

Literacy^{for}All Young Learners

Activities



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Alternatives to the Letter of the Week Using Tad Hills's Rocket Series

This is an example of beginning with a book and using it as a theme for planning activities that teach the alphabet to young children.

Alphabet Game

1. Visit Guru Parents <http://www.guruparents.com/support-files/alphabet-chart.pdf>. Print out two alphabet charts on card stock from this web address. Cut one chart into small cards. Laminate or cover with clear contact paper both the chart and the small cards.
2. Have the children work in pairs to match the cards to the posters by placing each card on top of the correct letter or picture. The children do not need to know their letters to complete this activity; they only need to pay attention to the characteristics of the print.

Introduce the Rocket Book Series by Tad Hills

1. To introduce the Rocket book series, watch the publisher's book trailer posted at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GIDyFsv4uSU>.
2. You can purchase a stuffed toy of Rocket or just find a white dog toy of some type and, using a permanent marker, make some black spots on it that match the way the story character looks. Put a little sign around the dog's neck that reads *Rocket*.
3. Ask the children if they know what a rocket is. (They may be familiar with this word from fireworks or squirt guns.) Explain that a rocket moves very fast and shoots up into the sky. Ask if they have seen dogs doing this—moving very fast, jumping up, and racing around to play. Point out Rocket's name and that it begins with the letter *R*.

What Is a Message?

1. Remind the children about their first day of school. On the first day, the whole class—that means every child—started school together as a group. Point out that, in the book *How Rocket Learned to Read*, the dog named Rocket will meet his teacher for the first time. She is a little yellow bird.

2. On a small chalkboard, tell them you will write the teacher's message: "Class starts today." Ask children if they know what that means. What is a class? What does *starts* mean? What does *today* mean? If they are unsure, give them some examples by referring to their first day of school. Then, put the phrase together and make sure that they understand its meaning.
3. Take a "picture walk" through the book, and have the children make predictions about what will happen in the story. As you go through the book, point out what it says on the chalkboard: "Word of the day: DOG; Bb (and a drawing of a butterfly); class starts tomorrow; Welcome Back, Rocket."
4. Before you share the book, tell the children to listen for the answers to these questions:
 - How does Rocket learn to read?
 - What does he do?
 - What does the little yellow bird do?
 - Why does the bird go away for the winter?
5. Tell the children that, just like the teacher in the book, you will write a different word every day on the chalkboard for them to learn. Reinforce the word by the book that you choose; for example, teach the word *wow* related to *Wow! Said the Owl* by Tim Hopgood. You can preview the book at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0gSaVsiqE>. Let the children know that, in another book, Rocket is going to meet an owl.

First Letters of First Names

1. Go to DLTK <http://www.dltk-teach.com/alphabuddies/marcysabcs.htm> and print out, in one large block letter per child, the first letter of each child's first name.
2. Make a second page for each child that reads: "My name is _____. The first letter of my name is _____."
3. Show Rocket again, and point out that his name starts with *R* and that, even though there are many letters in his name, the very first one is *R*.
4. Distribute copies of the block letters for the first letter of each child's name. At first, play a guessing game, such as "This person is wearing blue today, and her first name starts with *S*. Who is it?" Let the children guess the first letter of each child's name.
5. After the children are more familiar with the first letters of their names, use their photo-name cards from your word wall and have them search to find a match for the first letter. Eventually you can ask, "Who has a name that starts with this letter?"
6. The same procedure can be used with first and last letters of simple words from the story, such as *run*, *wag*, and *mud*.

