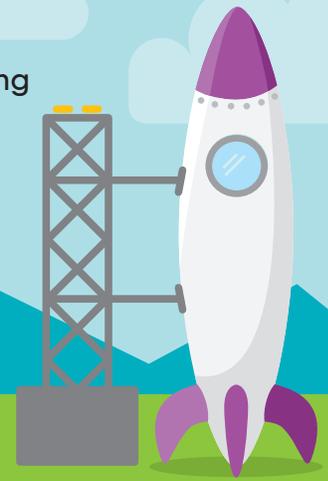


Dear Parents, Guardians, and Special Caregivers,

We are excited about launching your child into the world of literacy and reading through a unique interactive program called Countdown. The skills taught during this 15- to 20-minute literacy time every day will lay the foundation for reading skills that your child will use throughout elementary school.

The first half of Countdown consists of short 3- to 5-minute fun and engaging activities focused on:



INSTRUCTIONAL VOCABULARY

Introducing your child to instructional words (also called Functional Vocabulary) that we use when we are teaching your child new ideas and concepts, including words like:

- beginning, middle, end
- first, next, last
- whole and part
- above and below
- same and different
- sort

SOUNDS IN WORDS Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

Introducing your child to sounds in words, starting with big parts and moving to smaller parts. Below are some of the sound skills your child will learn during these engaging activities:

- Being able to orally blend two spoken word parts together to make a new word
 - Two word parts: tooth+brush = toothbrush
 - Two syllables together: ta+ble = table
 - One small part and a bigger part: b+all = ball
 - Two or three single sounds together: a+t = at, or c+a+t = cat

This skill of hearing and blending sounds together helps your child notice all the tiniest parts of a word so we can then teach them the letters that spell those small parts. Example: /ă/ is spelled by the "letter a" and is the first sound in the word apple."

PRINT CONCEPTS

Introducing your child to:

- holding a book properly
- turning pages in a book
- the idea of reading left to right
- identifying the names of the capital letters and lowercase letters
- understanding spaces between written words
- differentiating between letters, words, and sentences
- understanding the idea of punctuation in print

LETTERS AND THEIR SOUNDS Alphabetic Principle

Introducing your child to the idea that the sounds we hear in words are spelled with letters that have names.

The second half of Countdown transitions to one full 15- to 20-minute lesson a day, and these lessons focus on phonemic awareness and applying students' knowledge of sounds and letters to reading and spelling one- and two-syllable words.

Our goal by the end of the year is that your child will build automatic sound-letter relationships through teacher-led and independent phonics, decoding, and spelling practice; automatically read high-frequency words; and gain the ability to accurately and automatically read isolated and connected text. Building these skills in kindergarten will set your child up to become a strong reader.

You can make a big difference in your child's success by using the words they are using at school and by setting a goal to do one of the five-minute fun activities (on the following pages) in the car, waiting in line, or sitting at the dinner table each day.

We know you will see lots of growth in your child's literacy skills.

Countdown

Early Literacy Home Activities

Glossary of Terms

Syllable: A syllable is a spoken chunk of a word centered around a vowel sound.

for = one syllable

for-get = two syllables

for-get-ful = three syllables

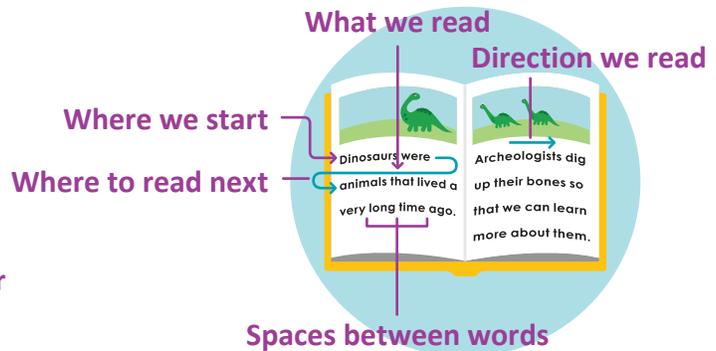
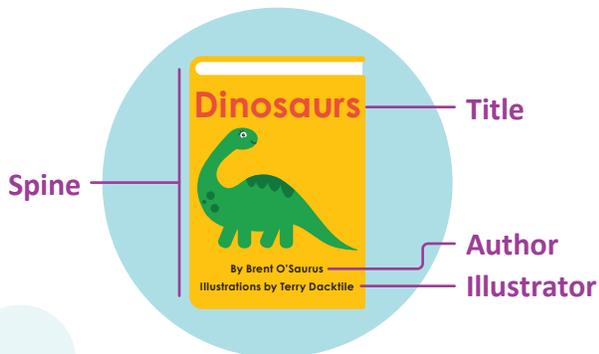
for-get-ful-ness = four syllables

Onset-rime: The onset is the beginning of a word before a vowel; the rime is the vowel and all consonants that follow.

pan - /p/ (onset) /an/ (rime)

brunch - /br/ (onset) /unch/ (rime)

Concepts of Print: Concepts of Print involves an understanding of the way that print works. In pre-k and kindergarten, students should learn what print is, where we find it, and how it is used, especially in the context of books.



Beginning Sound Isolation: Beginning Sound Isolation is the ability to peel off the first sound of a word. After saying the beginning sound by itself, you say the whole word together. This skill helps children understand that words are made up of individual sounds.

When a letter appears between slash marks / /, say the sound of the letter, not its name.

Say the first SOUND in bear; do not say the letter name "b."

EXAMPLES: /b/, bear

Say the first SOUND in ship; do not say the letter names "s" "h."

/sh/, ship

Say the first SOUND in queen; do not say the letter names "q" "u."

