the 25 words that are the Word Building unit focus
Making Words or Word Building
Using a dry erase board, magnetic letters, or letter cards, children start with a word and then change one letter to make a new word. This is a great strategy to show how groups of words are related. (See "Making Words or Word Building Lesson" on page 63.)
Dictation
The teacher says a word that matches a target sound and students write the word on a dry erase board.

Chapter Summary

This chapter started with Troy, a joyful student who came to our reading clinic needing to learn the alphabet. Like many adults in the United States (and even some teachers), his mother was unclear about exactly what it means to learn letters. It means not simply singing a song and naming letters but, more importantly, learning the *sounds*. The letter–sounds help children move to the next essential phase and decode words. Another important principle to remember is that letter lessons must accompany rich teaching of the alphabetic principle throughout the day. Without this, the motivation, meaning, and critical *use* of letter–sounds information is lost and children will acquire a rote, inert collection of letter–sounds that are meaningless to them. The chapter focuses mostly on the contents of letter lessons, but the first part of the activities section describes a number of parallel practices that must take place within early childhood classrooms if letter knowledge is going to be useful and stick. Use these joyful and meaningful practices throughout the day to keep instruction meaning centered and balanced.

chapter 5

UNIT: First Words

Decoding

TAYLOR CAME INTO OUR READING CLINIC AS AN EAGER FIRST grader. She could proudly name any letter–sound we gave her in seconds. But sitting at the table trying to decode the word *cat* went something like this:

Text:	*This*	*is*	*my*	*cat.*
Taylor:	This	is	my	/c/ /aaaa/ /t/,
				/c/ /aaaa/ /t/,
				/c/ /aaaa/ /t/,
				/c/ /aaaa/ /t/.
Tutor:	Okay, now say it faster, Taylor. Put them together. Bulldoze them.			
Taylor:		/c/ /aaaa/ /t/,		
		/c/ /aaaa/ /t/.		
Tutor:	What does it say?			
Taylor	*Take?*			

Perhaps you have seen a student like Taylor grasp onto the ending sound in a word and take a stab? The situation can be maddening, but as with all instruction, the problem is in the instruction, not the student. Taylor didn't have the necessary knowledge to fully blend a word like *cat* together, so that interaction gave us the information we needed to provide some targeted explicit instruction.