Charting the Cs Conference 2025:

To Literacy and Beyond

Cooperation
Communication
Collaboration

AAC & Authentic Communication: Strategies For Implementation In Everyday Emergent Literacy Routines

Tina Moreno, M.A. CCC-SLP, ATP

Charting the Cs Conference 2025

About me

- SLP specializing in AAC for 15 years
- United Cerebral Palsy of Greater Cleveland LeafBridge
- Voices4All Private Practice
- Member of ASHA, SIG 12
- Assistive Technology Professional through RESNA
- Co-founder: Camp ALEC
- Vice President, People Who Use AAC and their Families: USSAAC
- Mom to adult AAC user -- Mateo

Communication autonomy

- Communication is a human right
- The Communication Bill of Rights was constructed by National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons with Severe Disabilities (NJC)
- “All people with a disability of any extent or severity have a basic right to affect, through communication, the conditions of their existence.”
- Traditional: NJC Bill of Rights
  Adapted by Kate Ahern: Bill of Rights with Symbols
  Video overview: Video Explanation of Bill of Rights

Authentic communication

- Personally relevant and meaningful
- Spontaneous
- Reflects own perspective, thoughts and ideas
- May be unexpected

Aided language stimulation

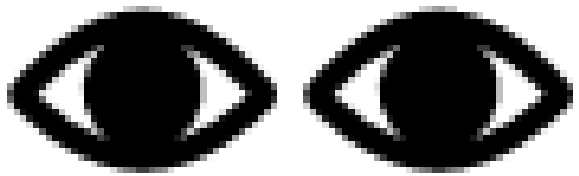
- Aided language stimulation (ALS) is a communication strategy, where a communication partner teaches symbol meaning and models language by combining his or her own verbal input with selection of vocabulary on the Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) system. This is done by simultaneously selecting vocabulary on the AAC system and speaking. ***There is no expectation of repetition.***

Attributing meaning with verbal referencing

- Acknowledging and shaping early forms of communication such as facial expressions, gestures, vocalizations, eye gaze and behaviors

"Say what you see."

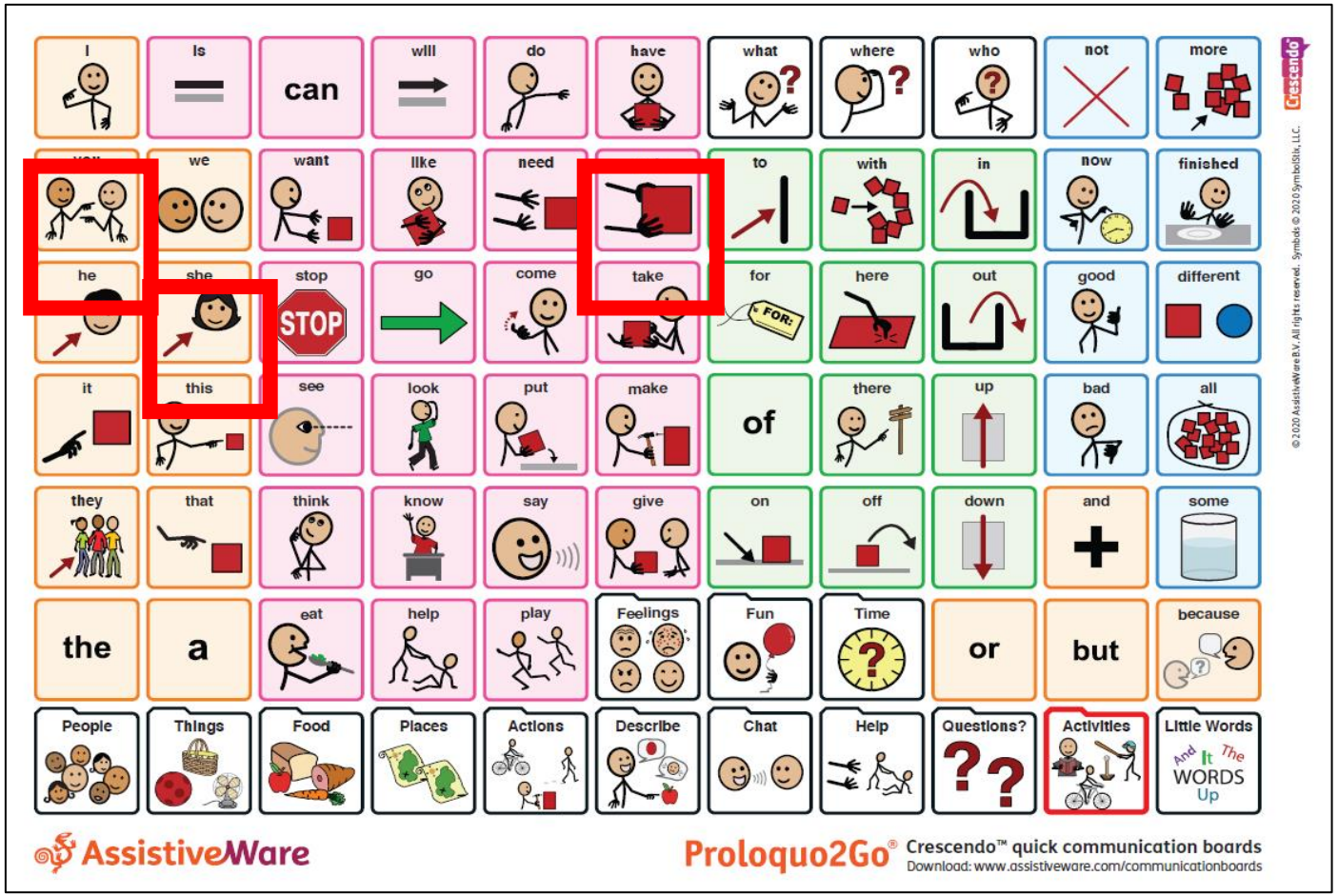
Rachael Langley, SLP and AAC Consultant



Attributing meaning with verbal referencing, continued

I see you help your friend. YOU HELP.

Attributing meaning – Let’s practice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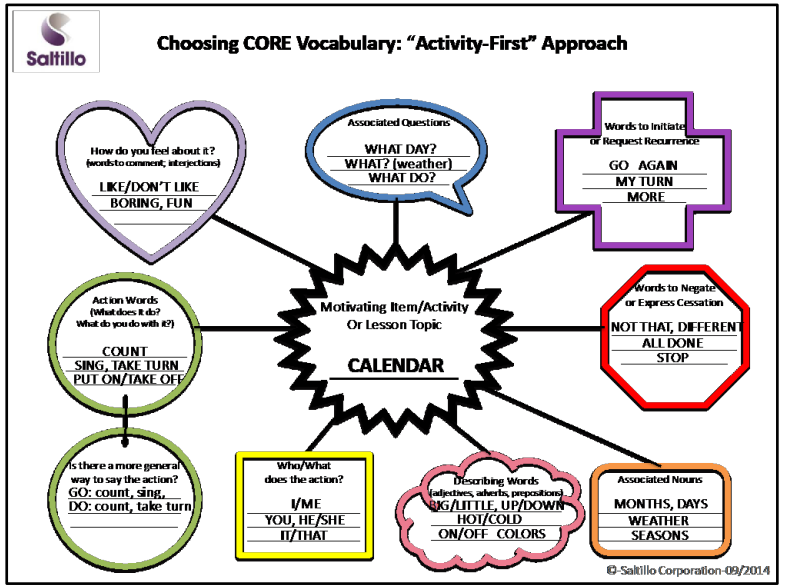
Motivate

- Key to authentic communication
- Reinforcement inventory
- Interesting, fun, engaging, personally meaningful!

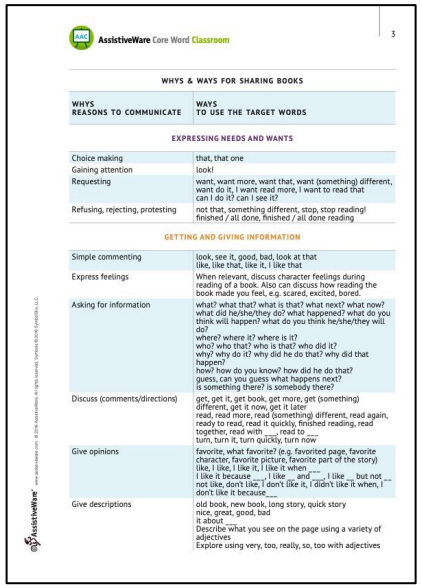
Use existing routines

Classroom Routine	Communication Opportunity	Language Targets (Words modeled on AAC device in BOLD CAPS)	Team Members
Arrival	Greeting staff and peers	Respond to body language and facial expressions. Offer 2-4 comments or opinions, such as: **I LIKE** your new shoes. Did you have a **GOOD RIDE** to school? **I'M HAPPY** to see you. Let's **GO** to the bathroom. Do you **NEED HELP** with your coat?	Teacher Intervention specialist Teaching assistant
Choice Time	Make choices	Offer choices, watching body language, facials expressions and gestures. Offer comments and opinion, such as: I think **YOU LIKE** that one! It likes like you **DON'T WANT** that one. That **LOOKS** fun! **GO PLAY** for 5 minutes.	
Morning Circle	Review the schedule and discuss who is present	Talk about the plan for the day and who is here. **WHO** is **HERE** **I AM** here. He's **NOT** here. **WHAT** will we **DO** first? We will **GO** to music We will **SEE** speech	

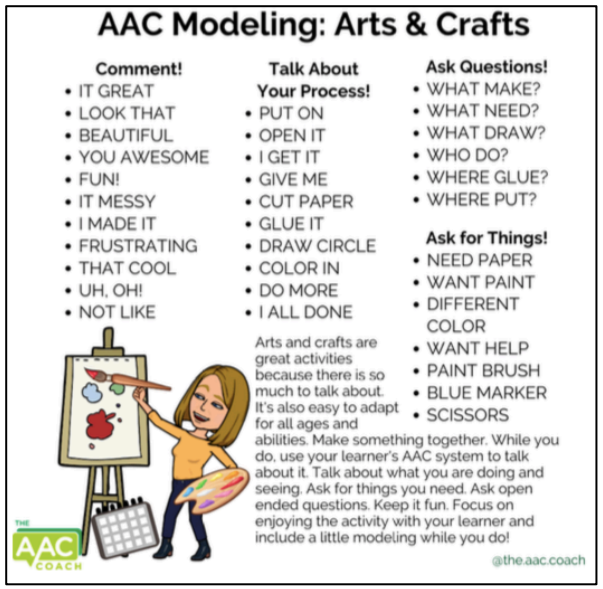
Tools for embedding communication into routines



