

Making Friends with Letters

Grade K
Unit 1
PHONICS



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DEDICATED TO TEACHERS™

Learning to Own Letters



IN THIS SESSION

TODAY YOU'LL teach students that when readers and writers want to know a letter well, they name it, sound it, write it, and use it to make lots of words.

TODAY YOUR STUDENTS will try these steps using letter *M*. You'll say the same steps to write the letters in the same way each time, thus creating a pathway that will help students internalize the letter formation.

MINILESSON

CONNECTION

Point out that to read and write with letters, kids need to feel as if they own them. They need those letters to be in their back pockets.

I invited students to the meeting area by singing the “We Are Gathering” song. When everyone found their spots, I began. “Writers, readers, when we met the other day, I told you that to read and write *lots* of books, you’ll need not just books and paper and pens, but also these.” I held a big scoop of magnetic letters in my hands, letting them fall from my hands like a dramatic waterfall. “I told you that you are going to need all these letters and sounds so that you can make (and read) tons of words!

“But here’s the truth. It isn’t enough for you to be able to grab armloads of these letters. You actually need to *own* each of these letters. You need each of these letters to be . . .” and I slid a letter into my pocket, “. . . in your back pocket.” I slapped my pocket several times.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Gather some magnetic letters and letter cards, making sure one of the letter cards has the letter *M*.
- ✓ Be ready to display the “How to Learn a Letter” anchor chart. ✨
- ✓ Make sure that all children can see the name wall.
- ✓ Select a book for each partnership. These can be any high-interest books from your classroom.
- ✓ Gather Post-its® for students to use and place them on the cover of each high-interest book you choose.

PHONICS INSTRUCTION

Concepts about Print

- Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

- Recognize and produce rhyming words.
- Identify and produce groups of words that begin with the same sound (alliteration).
- Identify the initial phonemes of spoken words.

Letter Knowledge and Letter Sound

- Recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing the primary or most frequent sound for each consonant.

❁ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that to own a letter, to know that letter so well that you have it in your back pocket, ready to use whenever you read or write, it helps to do some things with the letter. It helps to name the letter, sound it, write it, and to use it to make lots of words."

TEACHING AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT/LINK

Provide children with practice in naming and sounding the letter you are helping them to "own."

"Let's try this work together." I posted a card containing a capital and lowercase *M* onto the easel. "*M* is the first letter in Mike's name"—I pointed to the *M* in *Mike* on the name wall—"and also the first letter in Mabel's name." I moved my finger to the *M* in Mabel's name.

"Let's say the name of this letter together." I pointed to the giant *M* that I had placed on the easel. "Everybody point to the letter and say it with me." I nodded as the class pointed and called out "*M*." "Let's whisper its name." I whispered, "*M*" and nodded encouragingly for children to whisper. "Let's shout the name!" I let the kindergartners yell out, "*M*!"

"Now that we know the *name*, let's *sound* it together. *M* says, 'Mmmm,' like in *MMMabel*. *M* says /mmm/ like in *MMMike*. Everyone sound it with me: /mmm/. Let's stretch the sound even longer, mmmmmmmmm. Let's do it again, this time adding Mabel's name. /mmmmmmmm/ *MMMMMabel*."

Channel children to write the capital version of the letter several times with invisible markers, first in the air and then on the carpet, repeating the letter formation pathway each time.

"Now that we can name the letter *M*, and we can sound the letter *M*, let's *write* it! We can write this letter in two ways. We can write it uppercase, or capital, like this one." I pointed to the uppercase *M* I'd displayed at the start of the minilesson and also to the capital *M* on Mabel's necklace. "Or we can write it small—or lowercase—like this *m*." I pointed to the small *m* that I'd displayed at the start of the minilesson. "Try it with me! Let's all write the capital *M*, writing in the air! Everyone, arms out in front of you." I voiced over the letter formation pathway as students wrote in the air, "Line down! Back up! Slanted line down. Slanted line up. Line down!"



Note that in your first two sessions, you essentially taught kids how to come to know—to own—a name. Now you are zooming in and helping them to come to know—to own—a letter.



You'll definitely want kids to engage in whole-arm invisible writing along with you. The large physical actions will help them. You'll probably want to follow this "verbal pathway" exactly unless your school has another it prefers. The important thing is that whatever language you use to say the way you write the letter, you stay consistent with that language throughout your teaching of letter-sound work.

“Let’s write it again! Capital *M* goes like this.” I once more led the kids in making the capital *M* using the letter formation pathway. I invited the kids to make the letter three times with me. Each time we did this, more students joined in. “Say the sound that letter makes with me, ready? /Mmmmm/—*M* says /mmmmm/.

“Now let’s write it on the rug with invisible markers!” I wrote the letter on my easel whiteboard, making sure to use consistent strokes and keep my language the same. “I am going to start high.” I pressed my marker at the top of the board. “Then, capital *M* goes like this—Line down! Back up! Slanted line down. Slanted line up. Line down!

“With your make-believe marker, will you write capital *M*? I’ll watch. Remember: start high on the page. Line down! Back up! Slanted line down. Slanted line up. Line down!” I scanned the meeting area, watching as children made the strokes to “write” the capital letter.

Introduce the lowercase letter and repeat this process of model writing with the lowercase version of the letter, repeating the letter formation pathway each time.

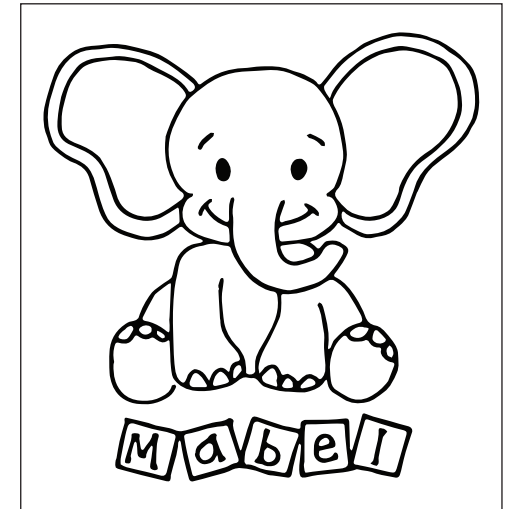
“Now let’s write the lowercase *m*.” I pointed to Mabel’s name tag and the letter *M* on the name wall and said, “The capital *M* and the lowercase *m* have the same name, *M*, and the same sound, /mmmm/, but they look different. Watch me first.” I turned my body away once more and held my arm out in front of me. “I start a little lower. Then, line down! Back up. Bump around. Bump around and down.



