

Pre-unit: Magic Letterland

Content

The pre-unit, entitled “Magic Letterland”, aims to introduce young learners to the aural and written recognition and production of (a) the sounds of the 26 letters of the English alphabet and (b) specific sounds which are known to cause difficulties to Greek learners.

Each teaching session is expected to cover two sounds/letters. Each lesson introduces up to two letters only, in order not to overwhelm young learners and to facilitate acquisition and assimilation.

Presentation of Letters

The presentation of the alphabet does not follow the alphabetical order. The memorization of the sequence of alphabet letters is neither meaningful nor necessary. Nevertheless, they are presented in sequence at the end of the Pre-unit if you feel that to familiarise learners with this order is important. The order of presentation of the letters/sounds in *Magic Letterland* is based on a combination of Nelson’s handwriting system, which is successfully adopted in the U.K., and on child’s hand movement development (for example, the writing of the letters *c, o, a* follows the development of hand movement).

Letters are presented as initials of particular words (e.g. *B* for *bear* and *ball*) and rhymes have been composed that contain repetitions of the particular letter/sound in a meaningful or funny context (*A bear with a ball goes boom boom boom*). Visual input is also designed for each rhyme to facilitate both comprehension and memorization. Thus, images are used as mnemonic devices to help to remember the word and the corresponding letter/sound.

Then, the letters are isolated to allow letter recognition and learners are asked to trace the letters with their fingers. Since eye and hand coordination is still developing at this age, and since young learners enjoy physical activities, this is an effective technique for pre-writing practice. The same type of task is repeated throughout the unit mainly because this helps young learners feel safe when presented with unknown material.

Practising the Letters in the Activity book.

Each lesson provides a wide variety of activities for practising the letters. First, the activities, require

learners to recognise and match capital and small case letters, and then write the letters in words. In this way, receptive skills are practised first and production follows. Normally, two more activities follow. These are playful, problem-solving activities and aim to provide further practice in a more entertaining way.

Suggested procedure

Use instrumental music background throughout the teaching session and encourage colouring of all pictures in the lesson. As learners of this age are usually kinaesthetic and musical, the use of such techniques is expected to enhance their memory skills. Give AMPLE time to allow learners to experience the letters in all possible ways by using all their senses. For example, encourage learners to form letters using plasticine, to write letters on the back of one another and then guess. You may also use plastic letters (commercially available) and play memory games, such as ‘the missing letter’, or blind fold learners and ask them to feel and guess the letters, etc.

Start with learners working individually during the recognition and production stage. Encourage pair and/or group-work during the activities; social skills are also developed along with cognitive and linguistic ones. Begin the lesson by drawing the words taught in the previous lesson and asking them to recall the vocabulary items together with their initials/sounds, e.g., ‘t’ for *tiger*, ‘h’ for *hare*, ‘k’ for *kite*, etc.). This helps recycle previously taught material and consolidate new knowledge (of letters and vocabulary items).

After that, present the new letters together with the vocabulary items, as shown in the book. You can also use extra materials, such as flashcards, finger puppets, realia and songs. The use of games is strongly recommended. Some possible suggestions for further practice include ‘Pictionary’, hangman, Bingo, Kim’s game, etc.

Useful tips

Revise and recycle vocabulary as often as possible in as many different ways. You may also try to combine meaningful newly taught words with previously taught ones, e.g., *red coat*, *yellow umbrella*, *purple kite*, etc. Always try to associate a letter with the vocabulary item and the corresponding rhyme.