

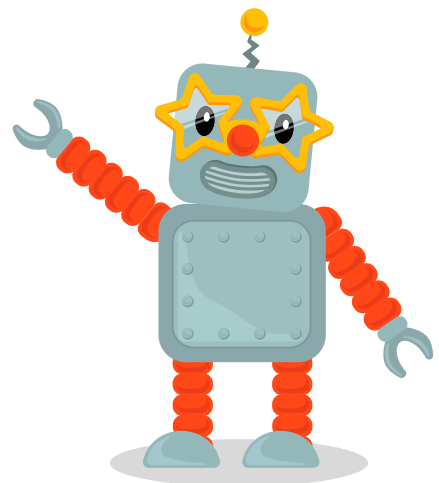
ABC Letter Learning

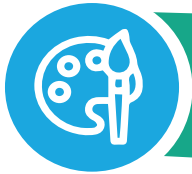
Increasing Language and Communication Skills

Children’s reading development is dependent on their understanding of the alphabetic principle - the idea that letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of spoken language. Learning that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters allows children to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words, and to begin to read with fluency.

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Budding Artists

Arts and crafts engage multiple brain areas simultaneously and improve bilateral coordination between the left and right sides of the brain, leading to immediate and future cognitive development.

These activities accelerate the development of muscles in the hands and fingers, improving fine motor skills that are essential for school success in the earliest formal years. Arts and crafts promote rich social and bonding interactions that help develop language skills and social cognitive abilities (such as, understanding emotions). Creative activities are a great way to create lasting memories while building your own personal art gallery!

Art can be messy and inhibited, thoughtful and meticulous, and fun, fun, fun! Enjoy the delight and wonder your child feels at all his/her discoveries!

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Super Salty Letters

Materials:

- Shallow tray, baking sheet or pan
- Salt (oatmeal, rice, etc.)
- Object that can be used as a non-writing utensil, writing utensil (such as a feather, a paintbrush, a stylus, a pen with a lid affixed, etc.)

Details:

1. Pour enough salt into the tray so that your child can 'write' (in the salt). It is helpful to use a tray that has a dark color on the bottom (and, if that's not possible, you can add a dark piece of construction paper to the bottom of the tray, that you pour the salt on top of).
2. Share the 'writing' utensil with your child (OR, invite him to use his finger to 'write').
3. Encourage your child to write the letters of his name (into the salt), and when he finishes 'writing', he can shake the tray to 'erase' the letters.
4. You can also create alphabet letter cards (i.e. write a few letters onto an index card) and place the card near the tray so your child has a guide to use as he writes different letters. Ask your child to identify each letter as he writes.
5. If your child is not yet ready to write letters, encourage him to draw shapes, lines, curves, and/or other images. Salty writing provides excellent fine-motor skill practice, pincer grasp development and confidence in his skills as a future writer!



Alphabet Rocks

Materials:

- 26 (and later, you can add to your collection by adding 26 more)
- Permanent marker (dark)
- Dish soap and water

Details:

1. Invite your child to help you find a variety of stones (you might want to start by gathering 26 stones. After you have collected the stones, set up a washing 'station' so you and your child can wash each stone. Set out the stones to dry and once they are completely dry, use a permanent marker to write one alphabet letter onto each one
2. Although you may choose to write both upper and lowercase letters, it may be best to start with either upper or lowercase (i.e. write all 26 letters in uppercase). IF space allows, you may be able to write both upper and lowercase matches onto each stone (i.e. Aa, Bb, Cc, etc.).
3. Once the alphabet rocks are completed, there are a few different ways to enjoy them!
 - Hide the rocks around your house or outdoors and invite your child to find them (naming each letter aloud). Ask your child to line the letters up (in alphabetical order).
 - Scatter the rocks onto a workspace and ask your child to put them in alphabetical order.
 - Encourage your child to use the alphabet rocks to spell his name, spell your name, or to spell CVC words (such as CAT, DOG, PIN, etc.).



Recycle & LEARN!