“Let’s do it in the air together. Don’t start as high as the first time. Start a little lower.” I repeated the letter formation pathway: “Make this be your best small *m* ever! Let’s go: Line down. Back up. Bump around. Bump around and down.” The students copied my movements. “Nice job. Try again.” And I coached kids to do this two more times.

“Now I am going to write the small *m*!” I got my invisible marker ready and put it on the invisible chart paper. “I’ll put them together because they are a team. Watch me! I start a little lower. Then, line down! Back up. Bump around. Bump around and down.

“Your turn. Magic paper out? Make-believe marker ready? Use your hand as pretend paper and make the lowercase *m*, the small one. Start lower than the big *M*. Line down. Back up. Bump around. Bump around and down. Beautiful! Write it again!”



Channel students to read the letter *M*. Remind them of the sound *M* makes and invite them to use the sound.

"Now writers, you have written the *M* lots of times. Try reading it. /Mmmm/. That's the sound you make when food is good, isn't it? Mmmm!" I rubbed my stomach and mmm-ed contentedly, inviting kids to follow. "What sound do you make when food is good?" The kids "mmmm-ed."

"That sound can also be the noise you make when you want to say, 'Don't do that!' I shook my head, meaning *no*, and said, "Mm-mmm." Then I added, "Try that with me. Shake your head when you do it." I leaned forward, inviting kids to follow suit, shaking their heads and saying, "Mm-mmm."

Sum up and help support transfer by helping students imagine times they would write the letter *M*.

"Congratulations, readers, writers. You now *own* the letter *M*. You can put it in your back pocket and pull it out whenever you need it. So, writers, if you wanted to write a book about your family, and you drew a picture of yourself, and you wanted to label yourself with the word *me*, what would you write?"

The kids called out, "*M!*"

"Yes, *M* for /*m*/.-*me*. And if your mom asked you what treat you wanted on a hot summer day, and what you really wanted was a *milkshake*, what would you write? Yes, *M* for /*m*/.-*milkshake*."



RUG TIME

Organize students into partnerships and give each partnership a book. Invite partners to search for words that begin with *M* in their book. If time allows, have partnerships swap books.

"Writers, readers, yesterday we wrote a book together, and we filled it with *M* things. We tucked Mabel into bed in her shoebox with *M* things. Today, I was thinking that maybe you'd like to read a book, and to see if you can find words in that book that begin with the letter we have in our back pockets. The letter is *M*!"

"I'm going to give you and the person next to you a book. Will you read the book together? If you see something on one of those pages that starts with an *M*, will you mark that part with a Post-it? There are Post-its stuck onto the covers of each of the books." As students worked, I added, "Make sure you'll be able to see your Post-it when your book is closed!"

The children worked for a bit and then I sang, "Stop, Look, and Listen," to get their attention. "Okay, friends, hold your books up in the air!" A few students began arguing over who could hold up the book. "Look at the way Tymel and Jessica are holding their book together." I motioned for students to look at the partnership. "They each have a hand on one side of the book. That's teamwork! Can everyone try that with your partner? Amazing!"

“Now we are going to trade books. When you get a new book, see if you can go to the parts of the book that your friends have marked and see if you can find the *M* word that they marked. This isn’t easy work, so when I hand you your book, get started!” I quickly grabbed the books students were holding up and passed them to new partnerships.

SHARE • Finding Initial Sounds in Words and Pictures

Share the words that two partnerships found, highlighting that some students found words in the text starting with *M*, while others found something in a picture that started with the /*m*/ sound.

“Kindergartners, you did some hard work today searching for *M* words in your books! Kim, can you come up and show the class the word you and your partner found?” Kim came up and pointed to the word *me*. “Wow, you found the word *me*! And Abbie, you put your Post-it next to something different, didn’t you? Can you come up and show the class?” Abbie came up and pointed to the picture of a mom in her book. “You’re right, *mom* does start with the /*m*/ sound! Learning our letters and sounds can help us read the words *and* the pictures in our books.”

EXTENSION 1 • Putting Mabel’s Name Necklace Back In Order

GETTING READY

- Before this extension, shuffle the letters on the class mascot’s name necklace, so they are in the wrong order.

Invite students to help put Mabel’s name necklace back in order. Set them up to talk in pairs. Remind them to study her name on the name chart if they need help.

“Kindergartners, come quickly, I need your help! Mabel was so excited about her name necklace that she spent all night playing with it. But when she went to put it back on, she couldn’t remember the order of the letters. She put them back on all out of order! Can we help her put her name necklace back in the right order? Let’s look at her name on the name chart to help us.” I pointed to Mabel’s name on the chart and then back to her jumbled name on her necklace. “Hmm, . . . turn to someone next to you. What should we do first to fix Mabel’s name?” I listened in as students talked.

“I was listening to you all talk, and I heard Corrie say we need to move the *M* to the front.” I took the letters off of Mabel’s necklace. “Corrie, can you come up and string the *M* back where it belongs? Wow, thank you! I know Mabel really appreciates that help!” Other students came up one at a time and helped put the rest of Mabel’s name back in order. Some children could not say the name of the letter when they wanted to move it but they could point to it or describe what it looked like.



“Thanks for your help, everyone! Let’s read Mabel’s name together now that we have the letters in the right order.” I pointed to the letters as we read them, moving left to right across the word. We repeated this a few times, and then I ceremoniously strung Mabel’s necklace around her neck.

