

Chapter 6 Online Resources

Independent Literacy Centers that Support Learning in Text Level D

Your literacy center activities for students reading in text Level D should focus on the big learning taking place at the small group table. You want children to practice and become more proficient at the following:

- Hearing short vowel sounds and linking the sounds to letters.
- Writing and reading CVC words.
- Reading and writing high frequency words as readers begin to acquire these words at a faster pace.
- Writing sentences using both kid spelling and known high frequency words.

LETTERS AND SOUNDS CENTER

Vowel Sorts

In the English language, vowels are very tricky. They can make different sounds depending on if they stand alone in a word, are paired with another vowel, or even if they are preceded or followed by certain consonants. Helping children become proficient with hearing short vowel sounds is the first step in demystifying the trickiness.

Here, we recommend inviting children to sort pictures as they say words slowly, isolate the short vowel sound, and link it to the appropriate letter. The most difficult part is finding pictures that are clear enough for the children to identify without them having to come to your small group table for clarification. In our classrooms, we have a supply of materials that include picture cards and picture stamps bought from educational companies, along with teacher-created picture cards made from images pulled from the Internet.

We encourage you to start with two vowels that have very distinctive and different sounds when you begin this task, such as short *a* and short *o*. Once children can distinguish the difference between those two sounds, add another vowel such as short *u* so children have to hear and sort three short vowels. Another possible idea is to keep the sort to two vowels but introduce two new vowel sounds such as short *i* and short *u*. The ultimate goal is for children to be able to distinguish all five short vowel sounds from each other fluently while moving toward automaticity.

CVC Word Writing

Another way to practice and become proficient with hearing and linking vowel sounds is by writing. So, we put out strips with pictures of CVC words on them (Figure 6.1). Our strips are numbered so we can go back and check a child's work. Children take a strip, write the number of the strip on their paper, say each word slowly, and write all the sounds they hear. We encourage children to work in pairs so they have a system for checking each other. We create our own CVC strips or find premade strips using an online search.

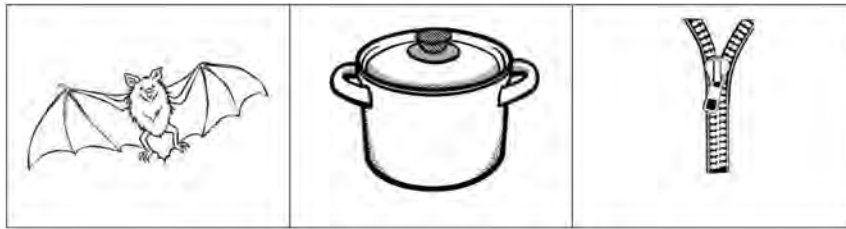


FIGURE 6.1
CVC Picture Strip

WORD CENTER

Children continue to work on learning high frequency words using their individual word lists. By the time children are reading text Level D, they should have a core of forty or more words they know in varying ways. According to Clay (2001), their known words will move along a gradient, or scale of knowing, from being unfamiliar to being remembered with great effort to finally being known with automaticity. The key is to rotate new materials in and old ones out so there is a bit of newness and fun to practicing high frequency words. Here are a few well-loved ideas from our classrooms.

Magic Words

This activity is quite simple but children truly believe magic is happening. Children write a high frequency word on a piece of white paper using a white crayon, which of course does not show up. Next, children use a marker or watercolor paint to cover the word. Because of the waxy nature of the white crayon, it repels the color and the word reappears as if by magic! See Figure 6.2.

**FIGURE 6.2***Magic Words*

Wiki Stix[®] or Pipe Cleaners

Wiki Stix[®] and pipe cleaners are the perfect tool for shaping letters and making words (Figure 6.3). Children have to think about how a letter looks in order to form it. Set a few letters purposely side by side and you have a word. These materials are just a fun, tactile way to practice making high frequency words.

**FIGURE 6.3***Wiki Stix[®] Words*

Letter Beads

Letter beads are a fun way to build words, but organization is the key! We put ours into a divided box that is labeled so each letter has its own home (Figure 6.4). This makes clean up each day much faster. Students can build high frequency words on pipe cleaners, strings, or thin craft sticks.



FIGURE 6.4
Letter Beads

WRITING CENTER

Students reading text Level D are able to write a readable sentence using kid-spelled words and known high frequency words. So, in our classrooms, we begin to require them to write about the thematic topic being studied. Most weeks, we have both a thematic vocabulary card and a thematic “clip strip” as a choice. For example, as shown in Figure 6.5A, students may choose to use the occupations vocabulary card to write sentences similar to these:

- The artist paints pictures.
- This is a mailman.
- Here is a singer.
- Astronauts go into space.
- A pilot can fly a plane.

Or students may choose a “clip strip” paper (Figure 6.5B). Their sentences might look like this:

- You can go to the fire station.
- I can see a cop car.



FIGURE 6.5A
Vocabulary Card: Community Helpers



FIGURE 6.5B
Clip Strip: Places in My Community

- I play at the park.
- Mom shops at the grocery store.
- I like to go to school.
- We eat at the restaurant.

We want to make sure students are meeting our goal of writing sentences while still allowing them to have the choice about what materials to use and what sentences they want to write.

LISTENING CENTER

The listening center can be a great place to practice responding to books. A student can listen and enjoy a book while putting their mental energy toward responding. We incorporate the same types of writing we are doing at the small group table with books at the listening center. So, for fiction books our students practice beginning, middle, and end or problem and solution writing strategies. For nonfiction books, our students write facts they learned about the topic or a “how to” based on the topic. For example, if a child listens to a nonfiction book on bird’s nests they could write a simple “how to” that might look like this:

1. The birds collect sticks and grass.
2. The birds make the nest.
3. The mommy bird lay eggs in the nest.
4. The eggs hatch.
5. The baby birds leave the nest.

We are careful to introduce the different ways to respond to books at the small group table before moving the activity to the listening center for independent practice.

READING CENTER

Our children have free access to the classroom library in the reading center that includes picture books, class-created books, poetry books, magazines, and much more. They also have access to some “leveled readers,” which have been a part of our reading center from the beginning of the school year. Our book bins are filled with a wide range of highly engaging topics, both fiction and nonfiction. Children are encouraged from day one to peruse these books based on what looks interesting to them. At first, our only goal is to get the books into the hands of the children for pleasure. We want them to:

- Look at the pictures and see how the story develops.
- Develop a sense of wonder about the books.
- Begin to notice there are words they know on each page.
- Discover that some characters pop up in many different books.

Over time, our goal changes and we want to get books into children’s hands that they can begin to read independently. We encourage students, but it certainly isn’t mandatory,

to use some of their reading center time to gather or shop for leveled books to put in their own book bins to be read during independent reading time. Sometimes, children choose to switch out books they know well or have grown tired of for new and exciting books. This selection of books will be read over and over and over, outside of literacy centers, during a time that is devoted solely to all children independently reading leveled books of their choosing.