Materials:

- Recycling bin/scraps of paper/marker

Details:

1. Rather than tossing scraps of paper into the recycling bin, keep the scraps and use them to write letters (one letter on each scrap).
2. Display the letter scraps for your child and place the clean (and relatively empty) recycling bin within tossing distance.
3. Ask your child to find one letter at a time (such as, uppercase /A/), and once they find the letter, encourage him to wad the paper into a ball, and toss the 'ball' into the recycling bin (as he shouts the name of the letter!).
4. Feel free to remove the letters out of the recycling bin so they can be reused again later!



As your child grows increasingly proficient identifying upper and lowercase letters, they will enjoy this fun, easy to implement **Letter Look-UP** activity!

Share a variety of flyers, magazines, packages/labels, and/or newspaper pages and invite your child to identify as many letters as possible.

To start, name letters you want your child to find, and ask that she search, identify and name the letter once she finds it. If possible, provide your child with a highlighter with which she can highlight each letter as it is found.

This is a great, letter-naming activity you and your child can do anytime, anywhere!



Letter Hopscotch

Materials:

- Sidewalk chalk

Details:

1. Create a hopscotch pattern (with sidewalk chalk) and add a letter to each hopscotch square. Depending on your child's comfortability with letter recognition, you may decide to use the letters that make up your child's name (i.e. S M I T H). You may also decide to write both upper and lowercase letters (A in one square, a in another). Or, you might decide to write all the alphabet letters (a mix of upper and lowercase, all uppercase, all lowercase, etc.).
2. In order to play letter hopscotch, you can teach your child how to play good old-fashioned hopscotch. (i.e. throw a flat stone, beanbag, or plastic toy to land on square one and then hop through the squares). Your child then hops in all the letter squares (EXCEPT the square in which the stone landed!). Ask your child hops into each square, ask that he say the letter name aloud.
3. You can also simplify Letter Hopscotch by saying the names of letters (one at a time, OR, share a short sequence and encourage your child to hop into each square in the order you shared—i.e. /A/, /j/, /z/).
4. In order to extend Letter Hopscotch play, erase and rearrange the letters (change the letters altogether, or add numbers to the hopscotch board!).

Egg Hunt

Materials:

- Plastic eggs (that can be opened and closed)
- Small scraps of paper (onto which you will write one alphabet letter each)

Details:

1. Gather several plastic eggs, and, using a marker, add one letter to the scraps of paper (which can then be folded and placed inside each egg).
2. Hide the eggs around your home, or outdoors, and encourage your child to go on an egg hunt! As she finds each egg, ask her to guess what letter is inside. Next, ask your child to open the egg and name the letter she sees. Did she predict correctly!?
3. Once your child has located all the eggs and named each of the letters, create new letters to store in the eggs and hide the eggs in new places!
4. To extend this experience, encourage your child to take over the writing of letters (storing the letters inside the eggs), and explain that she needs to hide the eggs so you can go on an egg hunt!
5. **Another egg-sellent idea!?** Use a permanent marker to write the uppercase letter on the TOP part of the egg, and the matching lowercase letter on the bottom part of the egg. Then, you can either hide BOTH sides of each letter egg and encourage your child to find them and correctly connect matching upper and lowercase pairs, OR, ask your child to arrange the uppercase egg halves in alphabetic order, and to then find all of the matching uppercase halves that you have hidden!



On the Road With Letters

Materials:

- Sidewalk chalk
- Toy cars

Details:

1. Randomly write several uppercase letters and lowercase letters (not side-by-side, but scattered across the driveway, etc.). If you choose to write all 52 letters, great, but if not, ensure that each uppercase (and/or lowercase) letter has a match!
2. Invite your child to use sidewalk chalk to match up the lower and uppercase letters, by drawing a 'road' that connects the matching letters!
3. Next, invite your child to 'drive' toy cars along the letter roads. If she is interested in doing so (and, to increase the difficulty of this experience), encourage your child to say the sound the letter makes as she drives her car from the uppercase to the lowercase letter (i.e. "d d d d"). In addition, encourage your child to draw pictures of objects that start with the letters (i.e. draw an APPLE on the road between the uppercase /A/ and the lowercase /a/). OR, ask your child to help you write the name of a word that begins with each letter (i.e. write the word ROAD on the road between uppercase /R/ and lowercase /r/).