EXTENSION 2 • Reading a Picture Book To Practice Rhyming

GETTING READY

- Before this session, choose a book with a simple rhyme pattern that is easy to hear. We use Mem Fox’s *Time for Bed*.

Read a rhyming picture book, leaving space for students to fill in rhyming words based on the pattern of the story.

“Class, I brought a book to read to you today. Most kids love this book so much, they join in while I’m reading it. Even if you’ve never read this book before, I bet you’ll be able to jump right in. You will know when it is your turn because I will lean my head toward you and wait for you to say the word that goes in that part. Are you ready?”

I began to read, “It’s time for bed little mouse, little mouse,” and I emphasized the second *mouse* to signal that word was important. I continued reading, “Darkness is falling all over the . . .” I stopped before the rhyming word *house*, and I again tilted my head toward the children. When no one called out *house*, I read the word, then continued. I continued to pause at the end of each couplet, and soon children were guessing rhyming words.



Trust in the process of repeated practice here, even if your students aren't guessing the rhymes. Try not to do too much explaining and resist the urge to post the rhyming words up on the easel so that children can study their spelling similarities. Remember, the focus of your teaching at this point in the unit is phonological awareness, so here you invite children to listen to sounds in words.

By Studying Names, We Can Learn More Letters



IN THIS SESSION

TODAY YOU'LL teach students a secret that can help them learn many letters: for a lot of letters, when you know the letter's name, you know the letter's sound.

TODAY YOUR STUDENTS will engage in a name study of a child's name that begins with letter *S* to learn this letter and the sound it makes. During rug time, they will do a card sort to find pictures that begin with an *S* sound. They'll also search the classroom for items that begin with *S*.

MINILESSON

CONNECTION

Tell children that one reason it is so cool to learn letters is because this lets them write more things.

While singing the "We Are Gathering" song, everyone found their spots. "Writers, you have learned to write letter *M*'s, and yesterday I actually saw some *M*'s cropping up in your stories. I saw an */m/-McDonald's* in Tony's writing, and am I right that David, you had a picture of macaroni? And you labeled it with an *M* because you heard the */m/* sound, right?"

"But friends, here's the thing. Your writing will be pretty wacky if the whole story has to be filled only with words that begin with *M*. Suppose you wanted to write this," and I pretended to write in the air as I said, "At the movies, I asked Mom for money for a snack."

"If you only had *M*'s, you'd have to say that you asked */m/-Mom* for */m/-money* for a *mmmack*. That'd be silly! So, writers, I am pretty sure you agree that I have to teach you a lot *more* letters, really soon. *And* you have to start learning letters on your own, without me even teaching you. So, let's study another star name and see if that star name can teach you another letter."

GETTING READY

- ✓ Prepare to pull a star name from the Star Jar beginning with the letter *S* or another easy initial consonant that children will be able to use to spell lots of other words.
- ✓ Locate cards for the *S/not-S* picture sort. ✨
- ✓ Draw an Elkonin box, a rectangle divided into thirds.
- ✓ Prepare the "Let's Study a Name!" anchor chart. ✨

PHONICS INSTRUCTION

Concepts about Print

- Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

- Identify and produce groups of words that begin with the same sound (alliteration).
- Identify the initial phonemes of spoken words.

Letter Knowledge and Letter Sound

- Recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing the primary or most frequent sound for each consonant.

Lead children through the now-familiar steps of a star name study, doing this extra quickly to save time for a deeper study of the initial consonant.

I led the class in singing the “Guess the Name” song to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell,” as I pulled another star name from the jar. The name was *Salima*.

Can you guess the name?
Can you guess the name?
Hi-ho, the derry-o
Can you guess the name?
It starts with an S
It starts with an S
Hi-ho, the derry-o
Can you guess the name?

“What do you notice when you study the name *Salima*?” I asked. “Turn and tell your partner”

“Some of you noticed that *Salima*’s name has a lot of small letters. Nod if you noticed that.” I nodded along with children. Others noticed *Salima*’s name has an *m* in it, wow! Mabel and Mike’s letter is inside *Sali-mmma*’s name. Thumbs up if you noticed that!”

Help the class cheer the star name, briskly, and discuss what they notice when they study the letters.

“Are you ready to cheer this word? Everyone, stand up and give me an S!” I stretched my arms high in the air, to indicate the tallness of the letter, urging children to follow suit.

“Give me an a!” I crouched down low to show the *a* was a small letter. Give me an I! Stretch back up high!” We did this, and then cheered the rest of the letters together. “What’s that spell?”

“*Salima*!” We all cheered together. “Now that we’ve gotten to know *Salima*’s name, let’s use her name to help us get a new letter in our back pocket.” I slapped my pocket. I wrote uppercase and lowercase *S*’s on my whiteboard easel.

❁ Name the teaching point.

“Today I want to teach you that when you learn the letter *S*, you learn a secret that will help you learn tons of other letters. This is the secret: for many letters, when you know the letter’s name, you can figure out the letter’s sound.”

Note that the star name part of this session is done in the connection, so that the rest of the minilessons can help kids grasp the new letter—in this case, S. Kids will learn a second star name during an extension to today’s lesson. You need to pick up the pace to get through your whole class!

We chose the name Salima because it begins with a consonant that is particularly accessible, in that the name of the letter helps to say its sound.

POSSIBLE COACHING MOVES

- ▶ “Yes, there are six letters. Can you spot the two that are the same?”
- ▶ “Do you recognize any letters you know inside *Salima*’s name?”
- ▶ “Are there some tall letters, some small letters? How many are tall?”



TEACHING

Guide children through the steps of making friends with a new letter. Begin by naming it, sounding it.

"So, class, what is the name of this letter?" I pointed to the uppercase and lowercase *S*. The class chimed in that it is an *S*. "Yes, and *S* makes the /s/ sound, let's all make the letter *S*'s sound together, ready?" The students made /s/ sounds. As they did so, I cupped my hand behind my ear, listening. "You are right. The letter name ends with the letter's sound.