[Saltillo's Choosing Vocab Activity First]



[Assistiveware Core Classroom]



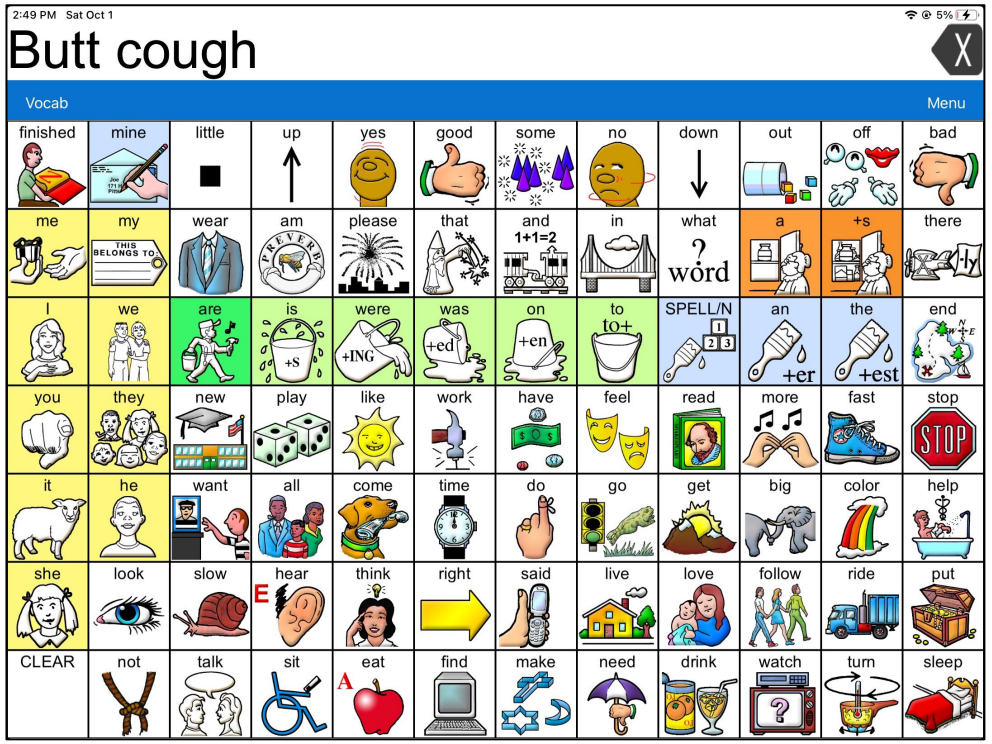
[AAC Coach]

Descriptive teaching model

- **Circumlocution -** The use of many words where fewer would do, especially in a deliberate attempt to be vague or evasive.
- **Descriptive Teaching (Gail Van Tatenhove) -** A strategy that is naturally used by classroom teachers around the world. When a teacher describes (or defines) lesson-specific words using common, everyday words, that teacher is doing descriptive teaching.

WHEN YOU CAN'T FIND A WORD
CURVED YELLOW FRUIT 40¢
DESCRIBE IT!
Rachael Langley - AAC Specialist

Descriptive teaching model, continued



What is prompting?

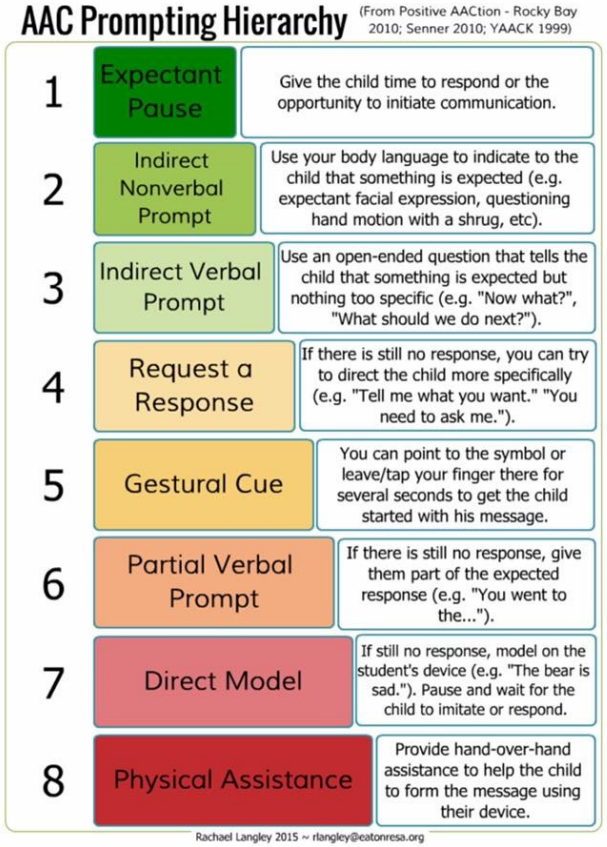
Definition:
The action of saying something to persuade, encourage, or remind someone to say or do something.

Inspiring vs. requiring

Always start here

Use caution, only if needed

Most restrictive, directive



Teaching vs. training

"If I'm prompting, I'm trying to get the kid to say what I expect them to say. That's training, not teaching."

Dr. Karen Erickson

Communication vs. Compliance

Typical roadblocks

AAC users often get stuck at the following:

1. Requesting
2. Answering questions

Beyond requesting and responding

- Tell jokes
- Recall prior experience
- Tell story
- Ask question
- Demonstrate emotions
- Express future goals
- Request adult to act
- Make choices
- Request to leave
- Display affection
- Curse
- Get attention/call someone
- Request help
- Protest/reject
- Greet
- Name/label
- Sustain interaction
- Comment
- Express opinion
- Express ideas
- Share information

Good morning.

Hey friend!

Do me a solid

Mondays are the worst.

It's a dog.

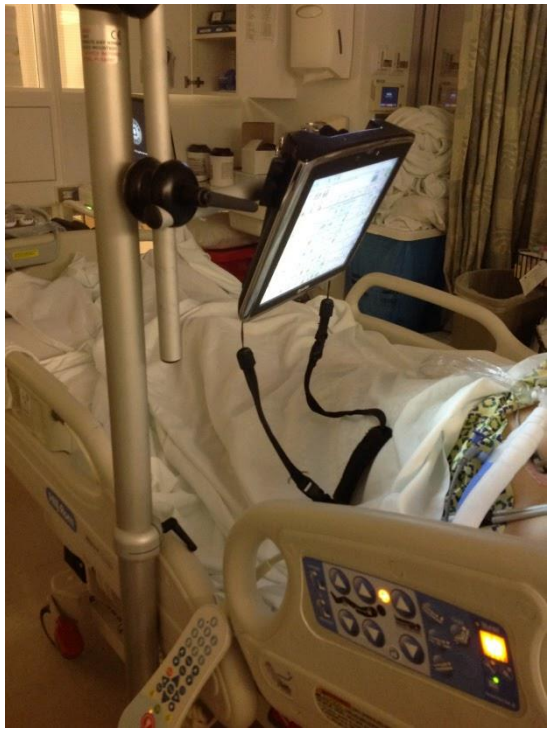
That's DISGUSTING!

I know what we can do.

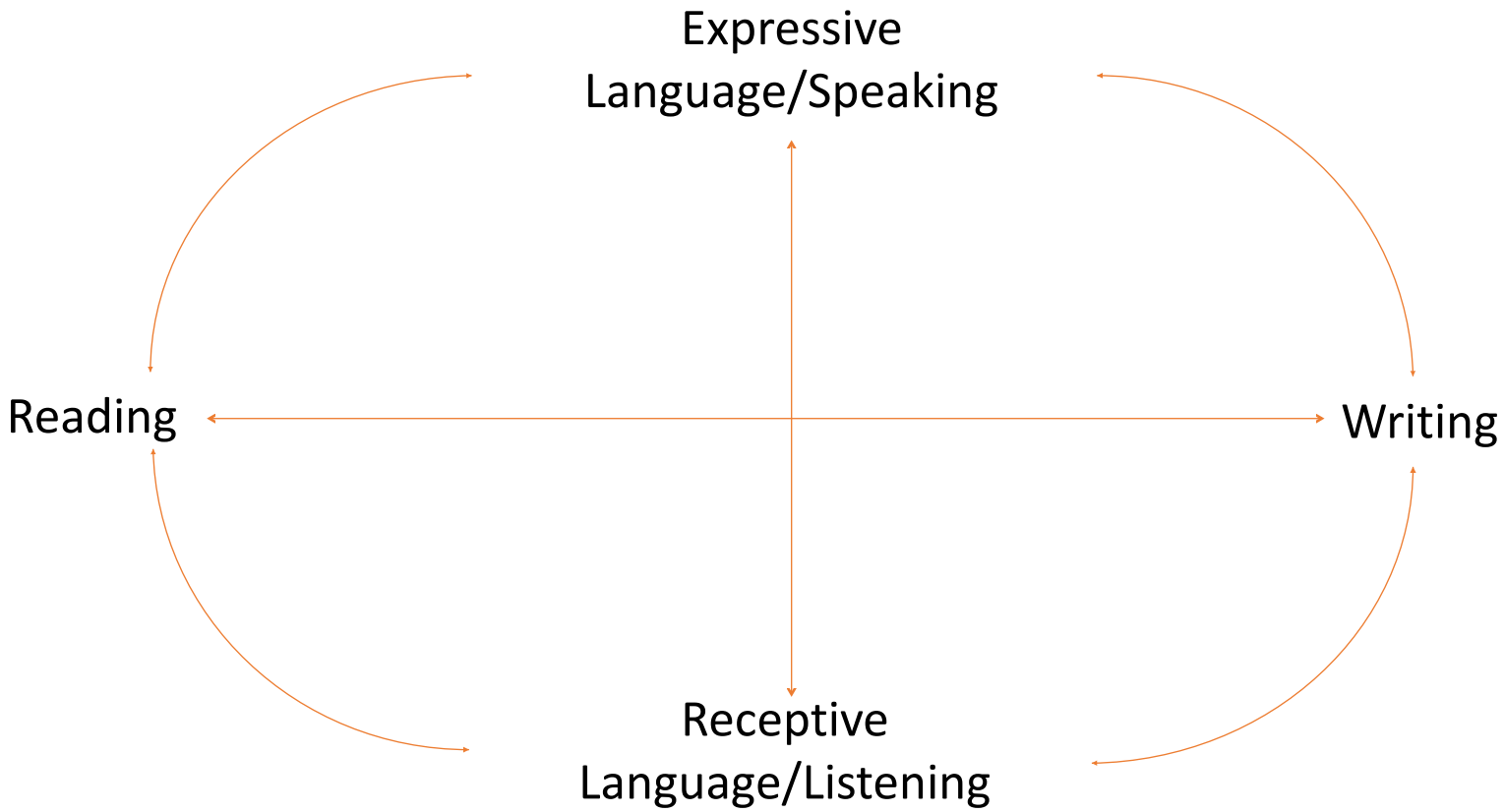
$%$!