Follow the Yellow Bird

1. There are lots of printable alphabets available at <http://www.pinterest.com/countryfun/abc-printables>. For this activity, you need the entire alphabet. If it is already posted in your room, use that copy. Or, go to the site above, make sure the download is free, and print out the alphabet. Before you print, make sure that you choose an alphabet that will not confuse the children. Be certain that the letters are not covered up or in a lettering style that is different from what you teach. Laminate the alphabet.
2. In the first story, *Rocket Learns to Read* (in Spanish, *Roc aprende a leer*), the yellow bird is his teacher and begins by posting an alphabet banner. Post the entire alphabet in your room at the children's eye level.
3. Make a pointer out of a yellow bird toy by gluing or sewing the toy to a dowel rod or by taping a clip-art yellow bird to a ruler.
4. Tell the children to keep their eyes on the yellow bird. Have the children sing "The Alphabet Song" slowly as you land the yellow bird on each letter as it is sung. If a child knows the alphabet well, have that child be the leader.
5. As the children become more familiar with the alphabet, give them individual alphabet posters, and have them use a pointer along with you as they sing the song.

Letter Search within Children's Names

1. Prepare a set of name tags for the class using sticky notes (or use My Name Is _____ name tags from the dollar store).
2. Go to the Mr. Printables site at <http://www.mrprintables.com/alphabet-flash-cards.html> to see many different alphabet posters and matching flash cards, plus a little holder you can make for the cards that the children use. You can print alphabet cards with the capital letters, small letters, and an illustration, or you can print cards that have all of that plus an illustration that is labeled with the corresponding word.
3. Give each child a copy of the first letter in his or her name, and then ask the child to search and find it on the alphabet banner. When they find their letters, let them use the yellow bird as a pointer to "land" on the first letter of their names.
4. Post the children's name tags next to the letters with which they begin. When you have finished, ask the children questions such as, "Is there any letter that has more than one child's name? Which is it? Who can come up and show us?" or "Is there any letter that doesn't have anyone's name? Come up and point to it."
5. To make the game more challenging, use the last letter of their first names or the first letters of their last names.

Alphabet Posters and Flash Cards

1. Visit Activity Village <http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/alphabet-games>. Print out a set of large alphabet posters and put them at the children's eye level in the classroom. Print out a set of alphabet flash cards for each child. This site also contains a pattern for making an alphabet cards holder for their cards.
2. At first, give the children a limited number of alphabet cards—choose very distinctive letters, such as *S*, *O*, and *F*.
3. Put a sticky note or use removable highlighting tape on the letters on the alphabet poster that they will be searching for today.
4. Have them open their packets and spread out the letters for that day in front of them.
5. Ask one child to be the teacher and land the yellow bird on a letter that is highlighted on the alphabet poster. As the yellow bird lands on a letter, have the children find that letter, pull it out of the pack, and hold it up for the yellow bird "teacher" to see and check.

Word Configuration

1. Print out the word list from the front inside cover of *Rocket's Mighty Words*: *dog*, *ear*, *spot*, *tail*, *nose*, *stick*, and *paw*. Print each word carefully on letter strips that have a dotted line in the middle.
2. Make a set of squares that will cover the letters with a small square placed on the baseline (*a*, *e*, *c*, *s*), a rectangle placed on the baseline for letters that are "sticks" (*l*, *k*, *t*), or a rectangle set at the halfway mark to hang down for letters with "tails" (*g*, *p*).
3. Have the children take turns coming up and placing the squares and rectangles on top of each letter. This teaches them word configuration—the outline or shape of an entire word.
4. Try the activity again, using letter strips of words about the yellow bird: *bird*, *eye*, *beak*, *wing*, and *feet*.

Magnetic Board

1. *Rocket's Mighty Words* board book has quite a few words that have an accompanying picture. Create simple images or use clip art to illustrate the action words: *wag*, *dig*, *run*, *sniff*, *nap*, and *melt*. Write the word on the bottom of the image, and glue a small magnet below each word.
2. Create simple images or use clip art to illustrate words that describe the outdoors: *mud*, *snow*, *wind*, and *moon*. Write the word on the image, and glue a small magnet below each word.

3. Create simple images or use clip art to illustrate words that describe the yellow bird: *eye, beak, wing, and feet*. Write the word on the image, and glue a small magnet below each word.
4. Create simple images or use clip art to illustrate the bird and Rocket reading together: *trunk, flowers, grass, cloud, and books*. Write the word on the image, and glue a small magnet below each word.
5. Create simple images or use clip art to illustrate the owl: *owl, tree, sky, and nest*. Write the word on the image, and glue a small magnet below each word.
6. Make matching word cards with magnets on the back so that, when children try to match the words, they will be aligned and children can see that both of the words are identical.