"Let's learn this letter so we have it in our back pocket," I said. "Hello class, I'd like you to meet . . ." and I pointed to the letter. The class chimed in "*S*." I cupped my hand behind my ear, the gesture suggesting that I wanted to know the letter's sound. They said /s/, so I added, "*/s/-Salima, /s/-snake, /s/-Stegosaurus, /s/*. The letter *S* makes the /s/ sound, so any time I hear the /s/ sound at the beginning of a word I know it starts with /s/ *S*."

Move children into writing the capital letter, writing in the air as you voice over the letter formation pathway.

"Before we can own the letter *S*, let's practice making it the right way." I guided students through writing the letter *S* in the air as I voiced over the letter formation pathway. "To write the letter, bump around, slide down, bump around the other way and stop.



"And guess what? Lowercase *s* is written the same way, just a little smaller. Let's try the *S* again, this time, making it smaller, so it's lowercase." I voiced over the same letter formation pathway as students wrote in the air.

"Let's do it again! This time, take out your magic paper and make-believe pen and get ready to write the *S* on the rug. What color is your make-believe pen? Green? Red? Glittery? Whisper your color to your friend! Now we're ready to write the first part of Salima's name, the capital *S*. Bump around, slide down, bump around the other way and stop." I led children through this another two to three times. "Your *S*'s are /s/-spectacular. They're /s/-super /s/-superb!"

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT/LINK

Help children use the letter's sound to think of other words that start with the same sound, then add the name to the name wall.

"Let's use the /s/ sound of the *S* to think of more /s/ words! *S* makes the sound /s/ like the hissing of a snake. Let's hiss like snakes using /s/, /s/, /s/, /s/, /s/. What other words begin like this? /s/-Salima?" We soon had a list: /s/-silly, /s/-slide, /s/-spaghetti, /s/-superhero." I encouraged the children to shout out other words that began with the /s/ sound.

Because this is still very early in kindergarten, kids need repeated practice naming the letters in a word and clarifying what a letter is in contrast to a word. Repeated study of the shapes and sizes of letters helps solidify these concepts.

The letter S is the first letter students have learned that is made almost the same way in its capital and lowercase forms, so it makes sense to emphasize this point here. Be sure to point this out for the other seven letters that fall into this category when you teach them (C, O, U, V, W, X, and Z).



I added Salima's name and photo to the name wall under the *Ss* heading and led the class in the "Star Name Celebration Song."

Salima, Salima is a star
Clap, clap, clap, clap
Salima's name starts with *S*
S, S, S, S, S

With a */s/ /s/* here and a */s/ /s/* there
Here a */s/* there a */s/*
Everywhere a */s/ /s/*
Salima, Salima is a star
/s/ /s/ /s/ /s/ /s/

RUG TIME

Show picture cards and have students listen for the words that start with *S*. Then give a stack of picture cards to sort.

"Now that you know the letter *S*, you can find *S* words everywhere. Let's try it!" I have some pictures of things; some of them start with */s/-S* and some do not. As I said this, I pointed to the first box in an Elkonin box I had drawn to help children isolate the first sound.

"When I hold a card up, read the picture and then give me a thumbs up if it starts with */s/-S*, or thumbs down if it does not." I held up picture of a snail. Most of the kids gave a thumbs up. "*Snail* starts with */s/-S*. I'll put *snail* in the *S* pile. I held up a picture of a goat. Many thumbs turned down. "Tell your friend why." After children talked, I said, "*G-g-g-goat* does not start like */s/ Salima*. *Goat* goes in the Not-an-*S* pile.

"Now, get together with the friend next to you, your partner for today. In a minute, I'm going to pass out some pictures, one set for each partnership. With your partner, read the picture and ask yourself, 'Does this word begin with an */s/-S* or Not-an-*S*?' In front of you, you'll make two piles: an */s/-S* pile and a Not-an-*S* pile. Are you ready, partners?"

After a couple of minutes, I called out. "Would you and your partner hold up some of your */s/-Salima* words? What words did you find that start with the */s/* sound like *Salima*?" The kids held them up and said the words they represented. "Whoa, *soup*? *Socks*? *Sun*? These are all terrific */s/* words."

Channel kids to walk around the room finding objects that start with *S*.

"We have two more minutes in our phonics workshop. Can you and your partner for today hold hands and go around this room, seeing if you can find things that start with the */s/* sound? When you get to something, touch it and say its name and listen for the */s/* sound. You might also find some things that start with */m/-M*."

POSSIBLE COACHING MOVES

- ▶ "Can you read that picture? A pumpkin? Is *pumpkin* an */s/-S* word? Let's see: */p/-/p/-/p/-pumpkin . . . /s/-/s/-/s/-Salima*. Do they sound the same? No? Then put that in the Not-an-*S* pile."
- ▶ "Interesting! You found a */m/-Mabel* word? *Mmmmountain*? That's so smart! Let's show everyone. Maybe we can make a new *M* pile for words what begin with */m/*."
- ▶ "Can you think of other words that start with *S*, like *Salima*?"

SHARE • Introducing the “Let’s Study a Name!” Chart

Remind children that charts are helpful for remembering steps in a process. Introduce the “Let’s Study a Name!” chart that will help children remember how to study names.

“Class, I noticed that when you came into the classroom today, you knew how to unpack. I didn’t have to tell you to hang up your coat, put away lunch, or come to the rug for meeting—you did it without asking me for help.

“I was thinking that because we are studying star names every day, maybe we could have a chart that reminds us of how to study star names. Does that sound like a good idea? Then we could just pull a name from the jar and you all could study it without me even telling you what to do.” I put up the “Let’s Study a Name!” chart. I pointed to each bullet and read them aloud, then gestured for kids to read the steps along with me.

EXTENSION 1 • Studying a T Star Name

Guide students to study a new star name, using the “Let’s Study a Name!” chart to remind them of the steps.

