



Language Activity 7: Becoming Familiar with Letters and Their Sounds

Primary Goal

Becoming familiar with the letters of the alphabet and their sounds.

Secondary Goals

Laying the basis for reading skills; developing cognitive, sensory, and fine motor skills.

Material

Work mat.

Basket.

Set of 26 pouches or small boxes with lids. The pouches or boxes should be identical in size, color, and shape. On each pouch or lid, clearly print a lowercase letter of the alphabet. To be consistent with the way letters will be presented to the child in many Montessori preschools, use blue for vowels and red for consonants. Inside each pouch or box, place several small objects and pictures that start with the phonetic sound represented by the letter. Try to avoid choosing items that emphasize the letter's name. For example, inside the *p* pouch you would not place a pea, which has the same sound as the letter's name. Instead, you could place a small plastic pig, a picture of some pots, a picture of a plant, and a picture of some pliers, all beginning with the sound "puh." When presenting vowels, use objects that represent the short vowel sound. For example, the *a* pouch could include an apple, an alligator, an anchor, and an axe. It would not contain an ape or an airplane, which have the long *a* sound. Present just one letter at a time. Once the child has worked with all 26 pouches, replace some of the objects and pictures to maintain the child's interest.

Special notes:

(1) This activity is not designed for the child to name letters, but to begin to understand that letters represent sounds. In the Montessori preschool program, lowercase letters and the



sounds of letters are presented first, before capital letters and the names of letters. If the child is interested in naming letters, as much as possible present their sounds rather than their names. For information about sounds, see the phonetic chart in the introduction to this section.

(2) This activity uses blue for vowels and red for consonants in order to be consistent with the way letters are presented in most Montessori preschools.

Presentation

- This activity appeals particularly to the abilities of twos 27–33 months old.
- In advance, choose the pouch you will present and place it in the basket.
- Ask the child to get the work mat and put it in a place you specify.
- With the child, get the prepared basket and place it on the work mat.
- Sit beside the child with the basket in front of you.
- Take the pouch out of the basket and place it on the work mat. Set the basket aside.
- Point to the letter on the pouch and say the sound. For example, trace the letter *a* and say, “Aaa.”
- Open the pouch, slowly remove one of the items, and place it on the mat. Name the item, speaking slowly and clearly and pausing to emphasize the first letter. For example, say, “A-pple. Apple.” Place the item to the right of the pouch on the work mat.
- One by one, take the other items out of the pouch, name them, and line them up horizontally on the work mat, continuing to move from left to right. Make sure to emphasize the first sound in each word.
- Pause and smile at the child. Then slowly pick up each object, name it, and return it to the pouch.
- Invite the child to do the activity. For example, say, “Now you see what *a* sounds are inside the pouch.”
- Give the child time to start the activity.



- If the child begins focusing on the activity, get up quietly and allow the child to work undisturbed.
- If the child does not start or does not seem to know what to do, ask, “May I help?” Gently guide the child’s hand to remove an item from the pouch. As soon as you feel the child engaging, gently remove your hand and let the child work on his/her own. Do not cajole the child to name the object.
- When the child has finished the activity, encourage the child to put the items in the pouch and put the pouch in the basket, then return the work mat and materials to their proper places. If necessary, do these tasks with the child. This completes the activity.
- Make sure that the materials presented stay available — on a low shelf, for example — for the child to work on again when she/he wishes.