The Missing Letter

Materials:

- Refrigerator magnetic letters (OR, if these are not handy, you can create letter cards using scrap paper or index cards)
- Cookie sheet (or, the refrigerator!)

Details:

1. Display four or five magnetic letters on a cookie sheet and ask your child to point to each letter and name it. Next, ask your child to close his eyes; as he does, remove one of the letters from the cookie sheet. Touch his hand when you are ready for him to open his eyes and ask him to give you a THUMBS-UP if he can identify which letter is MISSING!
2. Change the letter line-up (the order in which the letters are arranged, as well as the letters you display), and continue playing.
3. Switch roles with your child (so that he hides one or two letters from you!).
4. To increase the difficulty of this experience, increase the number of letters displayed. IF you do not have magnetic letters, you can invite your child to identify the missing letter using homemade letter cards!



Letter Twister

Materials:

- Paper plates
- Markers
- Heavy-duty tape (if you and your child play Letter Twister on a slick floor, please use heavy duty tape to affix the paper plates to the floor)

Details:

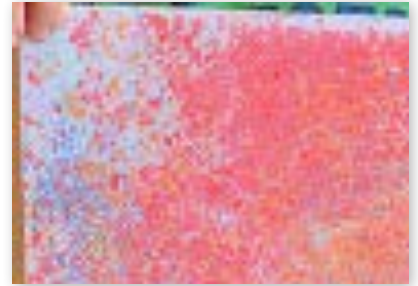
1. Write letters on paper plates and place six to nine of the paper plates into a grid pattern on a safe floorspace (or, fluffy, debris-free grass!).
2. Call out one letter at a time and add a direction such as, "Put your left foot on the letter /A/." Continue sharing directions (and, join your child in playing!) as long as possible (i.e. until all the letters have been touched/identified).
3. To increase the difficulty of this experience, add more complex directions such as, "Put your hand on the letter that is the first letter in your name!"



Chalk-Scraping Prints

Materials:

- Sidewalk chalk (this is a great way to use up small and broken pieces of chalk!)
- Newspapers
- Child-safe scissors
- Shallow pan of water
- White paper (printer, copy paper will work fine!)



Details:

1. Prepare a workspace and cover it with newspaper and fill a shallow pan with water.
2. Use a child-safe pair of scissors and scrape the chalk over the water; the chalk dust will float on top of the water.
3. Scrape the chalk until you have three or four different colors of chalk dust floating on top of the water.
4. Hold the paper and place it gently on top of the water (don't push the paper under the water!).
5. Grasp two corners of the paper and pick the paper up carefully and look at the print! Ask your child to talk about how the chalk transferred from water to paper. Did the colors mix, or did they overlap? How does the print created by chalk look different than paint?
6. Allow the paint to dry, and if you and your child want to make new prints, scrape additional chalk into the water. Invite your child to explore with colors (i.e. blue and red, which will likely blend into purple; green and yellow, which will likely blend into blue, and so on).



Fingerprint Creations

Materials:

- Paper
- Pen/pencil
- Washable stamp pads (washable watercolors, finger paint, or washable markers)



Details:

1. Using a stamp pad (or, with a washable marker or watercolor (i.e. if your child is comfortable doing so, he can color a fingertip with a washable marker or washable watercolors, or finger paints) invite your child to make fingerprints onto paper.
2. Encourage your child to think about the kinds of creatures that can be made from fingerprints. For example, five or six fingerprints together can form a caterpillar; four fingerprints could form the wings of a butterfly, but you could also create birds, ladybugs, dogs, cats, pigs, spiders, flowers, trees, fish, faces, and so much more!
3. Next, invite your child to use the writing utensil to add details to their fingerprints (such as legs, eyes, hair, fur, etc.).
4. Fire up your pointer finger and see what creatures you can create and ask your child to join you in creating a larger, dual-fingerprint creature creation!