“Let’s use our new chart from earlier to help us study another star name.” I led the class in singing the “Guess the Name” song as I reached into the Star Jar and pulled out the name *Tymel*.

“Okay, what do we do first?” I asked the class, pointing to the first bullet on the chart. “Read it!” The students responded. We read Tymel’s name together. “What’s next?” I asked, pointing to the second line. “Count the letters!” We counted the letters together on our fingers. “Okay, time to study the letters! Tell your partner what you notice about the letters in Tymel’s name.

“You noticed a lot about the letters in Tymel’s name! I heard some of you talking about this letter, here,” and I tapped on the *y*. “This letter has a hangy-tail. We’ll talk about that more when we cheer Tymel’s name.

“Let’s think about the letter and sound that /t/-*Tymel* starts with. *Tymel* starts with the letter *T*. *T* makes the /t/ sound. I hear /t/ at the beginning of /t/-*Tymel*. Let’s make *T*’s sound together, ready?”

“/t/ /t/ /t/,” the class said together.

“Yes, the letter *T* has the /t/ sound, just like in /t/-*toast* and /t/-*turtle*.



Because T is a stop-consonant, model the “shortness” of the /t/ sound. This is not “tuh” but /t/. Correct the kids if they make a “tuh” sound as some are sure to do.

"A time to cheer Tymel's name! Give me a *T*! Give me a . . . a . . . hey! Wait a second. The letter *y* isn't just small. It has a hangy-tail." I pointed to lowercase *y* in Tymel's name. "See that tail?" I bent down and let one arm hang low to indicate a tail, nodding for children to repeat my movement as they "gave me the *y*."

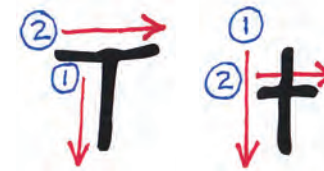
"Give me an *m* . . ." we cheered the remaining letters together. "What's that spell?"

"*Tymel!*" We all cheered his name together. "Now that we've gotten to know Tymel's name, let's use his name to help us get a new letter in our back pocket." I slapped my pocket. I wrote an uppercase and lowercase *Tt* on my whiteboard easel.

Move children into writing the capital letter, by writing in the air.

"Now we're ready to write. Stand up tall like me and raise your arm up high because this letter is a tall letter. It's the start of Tymel's name, so the *T* is a capital *T*." Standing with my back toward the children to model, I walked through the letter formation pathway, leading the children to practice by writing a *T* in the sky while chanting the pathway with me. "Let's start high. Line down! Line across the top. Let's do it again. Say it, all together: Line down. Line across the top. One more time: Line . . .

"Kindergartners, wait a minute." I pointed to the lowercase *t* on the card I had posted at the start of the lesson. "Does this lowercase *t* match the *T* at the start of Tymel's name? No! They look different. How?" Children said the capital letter has a line that goes across the *top*, whereas the lowercase *t* has a line that goes across the *middle*."



Tymel, Tymel is a star
Clap, clap, clap, clap
Tymel's name starts with a *T*
T, T, T, T, T
With a /t/ /t/ here and a /t/ /t/ there
Here a /t/ there a /t/
Everywhere a /t/ /t/
Tymel, Tymel is a star
/t/ /t/ /t/ /t/ /t/

"Get ready to make the lowercase *t*. The lowercase *t* is just as /t/ tall as the capital *T*, so stand up tall again." I modeled, raising my arm high, standing with my back to the children. "Watch this. Straight line down. *Little* line across the *middle*." I emphasized the words to model the difference in the letter formation pathways for the lowercase and capital versions of the letter. The children practiced as we repeated the letter formation pathway. "Uppercase *T* and lowercase *t* look different but they both make the /t/ sound."



I added Tymel's name and photo to the name wall under the *Tt* heading and led the class in the "Star Name Celebration Song."

EXTENSION 2 • Gathering More Pictures for *M* and *S* Books

GETTING READY

- Have a labeled bin for your class letter book ready.
- Prepare more pictures to sort into *M* and *S* letter books.

Introduce a bin to keep in the classroom library to hold the letter books the class makes together. Show pictures of items and ask partners to decide if they belong in the *M* book or the *S* book.

I pulled out a bin labeled "Letter Books" and placed it next to me as I held up the class *M* book we had made. "We are going to learn so many letters and make so many letter books, I thought we should make a bin for them that we can keep in our class library. Should we have Mabel put the first book in the bin?" I turned to Mabel and asked, "Mabel, would you do the honors?" I picked Mabel up and pretended to have her put the *M* book in the bin.

"Earlier, you sorted pictures and made a pile of pictures of things that started with *S*. I thought we could make a book for letter *S*, just like we did for letter *M*. Can you all help get more pictures for both of these books?" The students nodded, and I continued, "I'll hold up pictures, some of which we looked at earlier. Will you and your partner say the name of the item and say whether it starts with /s/-*S* or /m/-*M*? Then we'll add it to the right book."

I added the pictures to the books, with the students' help. When we were finished, I added them both to the bin and placed the bin in the classroom library. "We'll keep these books in the library, so you can read them during reading workshop."

EXTENSION 3 • Revising Writing With the Help of a New Letter

During writing workshop, demonstrate how you might revise the story from this session's connection, this time using the new letter children have learned.

"Class, I'm so glad we now have a new letter to use in our writing, the letter *S*. We can use our new letter to fix up our story about asking Mom for a treat at the movies. Do you remember our story? We started by saying, 'At the movies, I asked Mom for money for a snack.'" On my whiteboard, I quickly sketched two stick figures and said, "This is Mom, and this is me, going to the movies. What letter can I write next to Mom? What letter does *Mom* start with?" I paused a beat, allowing kids to suggest I label Mom with an *M*. I recited the letter formation pathway as I wrote the *M*, "Start high on the page. Line down, back up, slanted line down, slanted line up, line down." I repeated the process for the *M* in *money*.