Literacy is critical

- Until AAC users can spell, they rely on others to decide which words to include on their communication system.
- Only the 26 letters of the alphabet provide unlimited means of communication.
- Spelling fills in lexical gaps (names of people, places, books, film titles, products and other words).



Oral & written language development



(Koppenhaver, Coleman, Kalman & Yoder, 1991 adapted from Teale & Sulzby, 1989)

Oral reading is not essential

- Oral reading fluency is ***not*** our goal
- Reading proficiency = silent reading with comprehension

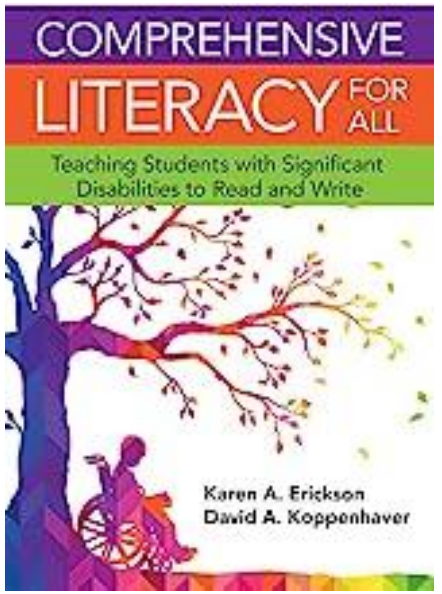
Who are emergent literacy learners?

If the answer is **NO** to **any** of the questions below, the student is emergent in their understandings of reading and writing:

- ❑ Know most of the letters most of the time?
- ❑ Engage actively during shared reading?
- ❑ Have a means of communication and interaction?
- ❑ Understand that writing involves letters and words?

Components of emergent literacy instruction

- Shared Reading
- Predictable Chart Writing
- Alphabet & Phonological Awareness
- Independent Writing (with access to full alphabet)
- Self-Directed Reading
- Symbol-based Communication (with few exceptions)



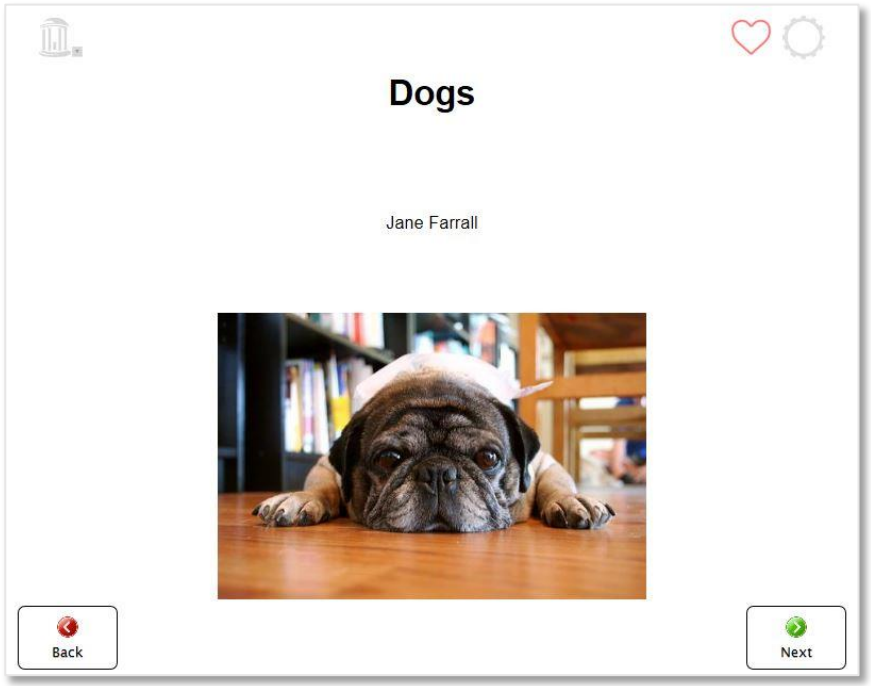
Structured shared reading

- Benefits of shared reading:
  - Encourage interaction
  - Engage learners and cultivate enjoyment of reading
  - Support communication and allow students to lead interaction
  - Attribute meaning to text
  - Demonstrate connection between language and print
  - Build literacy skills and grow vocabulary
  - Encourage critical thinking
  - Help develop fluency as students learn rhythm, intonation and punctuation

Structured shared reading, continued

- Follow The C – A – R
  - **COMMENT**
    STOP and wait 10-15 seconds
  - **ASK for or invite participation**
    STOP and wait 10-15 seconds
  - **RESPOND by repeating and adding more**
- Encourage communication
- Attribute meaning
- Model using core words

Structured shared reading example



www.monarchreader.com

GOOD dog (wait)

[no response from student]

WHAT are you thinking? (wait)

[student points to dog]

Yes, **YOU SEE** dog

I SEE dog too

I LIKE dogs

[student reaches to turn page]

Let's **OPEN IT**

Structured shared reading, continued

- Maximize interaction of students and use of core
- Repeated reading of text is beneficial
- Plan sets of comments for 3-4 readings of same book
- Repetition increases interest and participation
- Keep comments short: 1-2 word combinations
- Select short books that hold interest

Structured shared reading with post its

www.monarchreader.com

Predictable chart writing

Multi-step group activity that teaches:

- Communication (using core vocabulary for AAC users)
- Concepts about print
- Interacting and communicating around a joint activity
- Word identification
- Writing elements such as spelling, capitalization and punctuation

Predictable chart writing - write the chart

- Teacher selects a motivating, familiar topic
- Teacher selects sentence stem using core words
- Provide options/choices for increasing interest/engagement
- Talk about letters and words as you write
- Model discussion about the chart

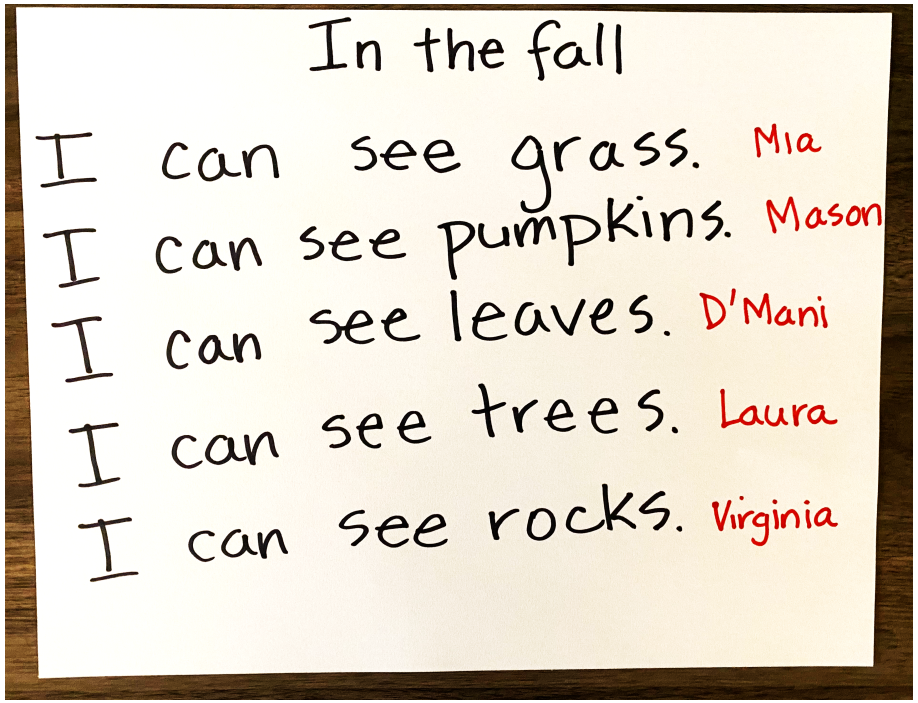
I can _____.

I like eating ____.

We will go to ____.

We are good at ____.

Predictable chart writing – Write the chart



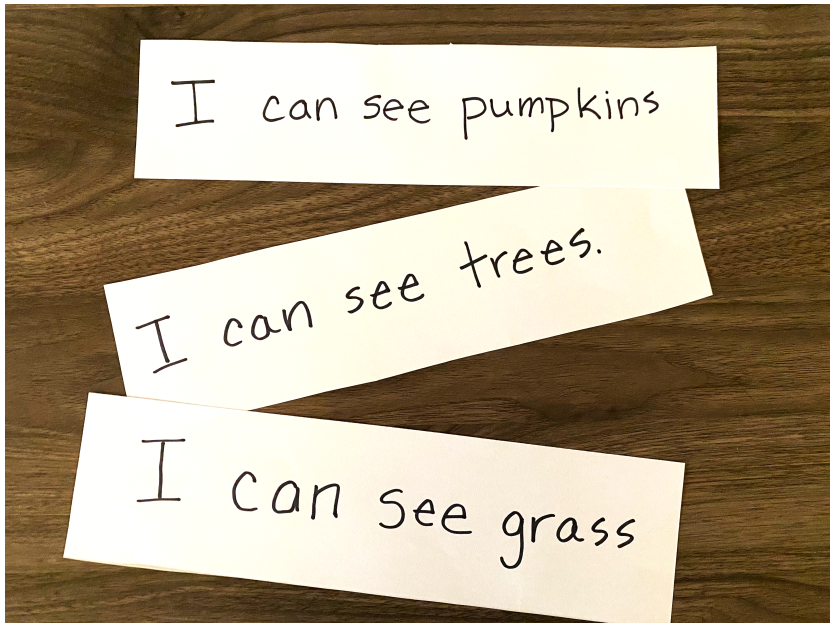
Predictable chart writing – Work the chart

- Helps student focus on specific elements of the text
- Re-read the chart while emphasizing the words in the sentence stem
- Model what reading fluently sounds like
- Have students take turn leading the group reading word by word
- Give the “leader reader” a pointer or wand to highlight word by word
- Re-read the chart multiple times
- Analyze each sentence, talk about similarities and differences (using core words)

Predictable chart writing – Sentence strips

- Teacher gives each student a sentence strip with their own sentence
- Encourage student to read sentence on own
- If child can’t read it, adult reads it

