

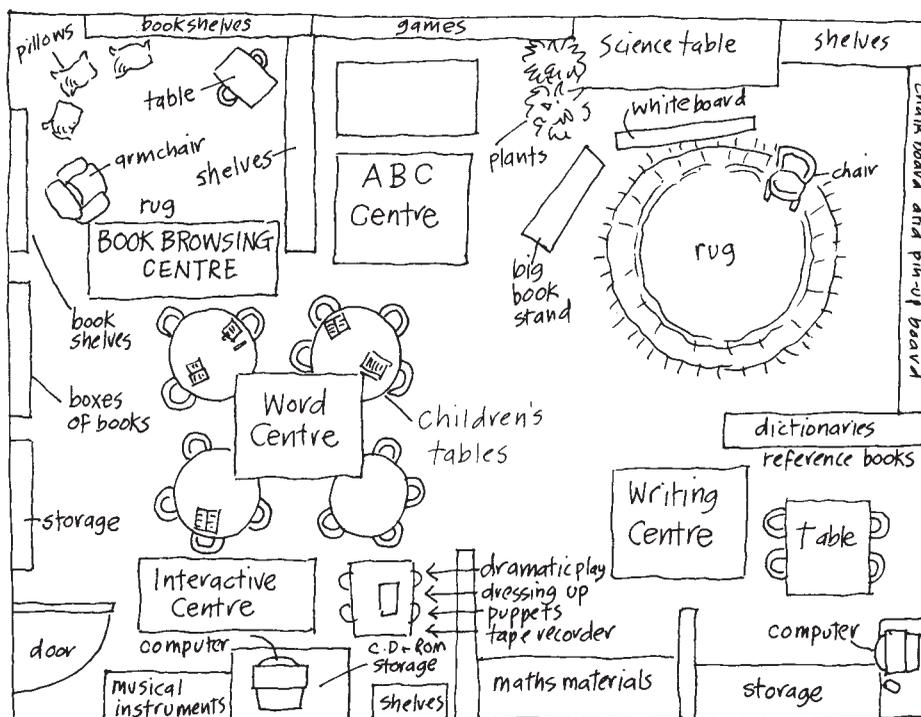
# Using literacy learning centres

Literacy learning centres are areas set up in the classroom for children to practise and extend the learning introduced in guided reading sessions. Literacy learning centres free the teacher to work in focused, uninterrupted guided reading sessions with a small group of children.

In a literacy learning centre, children participate in purposeful tasks and activities such as partner reading, word games and readers theatre, as opposed to busy work such as colouring in worksheets.

Activities need to be carefully introduced so that children can work without assistance from the teacher. For example, if the card game 'Snap' is used in a learning centre the game rules are introduced and the game practised in small groups carefully supervised by the teacher before children play the game in the centre. Many teachers begin slowly by introducing children to activities in one centre before moving to the next centre.

Literacy learning centres are areas for cooperative and independent activity. Many teachers plan cooperative activities where children work with peers and there are also individual activities when necessary.



One classroom plan with five literacy learning centres.

## Task boards

The management of learning centres is often organised with a task board. This may begin with one or two literacy learning centres, with more centres being added as children learn how to complete the activities independently.

	Monday	
Group 1	Guided reading	Writing 
Group 2	A B C <b>ABC</b>	Guided reading
Group 3	Writing 	A B C <b>ABC</b>

Some teachers start small with an alphabet centre and a writing centre. Other teachers have many different centres such as a game centre, a partner reading centre, a drama centre, a big book centre, an author centre, a computer centre, a listening centre, a storytelling centre, a media centre, a fairy-tale centre and a read-around-the-room centre. In some classrooms, the children choose to work at different centres and the teacher calls together small groups of children for guided reading. (See Morrow 1997 for more ideas.)

Teachers, with the children, design symbols to use to represent different literacy learning centres, and these are then placed by the learning centres in the classroom.

In many classrooms, children are placed in several groups which rotate through activities. For example on Monday, Sam's group will do guided reading with the teacher followed by a writing activity. Adam's group will do activities in the ABC centre, followed by guided reading. Nina's group will have book browsing then a word centre activity. Will's group has word centre and the ABC centre and Cass's group the interactive centre and then book browsing.

	Monday		Tuesday	
Sam's group	Guided Reading	Writing Centre	Word Centre	Book Browsing
Adam's group	A B C	Guided Reading	Writing Centre	Interactive Centre
Nina's group	Book Browsing	Word Centre	Guided Reading	A B C
Will's group	Word Centre	A B C	Book Browsing	Guided Reading
Cass's group	Interactive Centre	Book Browsing	A B C	Word Centre

Teachers can plan guided reading sessions over one- or two-week period so that the groups meet with the teacher two to three times per week.

## *The writing centre*

In the writing centre children can use word processors, paper and pencils, crayons and markers for writing activities. Sometimes the activities encourage creative responses; at other times there are more structured activities where children innovate on a text.

The writing centre for emergent literacy can focus on innovating on text, sentence makers and book making, and the activities can integrate writing and information technology.