If you notice most of your writers are not using the letters M and S to label their writing, this would make a nice mid-workshop teaching point during writing workshop. If you notice only a handful of writers who have yet to include these letters, you could teach this extension as a small group during writing time.

"But friends, here is my snack. What letter should I use here, to label the /s/ snack? Say the word with me. What sound do you hear at the start? Let's say it again and listen to the letter at the start of *snack*." The kids chimed, "S!" I recited the letter formation pathway as I drew the s to label the snack. "Bump around, slide down, bump around the other way and stop."

Channel students to study their writing, looking for things in their sketches they could label with an *M* or an *S*.

"Right now, take a look at your writing. "Do any of you think you might need an *M* on your page? If you have a drawing of yourself on the page, you might write *M* for *me*. Or, you might need to label /*M*/ for *Mom*, or /*m*/ for *monkey bars*. Put up your thumb if you see something you could label with *M*." I saw a few thumbs go up.

"Now check your writing again. Is there something you could label with *S*? Maybe you have a /*s*/ swing in your piece of writing, or a /*s*/ sidewalk. Thumbs up." Again, a few children signaled, and I said, "Fabulous! I can't wait to see."



Syllables Can Help Readers and Writers Tackle Long Words



IN THIS SESSION

TODAY YOU'LL begin by teaching students another star name. You'll then teach that writers can say any word and hear the beats in it—the syllables. Doing this helps to read and write longer words.

TODAY YOUR STUDENTS will clap and stomp the beats of names and words as you guide them, and then they will stomp and clap the beats in words they find in their books.

MINILESSON

CONNECTION

Rally kids to the work of today by choosing a new star name—this time, one with more syllables than previous star names.

“Readers and writers, today we’ll jump right in by choosing today’s star name. Join me!” I began to sing the “Guess the Name” song to the tune of “The Farmer in the Dell” and gestured for students to join me.

Can you guess the name?
Can you guess the name?
Hi-ho, the derry-o
Can you guess the name?

I reached into the jar and dramatically pulled out a name, peeked at it, and whispered, “It starts with . . . an *N*!” I deliberately pulled out a name that I had preselected for its three syllables. I sang the second verse, again gesturing for kids to join in:

GETTING READY

- ✓ For today’s star name, select a name with multiple syllables—ideally one from early in the suggested letter sequence, one beginning with an easier initial sound, but not to worry. Today’s focus is on segmenting the syllables (or parts) of the word, rather than the initial sound. You’ll return to initial sound teaching after this lesson.
- ✓ Display and prepare to add to the “Let’s Study a Name!” anchor chart. 🌟
- ✓ Gather a mix of beautiful books, ideally big books, out to disperse among rug clubs.

PHONICS INSTRUCTION

Concepts about Print

- Recognize that spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.

Phonological and Phonemic Awareness

- Identify and produce groups of words that begin with the same sound (alliteration).
- Count, pronounce, and segment syllables in spoken words.
- Identify the initial phonemes of spoken words.

Letter Knowledge and Letter Sound

- Recognize and name all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of letter-sound correspondences by producing the primary or most frequent sound for each consonant.

It starts with an *N*
It starts with an *N*
Hi-ho, the derry-o
Can you guess the name?

"Today the star name will be . . ." And I revealed Natalia's name card, taped it to the easel, and pointed to it as I read it. "Natalia. This name is *Natalia*." I signaled for children to read it with me, "Natalia!"

Coach children to note the attributes of the name: counting and naming the letters, noticing if any are the same, noting which are tall and which are small.

"Remember yesterday when Tymel was our star name? You used the chart to remind you how to study his name." I gestured toward the chart as I spoke. "Let's try that again. With your partner, read Natalia's name, then count the letters." I listened as kids talked.



After a minute, I voiced over, saying, "Some of you said that Natalia's name is long—longer than Mike's! You are right. Seven letters! Now, study the name. To do that, try pretending you're touching each letter. You can do this in the air, pretending to touch the name even if it is up here on the easel." I gestured to kids to get their fingers in the air, pretending to touch the name card.

“Are some of the letters the same? Is every single letter different?” Then I turned to the kids and said, “What do you see?” After hearing from a few, I said, “So some of you noticed that *Natalia* has three tall letters and four small ones. And she has three of the same letter!”

Encourage kids to do a super-quick cheer while still sitting, so they have time to think about the syllables of the name.

“Let’s make our cheer be super-quick so we have time still to think about the beats to this lovely long name. Can you cheer with me, all together?” I sat tall and cheered, signaling for the kids to read the letters and join me. “N!” I reached up above my head, then pointed to the next letter and recruited the kids to call “a” while we scrunched down in our seats. We continued through the word.

 **Name the teaching point.**

“Today I want to teach you another secret. When you go to write a long word or a long name, it helps to first say the name (or the word) in a way that lets you hear the beats—the syllables. Writers can say any word and hear the beats in it, hear what people call the *syllables* of that name or that word.”

TEACHING

Explain the larger concept of beats—of rhythm—to set the stage for syllabication work. Practice singing and drumming some familiar songs to give students practice hearing different rhythms.

“Class, I think I need to teach you something about drumming. Turn your knees into a drum, your hands into drumsticks, and try to drum along with me. I’ll drum in one way, you try to drum the same as I do.” I drummed in a slow even pace: *dum, dum, dum, dum*, leaving time for students to echo-drum. I started a different rhythm by drumming in double beats: *dum-dum*, pause, *dum-dum*, and the students echoed. Then, I changed the rhythm again: *dum, dum-dum, dum, dum-dum*.

“Each of these different ways of drumming has a different beat, a different rhythm. Songs have different rhythms too. Listen to the rhythm of ‘Hickory Dickory Dock.’” I sang the song, then I drummed the rhythm of the song to emphasize the beats. “It is different than the rhythm of ‘Old MacDonald Had a Farm.’ Let’s sing that, then we’ll try drumming the beats.” Together, we sang and then drummed the beats to the song.