Predictable chart writing – Sentence strips continued



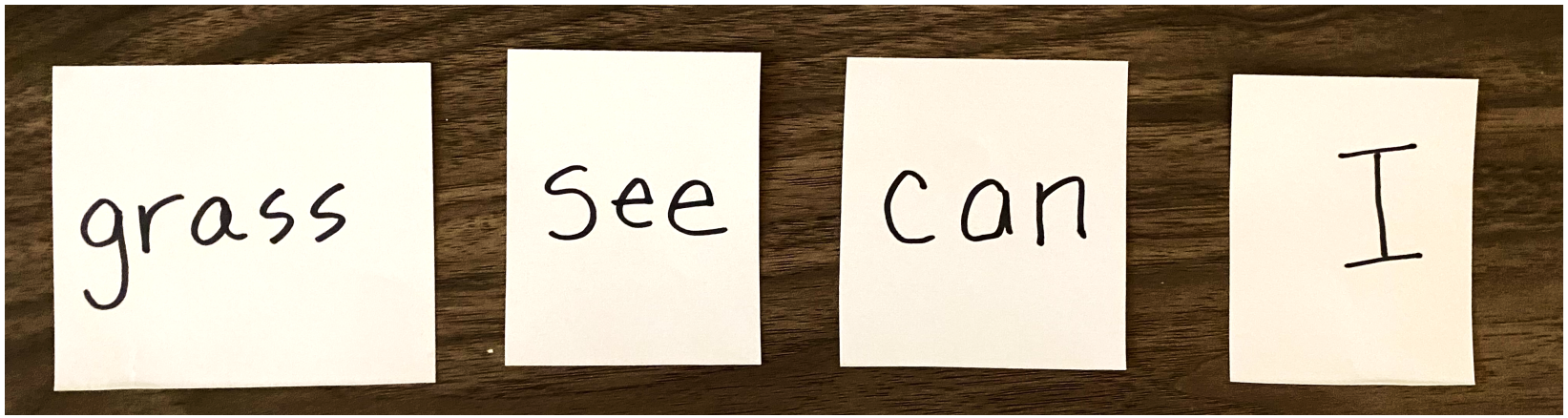
Predictable chart writing – Sentence strips, continued

- Students cut apart word strip; use partner-assisted scanning if needed
- Give students time to try to do it as independently as possible [but have a spare!]
- If needed, pull out duplicate sentence strip and model process, word by word, for student
- Objective: Help student develop concept of word

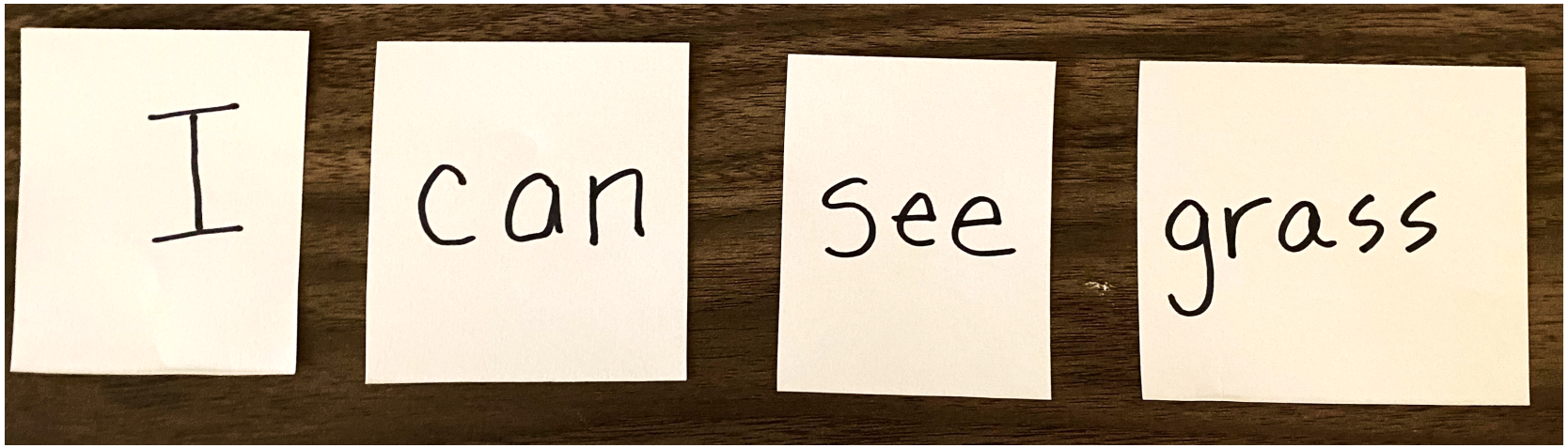
Predictable chart writing – Sentence strips

- Mix up words and ask student to arrange them to re-create sentence
- Read while pointing to each word and ask, “How does that sound?”
- Refer to the chart for comparison and ask, “Does that sound the same as your sentence?
- Encourage student to repeat process until it’s correct
- Use partner-assisted scanning, if needed
- If student is unable to re-create sentence, guide him/her to do it word by word

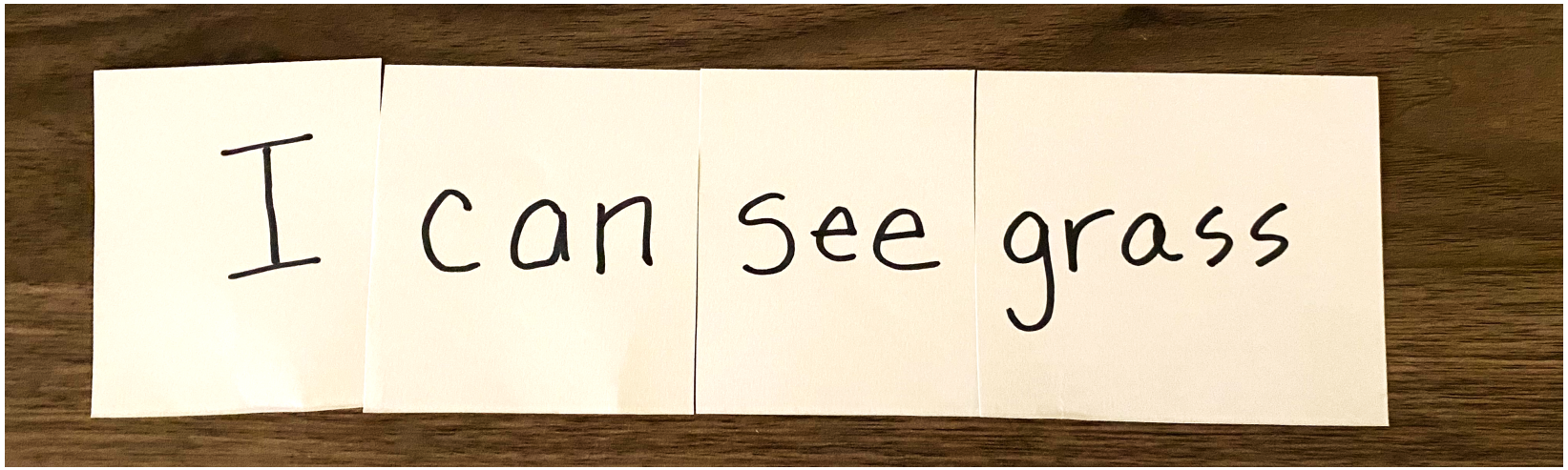
Predictable chart writing – Sentence strips cut



Predictable chart writing – Sentence strips moved

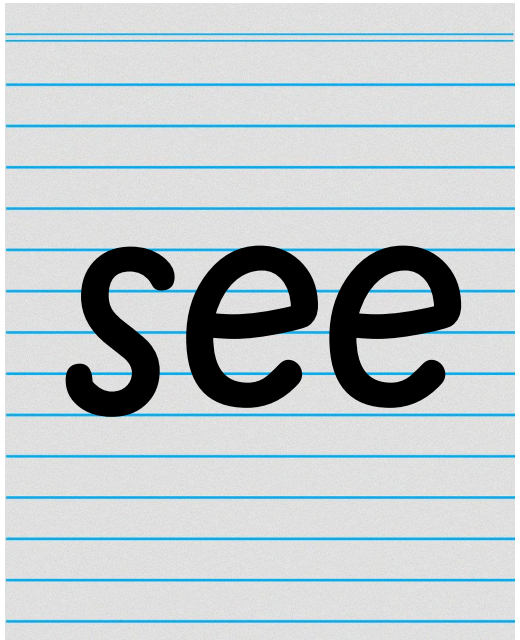


Predictable chart writing – Sentence strips together



Predictable chart writing – Be the sentence!

- Write individual words of full sheets of paper
- Give each student a word
- Encourage students to move around to re-create sentences
- Refer back to the chart and ask, “Does that sound the same?”
- Model how to say sentences using core vocabulary
- Encourage spectators to chime in



Predictable chart writing – Write the book

- Getting published is a HUGE motivator
- Make a paper book or use apps like Book Creator or Pictello
- Share at https://monarchreader.com to get published
- Create a library of high interest, easy-to-ready books
- Send books home for students to read with their families

Predictable chart writing – Write the book, continued

With Book Creator app

Alphabet knowledge & phonological awareness

- Children can learn symbols we teach them
- Children don’t have to understand concrete symbols before we introduce abstract symbols
- Language, reading and writing all develop at the same time

Alphabet knowledge & phonological awareness, continued

- **Alphabet Knowledge:**
  - Recognize 26 upper and 26 lower case letters
  - Understand pairings of upper and lower case letters
  - Names of letters
  - Letter sounds
  - Make or select letters for writing

Alphabet knowledge & phonological awareness, continued

- **Phonological Awareness:**
  - Identify and manipulate words and sounds in spoken language
  - Hear differences
    - Between words (he/she)
    - Between syllables and parts of words
    - Words that begin with same/different sound
    - Words that end with the same/different sounds

Explicit alphabet instruction

- Distributed instruction: A different letter each day
- Upper and lower case
- Letter-sound relationship
- Recognize the letter in context or words and passages
- Learn how to write or produce the target letter

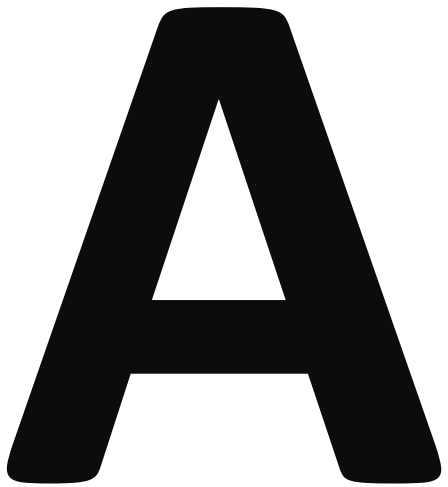
The Letter A

Building Bridges Alphabet and Phonological Awareness Lessons

BuildingBridges
English Language Arts

A a

“This is the letter a. ”



“This is the uppercase letter A.”