/kw/, queen

Rhyming: Words rhyme when the middle and end (vowel sound and consonants that follow) of words sound the same. Rhymes are based on sound only, not on spelling.

EXAMPLES:

bat & sat

rhyme = /at/

when & pen

rhyme = /en/

seek & beak

rhyme = /eek/

Blending and segmenting (syllables, onset-rime, sounds): Blending refers to combining parts of a word together to make a complete word. Segmenting refers to taking apart the parts of a word.

BLENDING EXAMPLES:

Syllable Blending

rain + bow = rainbow

ta + ble = table

Onset-Rime Blending

p + ick = pick

j + ump = jump

Sound Blending

/w/ + /i/ + /sh/ = wish

/h/ + /a/ + /t/ = hat

/f/ + /r/ + /o/ + /g/ = frog

SEGMENTING EXAMPLES:

Syllable Segmenting

driveway = drive / way

gopher = go / pher

Onset-Rime Segmenting

*separating the letters before the vowel from the vowel and everything after it

fish = f / ish

dirt = d / irt

Sound Segmenting

sail = s / ai / l

zip = z / i / p

spot = s / p / o / t

Capital vs. Lowercase Letters: Children should practice with both capital and lowercase letters, but because they see lowercase most often in printed material, that is where the focus should be.

Remember, when a letter appears between slash marks / /, it means you should say the SOUND of the letter, not the letter NAME.

Early Literacy Activities

Reading Aloud

1. Read books aloud to your child.
2. Ask some or all of the following questions to help them understand some important concepts of print:
 - Where can I look for the name of the book? (on the cover)
 - What is the name of the book called? (title)
 - Who writes the words of the book? (author)
 - Who draws the pictures? (illustrator)
 - When I read, what am I looking at? (words, not pictures)
 - Where should I start reading on the page? (left side of the page, first line)
 - Where do I read next, after the first line? (go to the next line down, starting on the left)
 - Point to just one word. How do I know where the word stops? (there is a space after each word)

Rhyming

1. Say any nursery rhyme and have your child fill in the rhyming words. Examples:
 - Row, Row, Row Your Boat
 - Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear
 - One, Two, Buckle My Shoe
 - Hickory Dickory Dock
 - Itsy Bitsy Spider
2. Say two short words. Ask your child to give you a thumbs up if they rhyme or a thumbs down if they don't. (**mug, rug** – thumbs up; **mug, bed** – thumbs down)
3. Say the beginning of a rhyming sentence, and then let your child fill in a last rhyming word.
 - “**Please** don't **sneeze** on the _____ (peas, cheese, bees...)”
 - “**Paul** will **call** for the _____ (ball, mall, stall, hall, fall...)”

Instructional Vocabulary

1. Use the following terms to explain things or to ask questions:
 - Same/different (Ex: Are these the **same** color or **different**?)
 - Whole/part (Ex: Can you hand me a **part** of that pizza?)
 - Before/after (Ex: **After** lunch, we'll have quiet time.)
 - First/next/last (Ex: **First**, we'll have breakfast. **Next**, ... **Last**...)
 - Beginning/middle/end (Ex: What happened at the **beginning** of that story? **Middle**? **End**?)
 - Short/long (Ex: Can you please hand me the **short** stick?)
 - Top/bottom (Ex: Look on the **bottom** shelf for the book.)
 - Loud/quiet (Ex: Say that in a **loud** voice. Now say it again in a **quiet** voice.)

Beginning Sound Isolation

1. Play I Spy: "I spy something that begins with the sound /p/." (e.g., pencils, paper, posters, etc.)
2. Sound Hunt: Have your child find an item starting with a certain sound. (Ex: "Find something that starts with /b/." Child brings a **ball**.)

Remember, when a letter appears between slash marks / /, it means you should say the **SOUND** of the letter, not the letter **NAME**.

Sound Sorting

1. Tell child you are going to be making two sounds. Explain that the sounds might be the same sound or they might be different.
2. After hearing the two sounds, child says "same" or "different."
 - Environmental sound ideas: knocking, whistling, tapping, popping, clapping
 - Word "sound" ideas: cot/cab; bat/bat; cloud/dog
 - Letter sound ideas: /p/ and /p/; /t/ and /b/

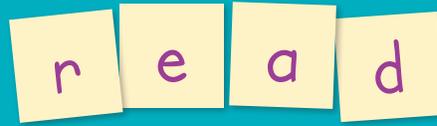
Blending and Segmenting Words in a Sentence or Phrase

1. Say a complete sentence or phrase.
2. Demonstrate how to take one step or clap hands one time for each word you hear.
3. Repeat the whole sentence or phrase at the end.
4. Ask your child to join you in this process.

Activities Requiring Minor Planning

Materials:

papers or sticky notes with one large lowercase letter written on each



Letter/Sound March

1. Place a few letter cards on the floor, forming a circle.
2. Have your child walk around the cards while music plays.
3. Child stops when the music stops and says the sound or letter name of the closest card aloud.
4. Remove the card if your child identifies it correctly, and then keep playing with remaining cards.
5. Have children label objects in the environment (in the house or outside) with their first letter. (Ex: Place the letter **g** on the **g**arbage can.)

Wacky Words

1. Hold up any letter card.
2. Ask your child to list words that begin with that sound.
3. Challenge them to create an alliterative sentences or phrase using words that begin with that sound. (Example: **P**enny the **P**enguin **p**icks **p**osies for her **p**al **P**eter.)

Letter-Sound Match

1. Lay out a few of the letter cards at a time.
2. Say a word that begins with one of the sounds of those letter cards.
3. Have your child find the correct letter card.