Explain that words have beats, and those beats are called syllables.

“I’m teaching you this about the beats in music because words have beats too. So when I want to write about nachos in my story, I first say the word *nachos* in a way that lets me hear the beats of the word: *na-chos*. We can do that with *Mabel* too. Try it with me: *Ma-bel*. I first say the word *Ma-bel* in a way that lets me hear the beats in the word. That way I can write first ‘Ma’ and then ‘bel.’ *Ma-bel*.

If most of your kids know the names of letters and can call out all the letters, then you can do the cheer in the way described here. If many of them need more support recognizing and naming the letters, a call-and-response cheer might be better, where you call, “Give me an N!” and the kids echo, “N!”

Some students will have difficulty hearing and drumming the rhythm in songs, and when a whole class is drumming on their knees, it may not sound at all like “Old MacDonald Had a Farm.” That’s okay—it’s the act of trying this that will help them understand syllabication.

“Here’s the thing: by Thanksgiving or maybe even earlier than that, you are going to want to write using totally cool long words like *spaghetti* and *dinosaur*. You might even write *Tyrannosaurus rex* soon after that. And to be able to write these long words, you need really strong muscles for hearing the beats in a word. Like: Ty/ran/o/saur/us.”

Return to today’s star name. Coach kids to listen for the syllables in the name, clap and stomp them, and then compare today’s name with an earlier star name.

“How about if we do this important new work with Natalia’s name? Let’s all say her name together and listen for the syllables. Ready, everyone say, Na-tal-ia!” The kids joined me in saying her name this way. “Try it with each other, without me. Be sure to say it beat by beat.

“Now let’s clap it out together, one clap for each part of the name. Ready?” We clapped together, “Na-tal-ia!” I led the kids in clapping her name several times.

“Now let’s see if we can stand and stomp her name too. Ready? We’re going to use both feet. Go for it!” The kids stomped the syllables on the rug.

“Earlier some kids were noticing that Natalia’s name *looked* a lot longer than Mike’s, that it had more letters. Let’s find out—does it also *sound* longer than Mike’s? Which name has more beats? Try saying and clapping the beats with your partner. Start with *Mike*.” I coached kids to say and clap each name. “So, what do you think? Yep, Mike’s name sounds shorter too—only one clap—but Natalia’s name is longer, with three claps.”

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT/LINK

Invite children to clap the beats in their own names, and in some of their friends’ names.

“Now that we have learned to clap the beats in Natalia’s name, I bet you are wanting to try clapping the beats in your own name and in your friends’ names. Right now, take a look around the rug, find a friendly face, say that friend’s name and then clap the beats. Then do another.”

As kids got started clapping their own names and a friend’s name, I cheered them on. “Try to clap as many names as you can. If you don’t remember a name, ask that person their name. Then maybe you can clap that name together.”

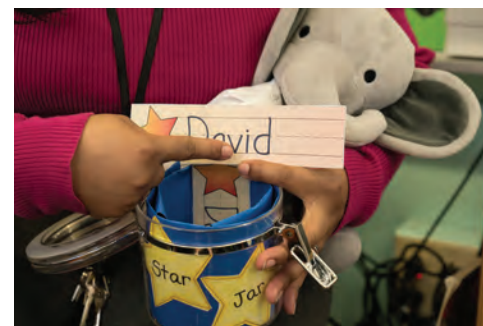
Explain that all words have beats, and that clapping the beats in words can help students with their writing.

“But we know it’s not just names that have syllables, it’s all words! I was reading this book,” I held up a book from our class library, “and I saw an alligator. I might want to write a story about an alligator—but . . . but . . . *alligator* is a long word!

“Here’s the thing. If I want to write the word *alligator*, it helps to hear the beats in it, the syllables. ‘Al-li-ga-tor.’ You can try this anytime you are writing, especially when you are writing a long word.”

We are tackling such long multisyllable words so early because teaching kids that long words have beats gives them a way to tackle words that otherwise might seem intimidating. We want kids to be fearless with words. And remember, we are not teaching for mastery, we are teaching for approximation—and for fun! This lesson, after all, allows for stomping and parading, so what could be wrong with that?

Syllables are also a way to teach the phonological awareness skills of blending and segmenting. Teaching kids that a word can have more than one beat can help them understand the idea that one word has many sounds that need to be combined or listened for to read and write them.



This month, most kindergartners will progress toward labeling with first consonants only—so spelling alligator may seem ambitious. But this is a lesson in hearing sounds, and it is easier to hear the larger sound unit of syllable than to hear the smaller unit of phonemes. Kids will need time to master the skill of listening for syllables, so the more opportunities they have to practice this orally, the more success they will eventually have. Meanwhile your teaching is providing early support in hearing phonemes, as well as essential help to the kids with stronger letter-sound knowledge who are ready to record more sounds in long words.

Debrief in ways that accentuate the transferable work that kids have learned.

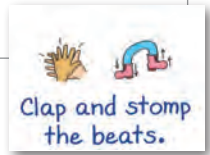
“Class, this is one more way we can get to know not only our friends’ names, but any words in the world. We can listen for the beats, maybe even clapping or stomping them, and compare words to see which ones are longer or shorter.

“Let’s add this to our ‘Let’s Study a Name!’ chart so we don’t forget. I’m going to add this right under ‘Read it’ so that from now on, it will be the second step we take when studying a name. We will read the name and then clap and stomp its syllables.”

ANCHOR CHART

Let’s Study a Name!

- Read it.
- **Clap and stomp the beats.**
- Count the letters.
- Study the letters.
- Cheer it!



RUG TIME CLUBS

Distribute big books to groups of about four or five students. Channel students to name things they see in their books and try to clap out the beats in those words.

“Writers, you’ve gotten so good at seeing things—at seeing things that start with letters you know, like *M*, *S*, *T*, *N*, and others, too, and now you can also hear the beats in the words. I’m going to give groups of about four of you a big book to look through. Will you open to a page, name something in the picture, and then clap the beats in that word? Do that work for as many words as you can.”