“This is the lowercase letter a.”

“Let’s practice naming this letter. What is this letter?”

“Let’s practice saying the sound this letter represents. The letter a represents the sound /ă/. Say /ă/ with me.”

*short a

axe

“Axe begins with the sound /ă/, axe.”

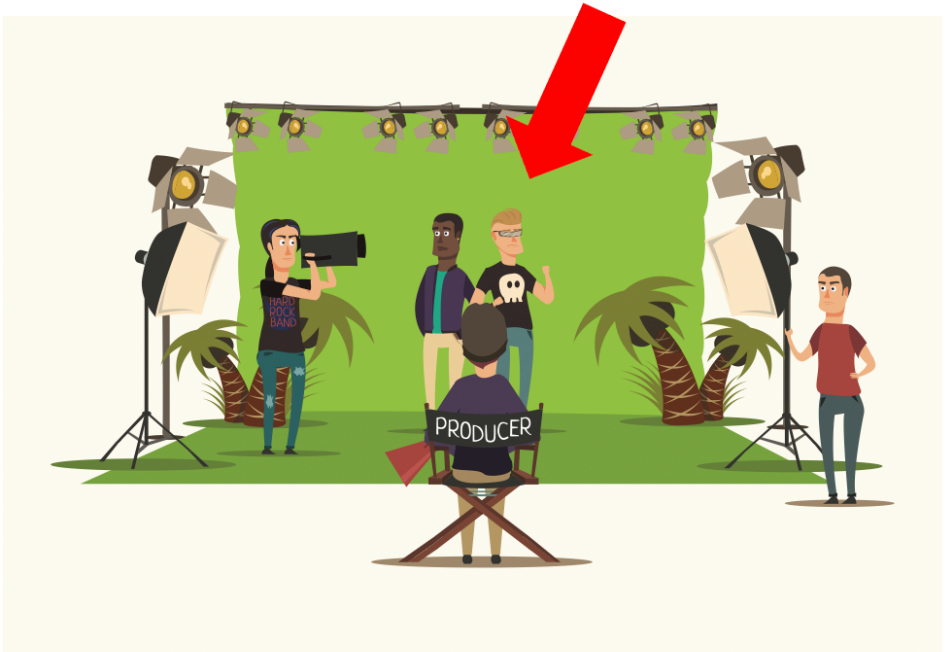
a x e

“Let’s stretch the sounds then blend them together.”

act

“Act begins with the sound /ă/, act.”

a c t



"Let's stretch the sounds then blend them together."

ask

“Ask begins with the sound /ă/, ask.”

a s k

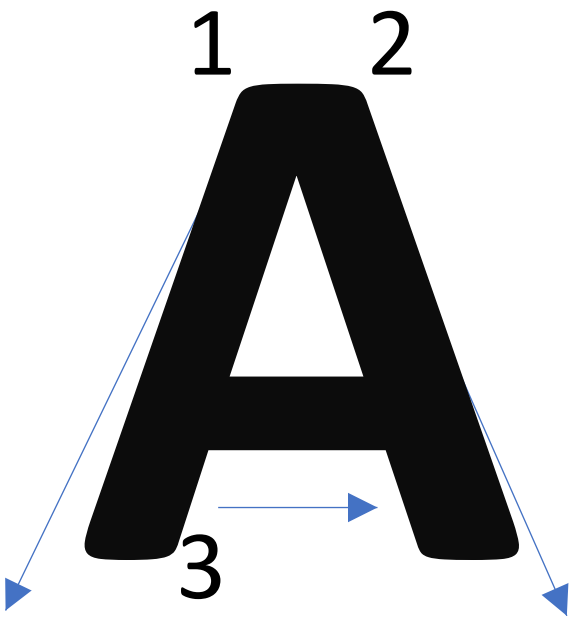
"Let's stretch the sounds then blend them together."

A a

“Now, let’s look for the letter a in a story.”

Angie looked at the apple.
The ant looked at the apple.
The apple looked good.