Mirror Images

Materials:

- Drawing/writing utensils (dry erase marker, crayons, markers)
- Various paper (construction, copy paper, finger-painting paper)
- Mirror



Details:

1. Around 28-months, it is typical for children to create a self-portrait that includes a few simple lines and/or shapes. As children age, they will likely add more details to their self-portraits.
2. Invite your child to sit in front of a mirror and study her face. What shapes does she see? What details does she see? If space allows, join your child talk about what you see (on your face).
3. There are a couple ways to encourage your child to create her self-portrait! One—provide your child a dry-erase marker and invite her to draw directly onto the mirror (you may find that she ‘traces’ her face (in the mirror)). If you have a full-sized mirror, this option can be super fun (because she can draw/trace her body too!).
4. Second—provide your child paper and drawing utensils (either in front of the mirror, or after she’s spent time observing herself) and encourage her to draw a self-portrait. Join your child and create your own self-portrait (side-by-side).
5. It is important to note that there is no ‘right or wrong’ when it comes self-portraits! Drawing self-portraits can increase a child’s self-awareness, confidence, and self-esteem (while enhancing fine-motor development!).
6. Last, but not least, rather than talking to your child about what you see in her portrait, ask her to tell you about her work (and, conversely, tell your child about your portrait!).



Invisible Paintings

Materials:

- A chunky white candle (any colored candles will work, but white or cream candles are quite easy to use/see as you expose the 'invisible' drawings)
- Paintbrush
- White paper (copy or printer paper may be too thin, but you could back a sheet with a thicker piece of paper or a folder, OR, choose cardstock, tagboard, poster board, etc.)
- Watercolor paints



Details:

1. Ask your child to use a candle to draw onto a piece of paper. Even though she won't be able to see her drawing immediately, she will see it later! The more wax, the better (for the invisible drawing), so encourage your child to press down firmly (with the candle). If little pieces of wax crumble and fall off (OR, if the candle breaks), no worries!
2. Encourage your child to use her imagination (i.e. have fun, enjoy the process!) as she considers what the drawing will look like when it is no longer invisible. **AND**, as an additional challenge, **BEFORE** the invisible drawing is revealed, encourage her to use a crayon (or marker) to recreate the invisible drawing onto another sheet of paper; once the invisible drawing is revealed, compare the two works of art!
3. Next, ask your child to choose two or three different watercolors to paint on the invisible drawing paper. As your child spreads the paint over the entire page, the secret designs and shapes will reveal themselves!



Sticker Names

Materials:

- Stickers (any stickers will do!)
- Paper
- Marker



Details:

1. Write your child's name (in LARGE) letters, onto a sheet of paper (or, invite your child to write his name!).
2. Ask your child to use the stickers to cover the letters of his name (as shown above). Some children will peel and stick stickers outside of the letter lines, and that is okay too, but encourage your child to try to follow the lines and curves that make-up their name!
3. Although it's not a requirement, your child may glean additional knowledge about letter formation if you ask that he place the stickers in a way that mimics letter writing (i.e. uppercase letter J is the first letter in my name, so I would put the first sticker on the left side of the straight line at the top of the J, and would continue following that track as I move left-to-right with the letters in my name).
4. **Please note, if your child is uninterested in this method, it is OKAY!** No matter how they participate with this experience, peeling and placing stickers is an **EXCELLENT** way to refine fine-motor skills, and because children typically love using stickers, this activity is easy-to-implement and it is super fun and enjoyable for our young learners (and not-so-young learners too!).



Expand your child's artistic horizons by branching out and experimenting with a variety of **materials, tools, paint-types and techniques:**

Materials	Tools	Paints	Techniques
Aluminum foil	Bath puff	Watercolors	Brush
Bubble wrap	Cars	Acrylic paints	Dab
Butcher paper	Cookie cutters	Finger paints	Drag
Canvas	Cotton balls	Colored glue	Drip
Cardboard	Cotton swabs	Gelatin powder (Jell-O)	Mix
Cardstock	Craft sticks	Washable tempera	Print
Ceramic tile	Cups		Roll
Coffee filter	Eye dropper		Scrape
Colored paper	Fly swatter		Splatter
Finger paint paper	Foam brush		Stamp
Manilla folder	Fork		Swat
Muslin fabric	Fruit/veggie prints		Swirl
Newsprint	Gift bows		
Paper plate	Leaves		
Paper towels	Marbles		
Poster board	Pastry brush		
River rocks	Pinecones		
Tag board	Pine needles		
Wooden blocks	Ping pong balls		
	Potato masher		
	Rolling pin		