



8 SOUND TO SYMBOL CORRESPONDENCE

Over the course of eight articles **Maria Kay** highlights the close relationship between music and literacy in the early years, and suggests simple activities to help you develop children's skills...

It is essential for children to be able to interpret symbols, and particularly alphabet characters. Music can help children to map letter shapes to their corresponding sounds, and there are a range of activities to help children accomplish this.

Children soon learn that symbols have meaning. They recognise popular retail logos, product packaging, advertisements and other environmental print. As each alphabet character represents a speech sound, it is important that children learn to match each letter shape with its corresponding sound.

We need to show children how we use print. Parents can be encouraged to sit them on their knees while they read the paper or write a shopping list. We can invite children to read environmental print and show them that we are reading it too - for example, read aloud the film titles on posters, the product name labels on shopping, or a menu in a café. Print is all around us - children quickly engage with it and are eager to interpret it. Exposing children to a print-rich environment and reading to them regularly helps them to become competent readers.

Many parents and carers almost automatically show children pictures of animals and ask what the animals say. Children enjoy 'reading' the pictures and making the animal sounds. This activity may form one of their earliest reading experiences. In some cases, the sound of an animal and its name are blended together to emphasise the close relationship between the two, as in 'moo cow'. This activity is very important to the success of later literacy skills as it demonstrates the relationship between sound and symbol, and enables children to later make their own analogies.

them; this helps children to see that you are interpreting the text.

The song 'What Does a Cow Say?' can be used so sing about the letters of the alphabet too.

*What... does... this let-ter say?
Hey... hey... can anybody play?
What... does... this let-ter say?
This let-ter says [insert letter here]*

The rhythm changes to reflect the syllables in the word 'letter' - it is now two syllables. In the previous song, the animal name has only one musical note, representing one syllable for cow, pig, snake and dog, etc. Use an alphabet book to show children the letters as you sing the song.

Reading rhymes and singing songs with children is the perfect way to establish a sound foundation for future literacy learning. If you are interested in reading more about how music can help literacy learning, refer to the book *Sound Before Symbol: Developing Literacy through Music* (Sage, 2013) by Maria Kay.

Maria Kay is the author of *Alphabet Book & More* - an introduction to the letters of the alphabet, with a musical twist. Available from Amazon, it includes advice on the teaching of reading skills; offers an aid to syllabification, and shows children how to draw the letter shapes.

Musical activities

What Does a Cow Say?

A song that may be used to help children to reproduce sounds in response to a picture is 'What Does a Cow Say?', which is sung to the traditional tune of 'Skip to My Lou':

*What... does... a cow say?
Hey... hey... can anybody play?
What... does... a cow say?
Moo-moo all day long.*

Repeat the song using a variety of animals, and use pictures of the animals to accompany the words. You can also use the pictures as a basis for discussion about where the animals might live and what they might eat, or how they move - fast or slow. This helps to build vocabulary and awareness of the world. Change the lyrics for each animal.

What Does This Letter Say?

Children can later transfer this learning to letters of the alphabet. "This is the letter A" (pronounced 'ay'); "the letter A says 'a'." Children learn that each letter has a name and also a corresponding sound. Also show children that the shape changes depending on if it is a big or small letter.

Children should be encouraged to draw round the letters with a finger, to learn the direction of the print. By reading alongside an adult they will also gain bibliographic knowledge. Point to words as you read