“Let me show you how to write the letter a.”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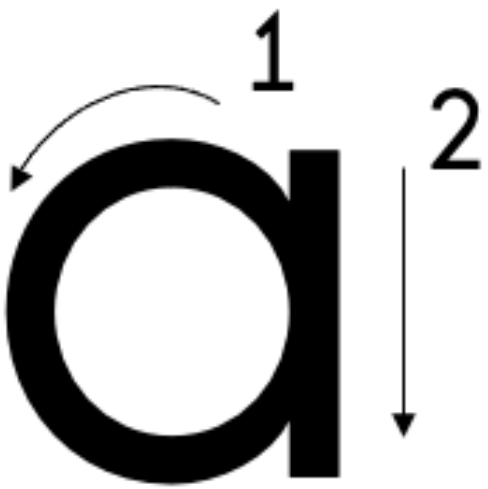
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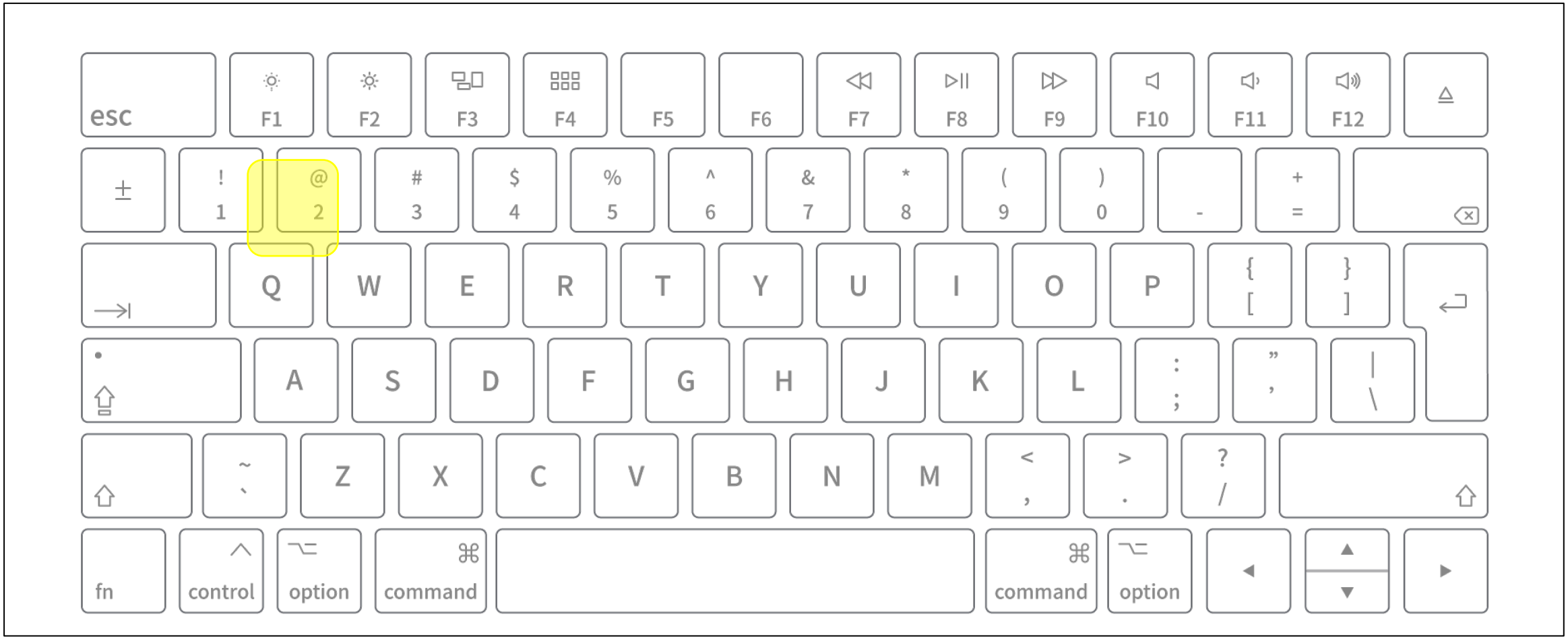
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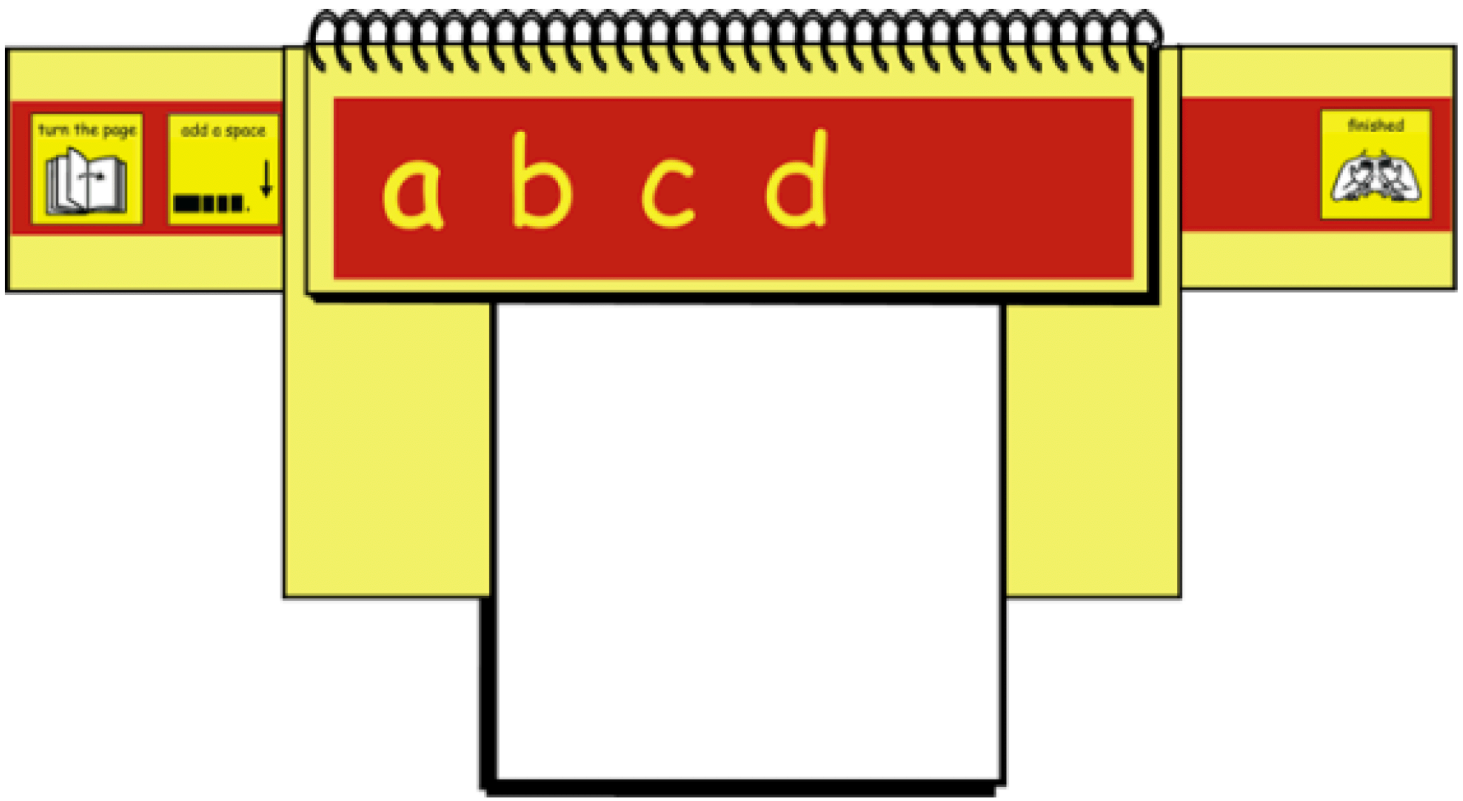
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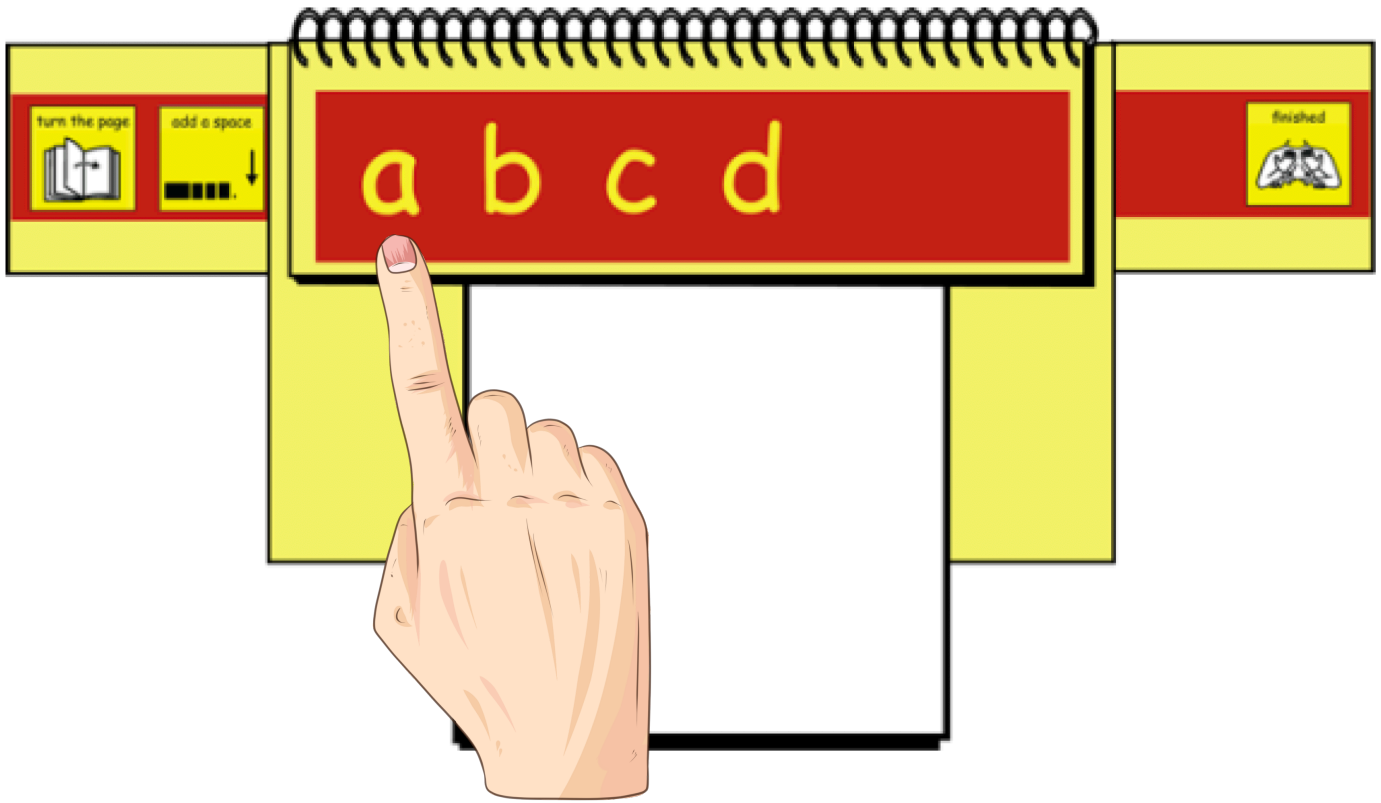
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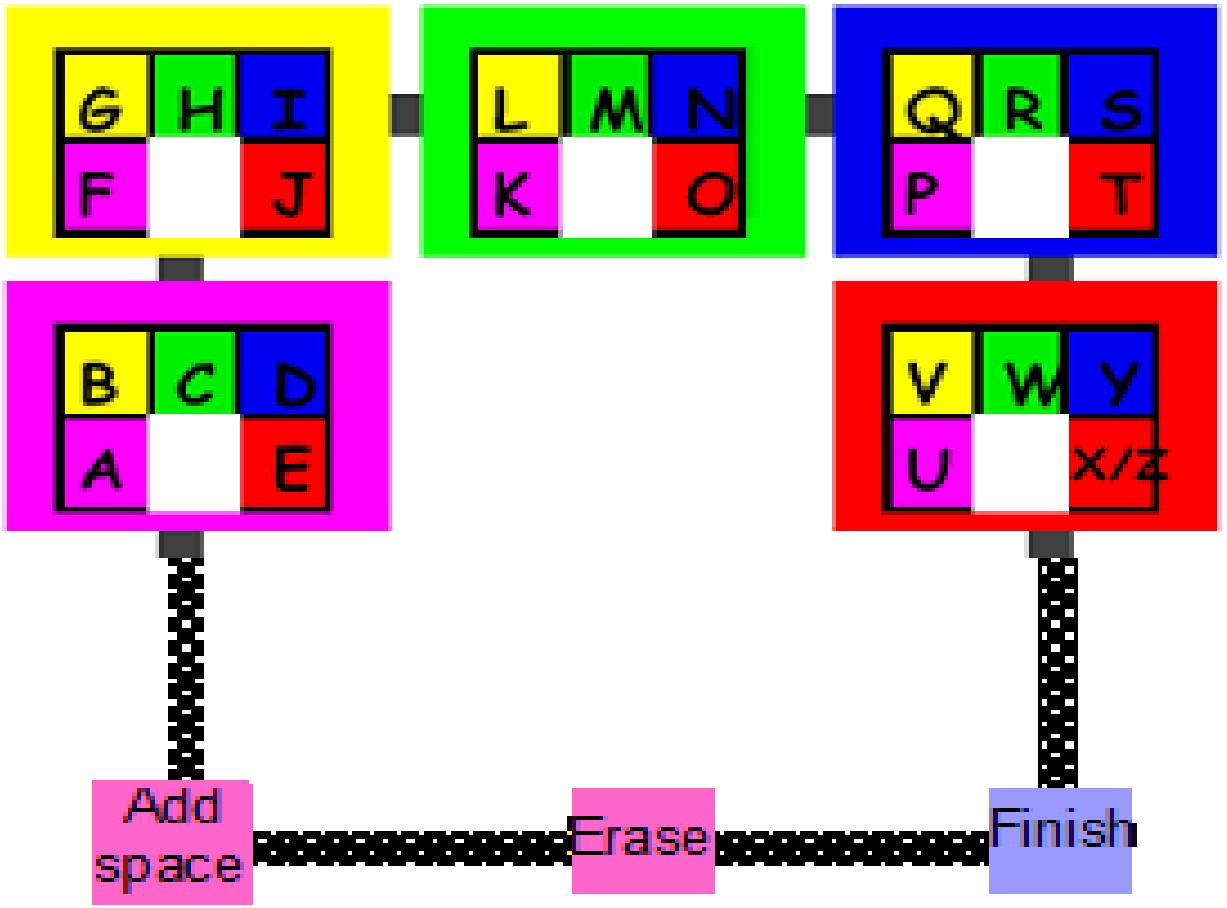
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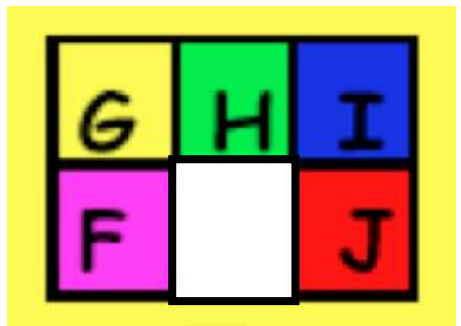
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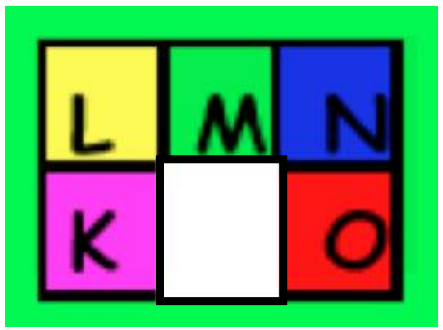
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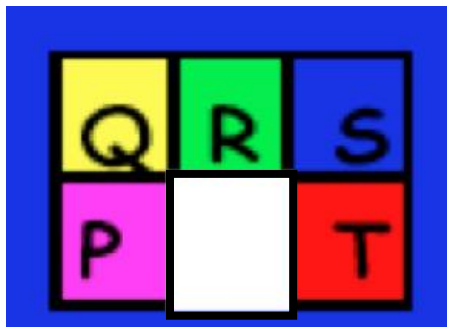
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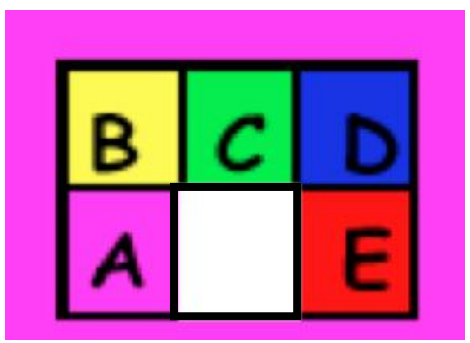
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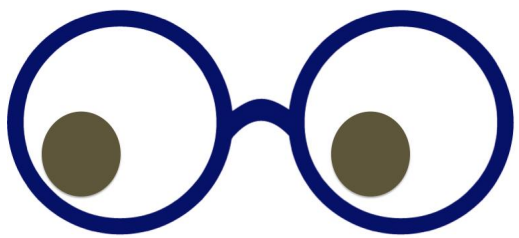

