What is the Alphabetic Principle?

The alphabetic principle is the understanding that letters represent sounds which form words; it is the knowledge of predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Unlike the Chinese who use characters to represent whole ideas or the Egyptians who used pictures to represent words, English is an alphabetic system – letters and letter patterns represent the sounds of our speech.

Learning the alphabet is a more daunting task than one realizes. It typically begins in preschool when a child learns how to sing the alphabet song and recognize many letters as well as their name in print. This learning process is typically completed by third grade when a child has obtained knowledge of all letter-sound relationships as well as the correct cursive-letter formation. Over these five years, a child has many distinct tasks to master.

Alphabetic Principle Activities

Let’s start with the basics – they must identify the name, shape and sound of each letter in the alphabet. Typically a child learns the name of each letter, followed by their shape and sound. Since music helps children learn, the easiest way to teach the name of each letter is to sing the alphabet song.

A child must then learn both the uppercase and lowercase letter forms. While uppercase letters are easier, it is important to expose a child to lowercase letters early because that is how a child will most likely see them in books. When applicable, review the two letters (a & g) with different lowercase print styles.

Letter shapes can be learned in a variety of ways. Reading alphabet books, playing with alphabet blocks or plastic letters, playing cards or even with food are great ways to expose a child to the shapes of each letter. Writing each letter whether traditionally with pencil and paper or nontraditional methods that implore creativity by using chalk, shaving cream or ketchup are other fun ideas that help a child learn the letters of the alphabet. When applicable, review not only the shape but also the sound (consonant and short vowel) of each letter.

Reading to your child every day is extremely important. In fact, studies confirm that learning to read is easier for children who are read to daily. With that said, both of my children quickly learned the basic sound each letter makes with a video and alphabet flash cards. When my son was in preschool, a friend recommended Leap Frog’s Letter Factory DVD. It certainly does not replace a book but it does help a child learn the letters of the alphabet and their basic sounds. The video concludes with a catchy song that shows the letter and says both the name and basic sound – remember music helps children remember things!

Alphabetic Principle Definition

In their book, *The Between the Lions Book For Parents*, the authors Rath and Kennedy define the alphabetic principle as the simple idea that the letters we use in print represent the sounds we use
in speech. The further state that a child must grasp this concept in order to combined letters to form words and read (the ultimate goal).

Learning to read is a complicated process and each child develops differently. Parents and educators need to nurture a child and help them foster a love of reading. Always remember to keep it fun – animate your voice when reading to your child and do not be afraid of the nontraditional methods as they tend to keep it fun!


- See more at: http://www.sightwordsgame.com/learning-to-read/what-is-the-alphabetic-principle/#sthash.KFS2vmEF.dpuf

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