I passed out our beautiful books. After kids worked a minute, I said in a voiceover, “Maybe there is an alligator in your book, or a marshmallow. Whatever you see, try to say that word and to hear the beats in it. Then if you ever want to put that word or those things into *your* books, you’ll be ready.” I coached while students worked, celebrating approximation and modeling clapping parts of words.

POSSIBLE COACHING MOVES

- ▶ “Point to something! Oh, do you know what that’s called? It’s called a strawberry. Say the word, *strawberry*. Now try clapping out the parts!”
- ▶ “Hmm, . . . that seemed like too many claps. Watch me do it—gi-raffe. Now you try again.”
- ▶ “Oh, you found a bunch of one-clap words? *Bug. Leaf. Sun.* Wow! I wonder if you can find any more!”

SHARE • Finding Beats in a Syllables Parade

Reconvene the class’s focus and post the star name on the name wall. Invite students to march out the beats in each name on the name wall to celebrate the work of today.

“As we put Natalia’s name up on the name wall today, let’s have a syllables parade by marching to the beat of the names on our name wall. Stand up and get ready to march right in place.”

I added Natalia’s name to the name wall under the letter *N* and I gestured for the kids to chant and march in place, “Na-tal-ia! Na-tal-ia!” Then I pointed to the other names on the name wall, and the kids chanted and marched to the beats in these. When we were done with the names, I started calling out other multisyllable words: *Bicycle. Roller coaster. Videogame.*



“Writers, I can already tell that in the blink of an eye, you’re going to be ready to write stories about totally cool long words like *Tyrannosaurus rex* and *magician*. Then I’ll say, ‘Fab-u-lous!’” and I clapped the beats as I said this.

EXTENSION 1 • Syllables Band

GETTING READY

- Gather enough percussion instruments—drums, maracas, rhythm sticks—to have one for each child. (Everyday objects such as cups, bins, and pencils can work as instruments too!)

Pass out percussion instruments. Give students a moment to play with their instruments, then guide them to make some music together by playing the beats, or syllables, in words.

“Class, I was thinking it would be really fun to make some music together today.” The class cheered as I passed out drums, maracas, and rhythm sticks, one per child. “Remember, if you didn’t get the instrument you wanted today, that’s okay! Try it out this time, and next time you can try a different one.” I encouraged students to play with their instruments for a few minutes.

“Stop, look, and listen!” I sang, and asked everyone to put down their instruments for just a moment. “Remember earlier we learned a secret to help us write loooong words?”

“You can clap them!” a student called.

I nodded and continued, “You’re right—you can clap out the syllables, or the beats, in the words. Well, guess what? Clapping and stomping aren’t the only way to make beats. You can drum them, shake them, and tap them too!

“Should we try it together right now? Pick up your instruments. Try your own name first!” The class erupted in the sound of students shouting their names and instruments being played. After a minute I called students’ attention back to me.

“Now let’s try other words. I will say a word and we can all sound out the beats using our instruments. Let’s try Mabel, Ma-bel,” I said as I tapped my drum two times, encouraging the class to do the same. We went through a few more names and familiar words together.

I invited students to shout out long words we could break into parts, and soon these became long and complicated—*ridiculous*, *caterpillar*, *Tyrannosaurus rex*, *spectacular*, *Mom*, *abracadabra*.

I gestured for the class’s attention and said, “That was awesome! You came up with some fascinating words, and you really heard those beats!”



EXTENSION 2 • Writing the Letter N

Coach children through writing the capital and lowercase letter N in the air. Recite the verbal pathways for these letters as children form them.

"Kindergartners, during writing time today I realized something. We didn't have a chance to write a capital N so we have this letter in our back pockets and can use it." I pointed to a capital N that I had written on my whiteboard. "Let's do this now. You ready? Line down, back up, slanted line down, line up." I repeated the letter formation pathway as I drew the letter in the air, encouraging the students to try it with me.

"Now get out those make-believe markers and let's write the N on the rug in front of us." I grabbed a marker and modeled for students on the whiteboard as I repeated the letter formation pathway out loud. The children drew their N's on the rug, then in their hands. "Nice writing capital N, friends! Oh! /n/-nice work, did you hear that? Remember the letter N goes with /n/ /n/ /n/. Say it with me this time!"

I pointed to a lowercase n I had drawn on the whiteboard and said, "Kindergartners! Does this lowercase n look like the capital N we just drew?" Students chimed, "Noooo."

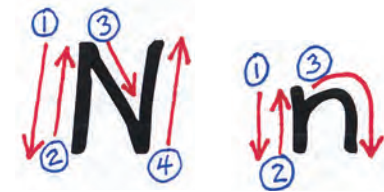
"You're right, the capital and lowercase N look different, and we have to know both to use them in our writing. We need the uppercase for words like names, and the lowercase for words that are not names, like *nuts* and *nibble* and *nose*.

"Let's practice writing the lowercase n." I encouraged students to practice along with me as I drew the n in the air and said the letter formation pathway, "Line down, back up, bump around and down." We practiced the lowercase n a few more times together.

Return to a familiar story to demonstrate how students might use the letter N in their writing.

"We now have a new letter to use in our writing. We could use our new letter to add to our story about asking Mom to help us get some candy at the movies. Remember, this is my mom, and this is me, going to the movies." I pointed to the sketch from the previous day. "Now we can add a snack that starts with /n/. Hmm, . . . does *licorice* work? /l/-/l/-licorice. No. Does *KitKat* work? KitKat /k/-/k/. No. How about *nachos*? /n/-/n/-Natalia, nachos. Yes!"

I drew some nachos and repeated the letter formation pathway to myself as I labeled my sketch with the letter n.



Though it's not necessary to belabor the uppercase/lowercase point right now, it's not too early to introduce this concept with this simple explanation of names or not-names, which you'll expand upon later.