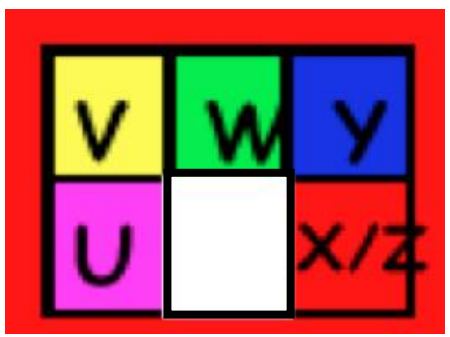
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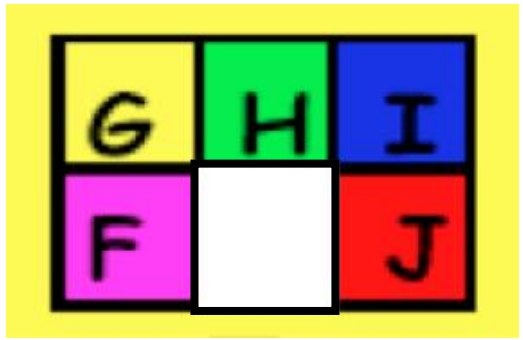
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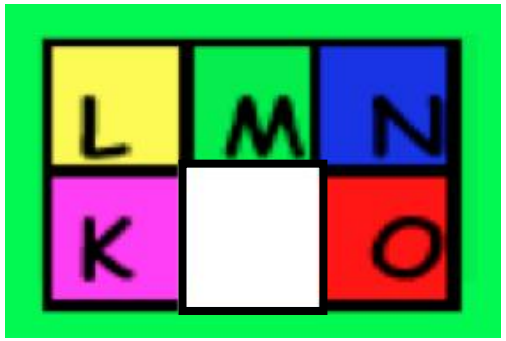
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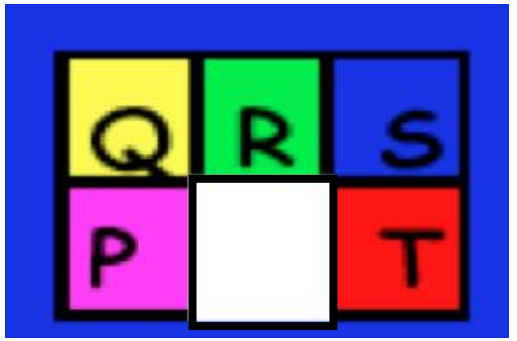
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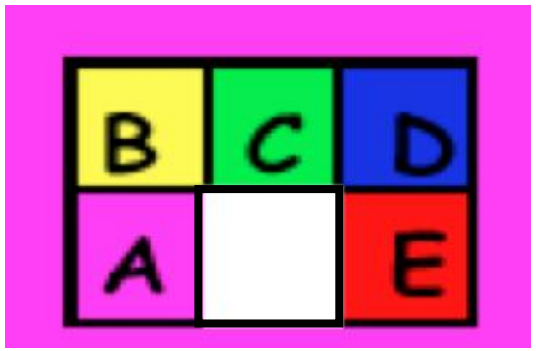
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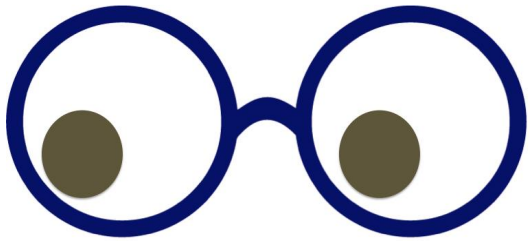

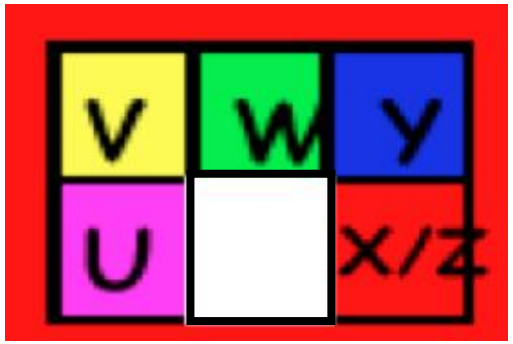
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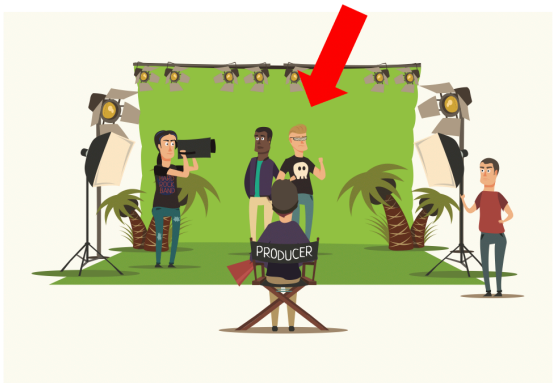

Building Bridges | www.buildingbridges-ela.com | draft date: 03/10/2023
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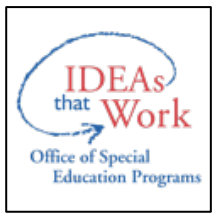

Center for Literacy and Disability Studies

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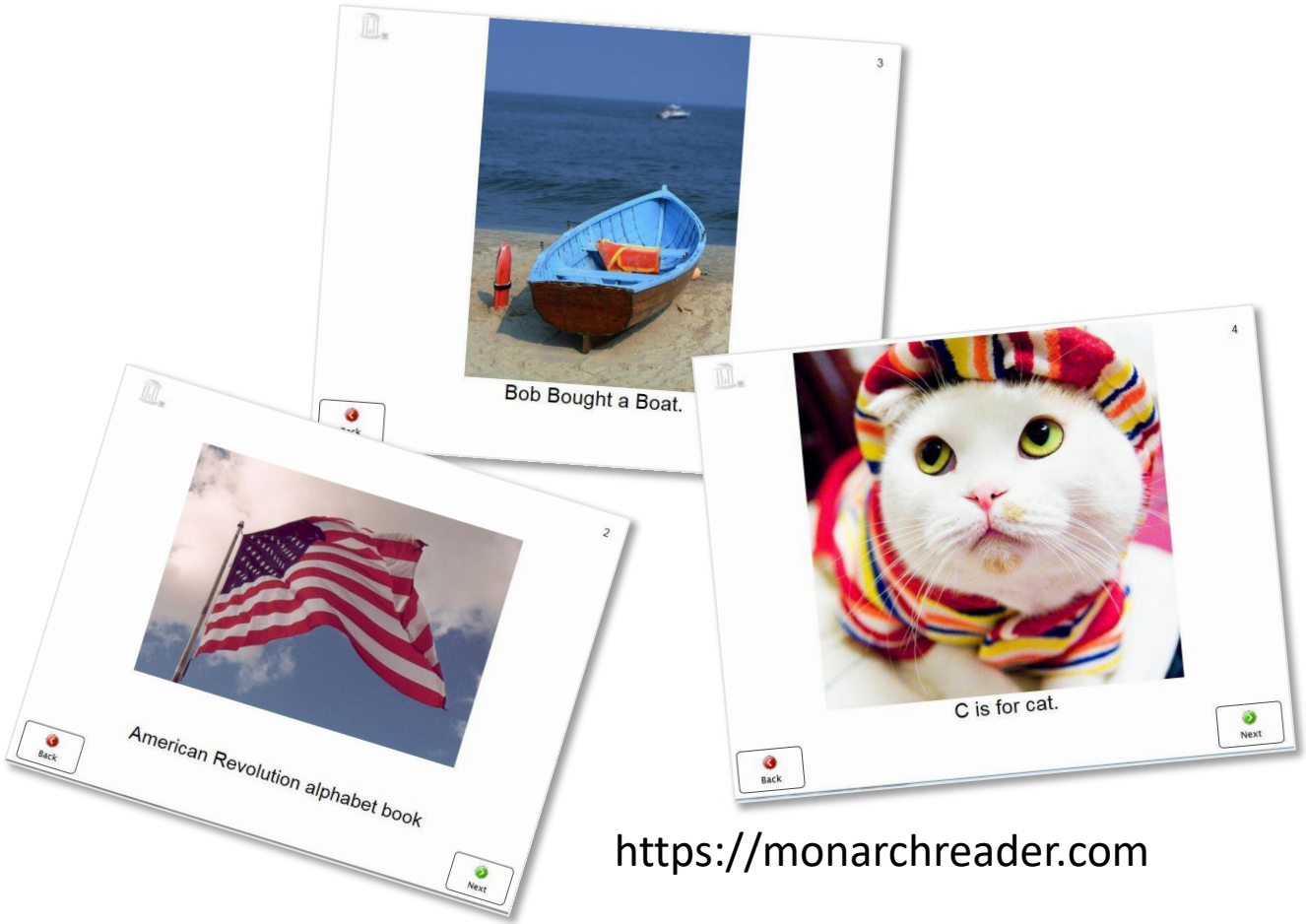
Embedded instruction

Alphabet books

- Point out letters, letter sounds
- Make connections to core words



https://monarchreader.com

Embedded instruction, continued

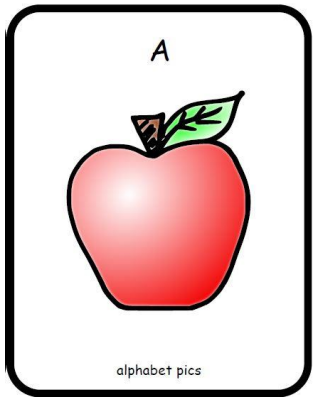
Environmental print

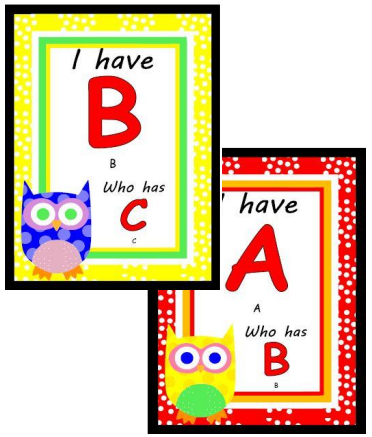
- Point out letters, letter sounds
- Make connections to core words
- Look for:
  - Signs
  - Menus
  - Schedules
  - Products