Word Trees

1. Type “images for Tad Hills” into your browser. There you will see the author’s picture and the real dog—an English sheepdog—who inspired his books. Explain to the children that an author is someone who writes a story and an illustrator is someone who makes the pictures. For the Rocket books, Tad Hills is both the author and the illustrator. Point out that the children are authors and illustrators, too, when they write and draw in their journals.
2. Make copies of a large tree, one per child, so that children can paste on environmental print and symbols that they know, such as the name of a cereal from the box, a stop sign, *yes, no*, a heart to represent love, *XOXO* to represent hugs and kisses, and so on.
3. Tell the children they are going to hear another story about the little dog and his yellow bird teacher that is called *Rocket Writes a Story*. Rocket begins by looking around and collecting words. Have the children begin their own word collections.

Sight Words Word Wall

Make a word wall of small words that are best learned as sight words because so many of them are hard to sound out. They are listed on the last two pages of the book *Rocket Writes a Story*: *back, after, there, again, from, only, now, where, but, since, about, also, by, put, had, over, here, more, across, than, some, were, how, every, then, very, around, you, and each*.

Teacher Resources

ABC Teach <http://www.abcteach.com>

Has specialized lists, so you can choose, for example, word cards to go with Spanish colors, French farm animals, and so on.

Jalongo, Mary. 2015. *Literacy for All Young Learners*. Lewisville, NC: Gryphon House. Strategy 2, pp. 21–24.

No More Letter of the Week, Pre-K Pages <http://www.pre-kpages.com/lotw>

Many alternatives to one letter per week and an explanation of why it is not the best approach to teaching the alphabet.

TeachingBooks.net <http://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=26798anda=1>

The ultimate “begin with a picture book” site. Each entry contains a reading of the book, material about the author, lesson plans, and lists of related books.

Children’s Books

Hills, Tad. 2010. *How Rocket Learned to Read*. New York: Schwartz and Wade.

Hills, Tad. 2012. *Rocket Writes a Story*. New York: Schwartz and Wade.

Hills, Tad. 2013. *Rocket’s Mighty Words*. New York: Schwartz and Wade.

Hills, Tad. 2014. *Drop It, Rocket!* New York: Random House.

Hopgood, Tim. 2009. *Wow! Said the Owl*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux.

Using “Say, Say, Little Playmate” to Teach Prepositions

1. Watch a video of the song “Say, Say, Little Playmate,” available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvcAjlbtInI>.

2. Learn the song:

*Say, say, little playmate,
Come out and play with me.
I need a friend you see.
Such special friends we’ll be.
Say, say, little playmate,
Come open up your door,
And we’ll be special friends forevermore.*

*Say, say, little playmate,
Come out and play with me.
We’ll have such fun, you’ll see.
Climb up my apple tree.
Say, say, little playmate,
Come open up your door,
And we’ll be special friends forevermore.*

*Say, say, little playmate,
Come out and play with me.
I need a friend you see.
Such special friends we’ll be.
Say, say, little playmate,
Come open up your door,
And we’ll be special friends forevermore.*

3. Provide stuffed or toy animals or images taped on dowel rods—a little brown squirrel, a baby black bear, a little red fox, a little green bird, and a gray striped raccoon.
4. Teach the children the color words that describe each of the animals: *brown, black, red, green, and gray*.
5. Sing a new verse of the song together, using the animal toy to act out the preposition:

*Oh, little brown squirrel,
Come **out** so I can see.
Don’t hide **inside** the tree.
I’ll sit **here** quietly.
Oh, little brown squirrel,*

I want to see you play.

*So do not go **away**.*

Please stay all day.

6. Sing the verse again, changing the third line each time:

- *Don't hide **inside** the tree* (squirrel)
- *Don't climb **up in** the tree* (bear)
- *Don't go **behind** the tree* (fox)
- *Don't fly **above** the tree* (bird)
- *Don't sit **beside** the tree* (raccoon)