### **INNOVATING ON A TEXT**

The sentence beginnings from books read in guided reading sessions may be given for children to complete, for example:

I like ...

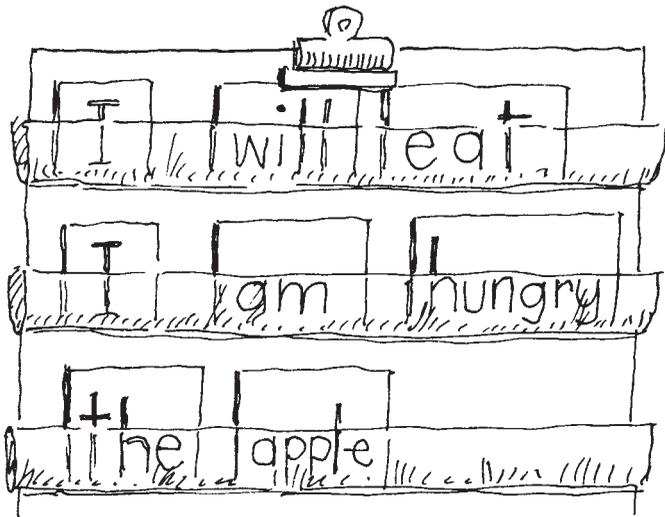
I have ...

This is a ...



### **SENTENCE MAKERS**

Sentence makers are strips of clear plastic in which children place cards with words written on them. The words will have been introduced in guided reading sessions. Children arrange the words to form sentences, at times to match an illustration, and then write the sentence they have created.



### **BOOK MAKING**

Children can create their own books by drawing pictures and writing in response to books read aloud by the teacher, big books used in shared reading and in response to the books used in guided reading. Children can work individually, or in pairs or small groups.

#### *Materials to place in the writing centre*

paper

camera

word processor

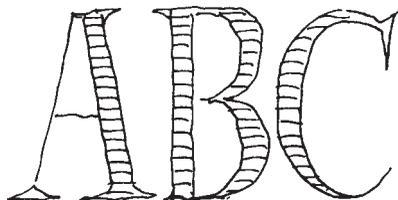
book-making materials – sheets of paper, staples, cardboard

CD-ROM books and activities

E-mail

## *The alphabet centre* **ABC**

The alphabet centre is used for emergent and early readers. As children move through the early, transitional and extending levels of reading, the alphabet centre will be replaced by another learning centre. The alphabet centre can focus on activities for phonemic awareness, print awareness and sound to letter relationships.



### **PHONEMIC AWARENESS ACTIVITIES**

Phonemic awareness is the awareness of the words and sounds heard in spoken language. It involves recognition of word, syllable, rhyme, alliteration and phonemes.

#### *Clapping games*

Children can listen to songs and jingles read aloud on CDs or tape recordings and either clap to the beat or the words in the songs. In 'Clap around the room' a child points to an object such as a pencil or a box and their partner claps the syllables *pen-cil* or *box* in the word. Consciousness of syllables is important when children begin to read and write words.

#### *Picture-card games*

Picture card games for phonemic awareness focus on the sounds of the spoken word and for this reason picture cards made from stickers, magazines and catalogues are used. Games of Snap, Concentration and Fish can be played with cards with pictures glued to the front. Rhyming Snap is played with rhyming words such as *cat, mat, sat*; or *sky, pie, I*.

First Sound Snap is played when pictures have the same initial sound such as *fish, five, four, fan*. It is the sound of the phonemes and not the visual pattern of letters that is important here.

More complex picture-card games involve pictures or objects where one word doesn't fit: for example, in rhyme *fish, sand, dish* or, in first sounds, pictures of dog, doughnut, snake, dinner.

### **PRINT AWARENESS ACTIVITIES**

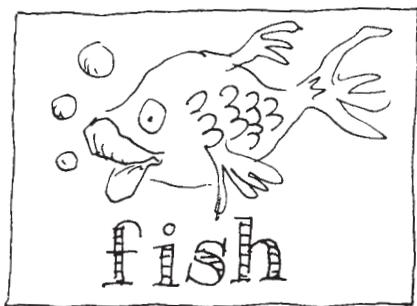
Print awareness involves learning about letter formation and different letter fonts, and the recognition and matching of letters. Letters can be cut from magazines and pasted to make collages. (See the *Alphakids Alphabet Books Teacher Resource Book* for more ideas.)

### **SOUND TO LETTER RELATIONSHIPS**

Sound to letter games can be made by writing words and illustrating them, when possible, on cards. It is helpful if a picture cue is placed near the word.

Snap, Memory or Concentration and Fish games can be played with these with cards. You will need 20–30 paired cards.

Snap games are played by pairs or small groups of children who have been dealt 5–10 cards. Children take turns to place a card face up on a central pile. If two cards in a row match, the first to correctly call 'Snap!' takes the cards. The winner is the one with the most cards. Once the game is over the winner deals the cards again and encourages a new winner.