Embedded instruction, continued

Play with letters and sounds (alphabet cards)

- Matching
- Go Fish
- Bingo



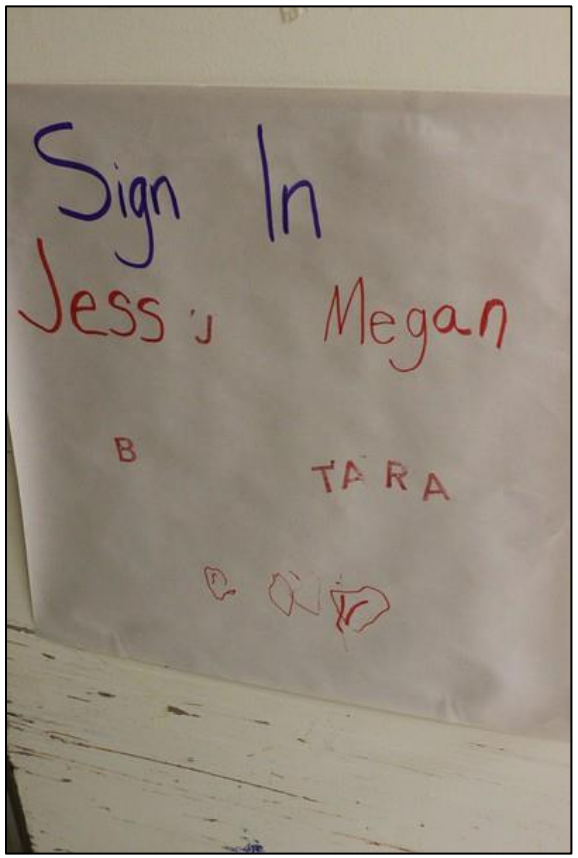


Made with www.lessonpix.com

More embedded instruction

Student names

- Sign attendance sheet each morning
- Vote or answer daily class questions
- Sign name to pick lunch options
- Avoid copying, tracing or using name stamps
- Use core words to talk about letters and names (he/she, same, different)



More on alphabet knowledge & phonological awareness

- Students need access to all letters all the time during literacy activities
- Integrate core vocabulary into all alphabet and phonological awareness activities

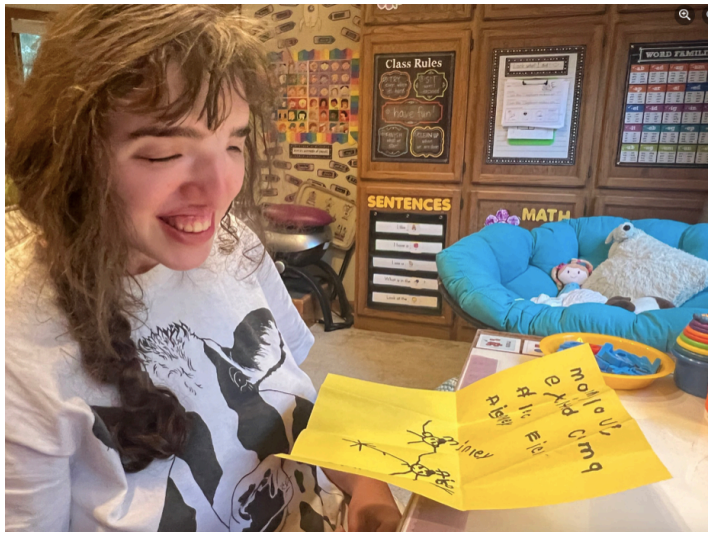
Independent writing

- Learning to write provides unlimited expression
- Symbols get students started communicating, but that’s just the beginning
- Only the 26 letters of the alphabet support unlimited expression
- Don’t need to know every letter to start writing
- Emphasis on writing is about communication
- Writing topics must be interesting

Independent writing, continued

- Adult offers topics for students to select from:
  - Familiar photos or objects
  - Favorite activities or past experiences
  - Past or future fieldtrips, holidays or events
  - Personally meaningful topic that is motivating
  - Easier to us to attribute meaning to emergent text when context is known
- Talk about selected topic using core vocabulary
- Write

Independent writing, continued



seal happy smg cld

I went to the camping
up and down swing

Giving feedback to emergent writers

Less Useful

You wrote a lot of letters.

Let me know you how to spell ___.

Nice writing!

Great kindergarten writing!

More Useful

I love what you wrote about ____. Tell me more.

You are an expert on ____. Write more.

What wonderful writing about ___. Tell us more and then we'll publish it.

I could take (one of the child's letters) and write (a word beginning with that letter.

Writing with alternative pencils

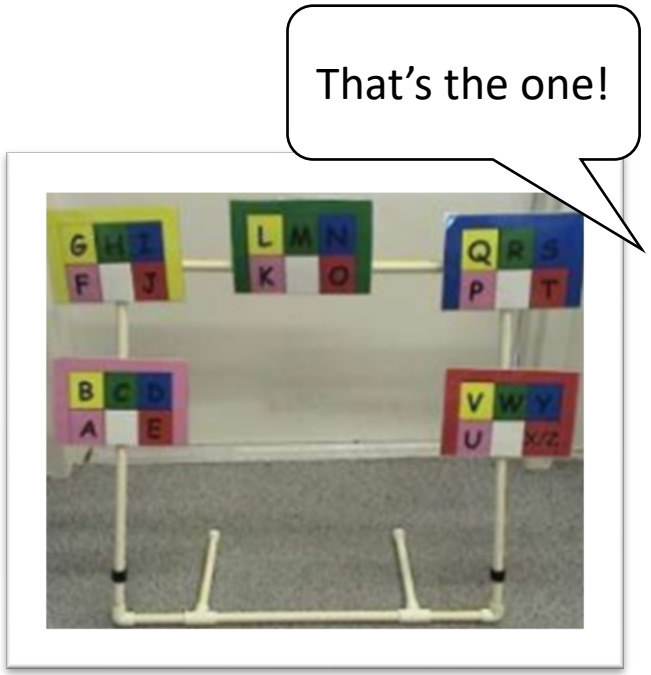
- In order to develop literacy skills, learners must have access to the full alphabet no matter the understanding they appear to have about print.
- An alternative pencil is anything that gives an individual access to the 26 letters of the alphabet.
- Alternative pencils can be used with individuals who are emerging writers and those who have conventional literacy skills.

Tools for independent writing

- Everyone needs access to all 26 letters
- Everyone needs a pencil

Writing with alternative pencils, continued

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
H	I	J	K	L	M	N
O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
V	W	X	Y	Z	.	?
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
YES	space	8	9	0	oops	NO



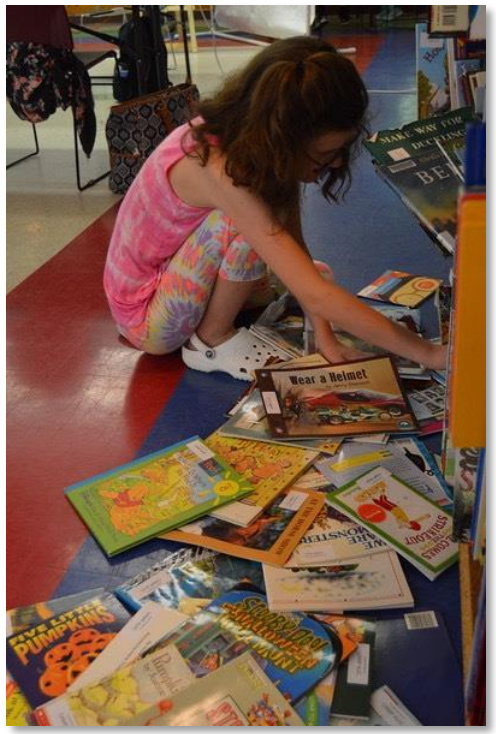
https://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/alternative-pencils/

Independent reading

Why?!?!?!?

- Provides choices and practice making choices
  - Offer widest possible variety
  - Age respectful and ability appropriate
- Provides context for teaching communication by demonstrating use of core vocabulary through aided language input

Independent reading, continued



- Adult: **I SEE** you picked a book
- Camper: [tosses book aside]
- Adult: **NOT** that one
- Camper:[picks another]
- Adult: **THAT**'s a **GOOD** one
- Camper: [Points to cover]
- Adult: **I SEE** a cat
- Adult: **I LIKE** cats
- Camper: [Opens book]
- Adult: **HERE** is a cat
- Camper: [Turns page]
- Adult: I hope **YOU LIKE it!**

Independent reading – accessible materials

Some students require technology www.monarchreader.com for age respectful and ability appropriate books

- Searchable by topic
- Set up collection of book
- Switch accessible
- Change pages and text colors for students
  with visual impairment

Independent reading - resources

- https://www.monarchreader.com
- https://www.getepic.com/
- http://www.storyshares.org
- http://www.storylineonline.net
- https://newsela.com/
- https://www.readworks.org/
- https://www.tweentribune.com/
- https://www.tumblebooks.com/
- http://www.magickeys.com/books/
- https://www.freechildrenstories.com/

For a deeper dive

Comprehensive Literacy for All

Easy to read for parents, educators, teachers and administrators! Available in print and as e-book.

Tar Heel Shared Reader

Professional development, materials, and technology that support the implementation of shared reading for learners who do not read connected text with comprehension above a 2nd grade level.

Building Bridges

A collection of training and support resources for teachers and related professionals with new resources and supports posted as they are developed and evaluated. Check back periodically for updates.

For a deeper dive, continued

Project-Core

Professional development, materials and resources that support emergent communicators and literacy learners. Includes core vocabulary boards those who do not yet have access to robust AAC.

DLM Professional Development

Professional learning modules about instructional strategies for both emergent and conventional literacy learners. Includes shared reading, guided reading approaches (such as Anchor-Read-Apply), writing with alternative pencils and predictable chart writing.

Project VC

Supports teams in their efforts to provide instruction through a series of professional development, formative assessment, and implementation supports designed to track and improve literacy outcomes for all students.

Other favorite resources

- Center for Literacy and Disabilities Studies
- Stepping into AAC
- Talking with Tech Podcast
- USSAAC
- USSAAC Speaker Connection
- TechOWL
- Camp ALEC

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Charting the Cs
Cooperation . Communication . Collaboration

Thank you! Questions?

Reach out any time!

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voices 4 all