

The Story Behind Alphabet Letter Recognition Lessons

Through my university observations of classrooms, I witnessed teachers helping children develop alphabet recognition of upper and lower case letters. I was taught that this was one of the first steps towards learning to read. I was also introduced to guided reading, cooperative learning, learning modalities and the importance of child development through the theories of Piaget.

For my longest practicum in kindergarten, I was with two very experienced teachers who team-taught. From them I learned about preparing children for grade one. The school was in a low-income area and by the springtime, these two teachers' students recognized their letters and could write letters, short words and most could correctly print their names! For me this solidified how important knowing your letters is in learning to read. These two teachers also modelled how important listening skills were. They had fifty kindergarten children and they did not give verbal instructions until all the children were listening!!! What talent!

When I was teaching grade one, our kindergarten teacher did a fabulous job of preparing students to recognize their letters and write them. Because of this, I was able to begin reading instruction on the first day. I had come to depend on this head start and when a classroom vacancy due to low enrolment resulted in a student arriving who did not have upper and lower alphabet letter recognition, I found out just how wonderful a great kindergarten teacher is!

In 2008, I decided to revise Smart Start in Language Arts to include a section on letter recognition, phonics practice and daily sentence writing. (see sidebar).



Reasons for 2nd Edition of Smart Start

1. The font comic sans became available. This font created the capital letter "I", in the way children were taught to print it. The previous font Moderne, did not.
2. I wanted to add a section on alphabet letter recognition to use in classrooms where students did not know their letters when entering grade one.
3. I wanted to make my own phonics practice worksheets to accompany the reading lessons, because The Frank Schaeffer books recommended in the first edition of Smart Start had gone out of print.
4. I wanted to add daily sentence writing and include a section on how to teach sentence structure and paragraphs using the question word phrases.

Alphabet Show & Tell and I Spy Photos

Show and tell provides an opportunity for young children to speak in front of their peers and share something special. In my own classroom, **Show & Tell** was part of science. Each week a different child was scheduled to bring something on a science theme. Before the child showed and described the item, the class was given ten questions to guess what it was. The creativity in Show & Tell blossomed, along with the children's ability to ask questions. It was surprising how often the class figured out what the object/animal/experiment was in ten questions.

I decided to use **Show & Tell** as part of the new letter recognition lessons. At the beginning of the year, students would be asked to bring two items beginning with the two letter sounds being studied that day. The items would be described and sorted into two boxes. Additionally, I created alphabet letter card games and writing activities to reinforce letter recognition, printing and listening skills.

Since **Show & Tell** would not work for the home school edition, I was inspired by Walter Wicks' I Spy books to make I Spy Photographs. My daughters, my Mom and I spent many special moments studying his amazing pictures. Together, the four of us created the **I Spy Photographs** (sample photo here is for letter G & T). We found out just how talented Walter Wicks is when we made these pictures. It was fun, but difficult. Our oldest daughter photographed them all. The pictures are used in the home education program instead of **Show & Tell** and can be viewed on the website www.books4results.com.