Memory or Concentration is played by pairs, small groups or individuals. A set of 20–30 cards with matching pairs is laid out face down. One at a time, children turn two cards over trying to make a match. If the match is correct they take the pair. If the match is incorrect they turn the cards face down again. The winner has the most pairs and then the cards are shuffled and placed face down for the next game.

Fish is similar to Snap except 10 cards are dealt to pairs or a group of children. In turns, children try to make pairs of matching cards by asking their group for a card. If the group members do not have a card they say 'Fish' and the person asking picks up a new card from a pile in the centre.

Matching cards can be made using:

- words with the same onset
- words with the same rime
- words with the same vowel sounds

### *Materials to place in the alphabet centre*

pictures cards and objects for matching similar words and sounds.

word cards for playing games

alphabet charts

plastic letters for building words

cardboard letters

alphabet books

individual letter books or beginning dictionaries

## *The word centre* ☺

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The word centre is set up with a range of games and activities through which children practise making and breaking words and reading high-frequency words.

### **HIGH-FREQUENCY WORDS**

Many words occur over and over, and these words are known as sight words or high-frequency words. Reading fluency is improved if high-frequency words are recognised automatically. A beginning list of high-frequency words is: *[child's name], I, is, me, like, my, the, am, here, a, see, and, can, get, this, has, are, go.*

To help children recognise these words, they are placed on cards for playing matching games such as Fish, Concentration and Snap.

### **ANALOGY WITH ONSET AND RIME**

Children make analogies between a familiar word like *cat* and an unfamiliar word in a text, for example *bat*. Making and breaking activities involve using plastic letters to make a word such as *cat* and then breaking the word into its onset and rime: *c- at*. They then make a list of *-at* words.

an	at	dog	in	but
pan	cat	log	pin	cut
can	mat	frog	thin	gut
man	sat	fog	grin	shut
	rat			

Word sorting games can be developed where children sort words that have the same onset – *can, candle, cake, cot* – or the same rime – *cat, sat, mat*.



Other activities include word games such as Scrabble and Bingo, and word ladders when children change one letter at a time.

in	go	to
pin	got	top
spin	goat	stop
spit	goats	step

### *Materials to place in the word centre*

word games  
CD-ROMs  
high-frequency word cards  
rhyming word cards  
onset and rime word cards  
plastic tile letters  
plastic tile words

### *The book browsing centre*

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This is a centre for independent or collaborative reading of a range of texts. Books previously introduced by the teacher, big books from shared reading and books related to the topics discussed in guided reading may be displayed. For example, after reading the book *Plants* in a guided reading session, a display of books on this topic can be arranged.

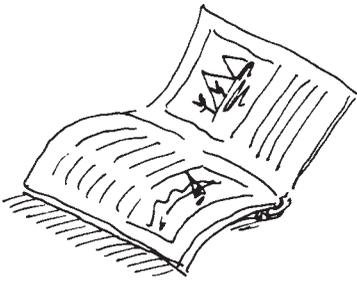
The book browsing centre focuses on browsing in books, following up books on topics of interest and re-reading books previously introduced in guided reading

In the book browsing centre the following materials may be available: books that children can read independently such as alphabet books, topic books selected around other curriculum areas and, poetry, raps and rhymes.

Types of texts include poetry, dictionaries, non-fiction, fables, fairy tales, alphabet books, photograph albums, books made by the class, big books, recipe books and other procedural texts, encyclopaedias, manuals, magazines, comics, catalogues and plays.

The alpha jingles from the Alphakids alphabet books can be placed on large charts for children to read along together. They can then read the jingles to each other and look for word patterns, and rhymes.

The following materials encourage the reading of poems, raps and rhymes: charts with jingles, raps and poems; large print poem charts; poems on cards; poetry anthologies; nursery rhymes and fractured rhyme; Dr Seuss books; and copies of poems and jingles for children to illustrate.



## *The interactive literacy centre* ≡

In an interactive literacy centre, children interact to read and write in response to texts. There are multiple copies of books for pairs or small groups to read aloud, and there may also be tape-recordings, or video or CD-ROM presentations of the texts. Children are involved in:

- practising reading with buddies or partners
- retelling stories using various media
- creating new texts based on books read
- readers theatre
- listening to or viewing texts on video, listening post or CD-ROM

Sometimes the interactive session involves paired reading where children of the same reading interests and skills read together. Sometimes buddy reading occurs, where older children read with younger children to share stories. Sometimes paired reading occurs where children are engaged in coaching each other with reading.

Children can respond to texts through dramatic retellings or re-enactments. Materials to encourage dramatic responses to texts include puppets, and story book characters made from felt to use on a felt board. Children can record music or other sound effects to use in their dramatic retelling. Some classrooms have digital cameras to record children's performances of readers theatre. Some classes use video to create response to the texts read.

Groups of children can draw story maps and create group responses in murals, models and other forms of art work.

### **READERS THEATRE**

In readers theatre, children take a familiar book and use it as a script that can be performed in front of an audience. They allocate roles, which will often include the role of 'narrator'. There is usually a practice session before the performance.



### *Materials for the interactive learning centre*

pairs or multiple copies of books

listening post

overhead projector for visual display

puppets

felt characters representing characters in books